

# South Asia Conflict Monitor

*monthly newsletter on terrorism, violence and armed conflict*



## Veiled Threat: Burqa, Madrassa and Radicalisation in Sri Lanka

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After over a month-long debate and discussion, the Sri Lankan cabinet, on April 27, 2021, imposed a ban on wearing Burqas (full-face veils in public used by Muslim women) and closing down madrasas (Islamic Seminaries) across the country. The government defended the decision by stating that these restrictions would improve national security and prevent radicalisation in society. As expected, few Islamic countries and groupings termed the decision as anti-Islamic. For example, Pakistan's ambassador to Sri Lanka, Saad Khattak, tweeted that the ban would "only serve as injury to the feelings of ordinary Sri Lankan Muslims and Muslims across the globe." On a separate note, the United Nations' special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, tweeted that the "burqa bans are incompatible with international law guarantees of the right to manifest one's religion or belief & of freedom of expression." The Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also condemned the decision. Interestingly, the US and EU member countries, who have been critical of Sri Lanka over human rights

violation during anti-LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) operations, have been silent on the new counter radicalism step by Sri Lankan government.

### Preventing Radicalism

The Cabinet panel took the decision that studied the recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) on the Easter attacks submitted to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on April 5. The Presidential Commission report on the Easter Church attack clearly mentioned the involvement of radical Islamist groups and negligence on the part of the government officials for not taking action on the intelligence input. The Commission report was presented to President Rajapaksa on February 1, 2021. After assuming power, President Rajapaksa appointed the Cabinet panel to study in-depth the findings and recommendations contained in the President Commission report on the Easter Church attacks and to advise on the next course of action.

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Interestingly, the cabinet panel report is yet to be made public. The presidential commission report found that former President Maithripala Sirisena and a host of other top defence officials, including former defence secretaries, former inspector general of police and intelligence chiefs were guilty of ignoring prior intelligence inputs. The report recommended criminal action against the officials.

The report allegedly mentioned that nine suicide bombers, belonging to the local Islamist extremist group the National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ) linked to ISIS, carried out coordinated blasts on Easter Sunday in 2019. Sharing information about the report with the media, Minister of Public Security Sarath Weerasekera said, "Naufer Moulavi was the mastermind (of the Easter bombings). The cleric was assisted by another person identified as Hajjul Akbar." Interestingly, the report did not mention anything about putting restrictions on Burqa. However, the investigators might have encountered difficulties faced by the security personnel while checking to identify Muslim women in the post-attack period. They might have suspected that the radical groups could misuse the burqa in future.

It would be worth mentioning that the wearing of burqa in Sri Lanka was temporarily banned from April 29, 2019, soon after the Easter Church and hotel bomb attacks. President Sirisena had issued an emergency law to impose restrictions on any face garment which "hinders identification" to ensure security. The attackers had bombed three churches and three luxury hotels, killing 274 people and injuring more than 570 others. Two local Muslim groups that had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group (formerly ISIS) have been suspected of the attacks. The police have so far arrested 702 people in connection with the Easter Sunday attacks. Of those, around 202 have been remanded, the terrorist investigation division is investigating 83, and around 80 are being held under the PTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act), passed in 1979. As per the PTA, police can detain anyone for months, extract confessions under torture and use the

same as evidence. The law has been widely used to detain Tamil youth and political opponents, particularly during the 30-year civil conflict between the state and the LTTE.

Immediately after the imposition of the ban, on April 27, 2021, the government announced extending the detention of Member of Parliament Rishad Bathiudeen and his younger brother Riyaj Bathiudeen for 90 more days under the PTA. The police claimed that the arrest was "based on circumstantial and scientific evidence that they had connections with the suicide bombers who carried out the [Easter Sunday] attacks." Earlier, the duos were arrested on April 24, 2020, under the PTA. They were released in October after the police failed to substantiate their association with the attacks. Most importantly, Bathiudeen leads the All-Ceylon Makkal Congress (ACMC), a partner of the main parliamentary opposition party, the Samgi Jana Balawegaya, and was a cabinet minister Sirisena government.

Most importantly, before imposing the ban of face veil, the government, on April 14, 2021, had imposed a ban on 11 Muslim organisations, including IS and Al Qaeda and nine local Muslim extremist groups. The gazette notification issued by the president declared that anyone linked to these organisations could be jailed for up to 20 years.

### **Demographic tensions**

The minority community comprises around 30 per cent of the total 22 million population of Sri Lanka. That includes Hindus (Tamils) 12.6 per cent, Muslims 9.7 per cent and Christians 7.6 per cent. The Buddhists are 70 per cent of the population. Given their unchallenged ethnic domination, the Buddhists, also known as Sinhalese, influence Sri Lankan polity. The asymmetry in the ethnic composition with growing radicalism and Sinhala chauvinism, mostly driven by domestic politics, has contributed to perennial insecurity amongst the minorities.

Several media and international groups have reported sporadic attacks on minorities:

Tamils, Muslims and Christians in the country. A closer look at the attacks on the minorities by Sinhala extremist Buddhist organisations like Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) shows that they have been targeting the minorities for cultural, ethnic and political purposes. The continuation of the attacks for a long period also reflects that certain political parties either have a tacit understanding with the radical groups or is completely subservient to them since they can swing the vote bank during the elections. Perhaps this has emboldened the extremists to continue their attacks on the minority groups.

Both government and private sources have confirmed regular attacks on the minorities in Sri Lanka, especially in the post-civil war period. First, the Colombo Police informed that nearly 20 mosques were attacked in 2013. Second, the Presidential Commission investigating alleged abductions or disappearances of residents in the Northern and Eastern Provinces during the period 1990-2009 pointed out that around 5,000 Muslims had gone missing during the war. Third, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) Secretary handed over a special report to Navanethem (Navi) Pillay, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, during her visit to Sri Lanka in August last year. According to this special report, there were some 280 incidents of threat and violence against Muslims in 2013 and attacks on mosques and places of businesses. Christian groups also reported more than 103 incidents of attacks on churches and their communities in 2013.

### **Minority groups' responses**

Given the past experiences of attacks, injustices and political marginalisation by the state, banning Burqa has created panic amongst the Muslim communities. They feel that the low level of confidence among Buddhists-Muslims-Christians and growing suspicion on the Muslims by the Sinhalese and Christian minorities in the post-Easter church incident could trigger ethnic violence in future. The Muslims also view the last year's developments like the forceful cremation of Muslims who died due to COVID-19, the closer of Madrasas, and the

prohibition on Burqa as a "racist agenda." Hilmy Ahamed, vice-president of the Muslim Council of Sri Lanka, told Al Jazeera that "they were trying to convince the Buddhists that they are going after Muslims." Also, many Sri Lankan Muslims have expressed their concerns over social media on government policies targeting them.

### **Conclusion**

Thus the government action to stop radicalising Sri Lanka and enhancing national security has received mixed reactions. Secular, liberal and human rights groups have criticised the decision as anti-Muslim and might encourage further radicalisation of Muslim youths in Sri Lanka. Some foreign media have criticised the decision as a 'racist agenda'. The action could lead to racial turmoil on the Island. The policy could get the serious attention of international radical Islamic groups, which would extend support to the marginalised community. Some of them have, in fact, questioned if the decision is related to the Presidential Commission report on Easter Church attacks and checking radicalism, then why is it that the same government has not banned the BBS, which is identified as a Buddhist radical group in Sri Lanka.

However, the Sri Lankan government action's on Burqa is not the first case in the world. Considering the growing radicalism and misuse of Burqa, several European countries, including Switzerland, France, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Bulgaria and the Netherlands, have banned Burqa. In these countries, Burqa is considered an insult to women's rights and misuse of the same for anti-state purposes. In that context, Sri Lankan action could be the first in South Asia, which has been a hotbed of radicalism. The success and failure of the Sri Lankan model to prevent radicalism could reframe the counter-radicalism policy in other countries.

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## MAOIST TRENDS IN INDIA: A COMBINATION OF MASS AND MINE WARFARE



Former Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh, while addressing a day-long meeting of Chief Ministers, including six of the Naxalite affected states, on April 13, 2006, observed: “It would not be an exaggeration to say that the problem of Naxalism is the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country.” On January 21, 2021, Indian Army Chief General MM Naravane said that, 'left-wing extremism' (LWE) is one of the biggest challenges before the Indian State. It seems, in the last 14 years, there has not been any phenomenal shift in the position of the LWE in India’s list of national security challenges.

Although the central government undertook many periodical counter Maoist operations –like operation green hunt, Prahar-I & II, SAMADHAN, etc. -- and developmental schemes with the coordination of Maoist affected states with some visible success; the rebels still retain the ability to strike on the state forces and infrastructure in some parts of central India. Some Maoist attacks undertaken in 2019-20 indicate that the military and resource strengths of the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) have gone down. Still, its political campaign has mostly remained unaffected. Most importantly, it has retained fraternal linkages with like-minded groups worldwide and is open to having a ‘united front’ against the Indian state with such like-minded groups within and outside India. These tactics of the CPI-Maoists might intensify conflicts in Jammu and Kashmir and North-eastern parts of India in particular, thereby strengthening religious extremism and leading to other civil unrests like class and caste violence in future.

April 4, 2021, Maoist attacks on the security forces in Chhattisgarh indicated the dominance of the rebel groups in the Bastar region. Twenty-two security force personnel were killed and 31 others injured in the incident between Jonaguda and Tekalguda villages along the border of Sukma and Bijapur districts in the Bastar region. After taking stock of the situation, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the sacrifices of the security personnel will always be remembered for taking this battle to a “decisive turn”. This incident took place within 10 days after the Maoists attacked Kanhargaon and Kadenar villages in Narayanpur district, where five District Reserve Guard (DRG) personnel were killed and 13 others injured as the rebels blew up the bus in which they were travelling.

### Claims and Counterclaims

Despite brutal recurring attacks on the security forces by the Maoists in their stronghold areas in different parts of central India, the Union Home Ministry data indicates that the state has, in fact, regained much geographical and administrative control over those regions which were earlier under the Maoist control. The claim is substantiated as the number of incidents dropped consistently since 2011. According to the annual report 2019-2020 of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, there has been an overall 41% reduction in violent incidents (1136 to 670) and 49% reduction in LWE related deaths (397 to 202) in 2019 as compared to 2013. In comparison to 2018, the year 2019 saw a decline of 19% (833 to 670) in incidents of violence and 15% in the number of resultant deaths (240 to 202).

In addition, in 2019, LWE violence was reported from 241 police stations in 61 districts spread across nine states compared to 291 police stations in 58 districts spread over nine states in 2013. As the reports suggest, the major Maoist related violence was limited to only 30 districts with 83% of the total incidents.

On the contrary, the Maoists claim that it is a tactical retreat for readjusting with the current situation like bringing changes in tactical counter-offensive campaign-TCOC, extensive use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and landmines, opening up of urban front, reducing the platoon strength, more leadership role to women and tribal, shifting to newer regions, etc. Although the Maoist leaders have accepted unequal revolutionary developments on several occasions due to counter-revolutionary schemes by the state, the party has attempted to motivate the cadres by highlighting success stories of the Peoples Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA) in the last 20 years. While assessing its failure, the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the CPI-Maoist found that the party, especially the cadres, failed to follow the rules of guerrilla war and secret methods of functioning. The party also failed to update in changing the class struggle programme and adopting proper tactics in the class struggle. Since operation Prahar and SAMADHAN (S-smart leadership, A-aggressive strategy, M-motivation and training, A-actionable intelligence, D-dashboard-based KPIs (key performance indicators) and KRAs (key result areas), H-harnessing technology, A-action plan for each theatre and N-no access to financing) have caused maximum damage to the movement in crucial 30 districts, the CMC has advised the cadres to enhance mass base, expanding mass organisations, adhering to utmost secrecy, taking up Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign (TCOC) in guerilla zones and protect and preserve armed guerillas to defeat these counter-revolutionary operations. The CMC emphasized mine and sniper warfare for not allowing the state forces to operate in an organised manner.

## Conclusion

Going by both the government and Maoist sources, the Maoist related violence and their geographical spread in India have shrunk drastically. This phenomenon is perhaps not new in India ever since the Maoist conflict started in 1967. Historically, the movement has seen the trend of recouping and regrouping after a phase of decline. For example, the Maoist revolution was limited to a few pockets in the late 1970s and again in 2004 after ‘operation steeplechase’ and strong action by the Andhra Pradesh government after the failure of peace talks. On both occasions, the Maoists had reemerged with newer tactics.

Therefore, the declining trend from 2011 onwards is a remarkable achievement for the state once again. The current achievement results from some successful counter Maoist operations in recent years, mostly dominated by military measures. These measures were essential in the areas where the Maoists were preventing state-sponsored development projects. Since the Maoist conflict in India originated and sustained due to governance issues and unequal development, and state failure to provide justice to the most deprived sections of the society, the state must emphasise development issues in the districts that witnessed low-intensity Maoist activities. The current declining trend will consolidate if the state takes a balanced policy between military and development measures instead of addressing the issues as only a law and order problem.

### Brief-2:

## AFGHANISTAN PEACE PROCESS: AN ASSESSMENT

The much-hyped Afghanistan peace process appears to be in shambles. The agreement was signed in Doha, Qatar, on February 29, 2020, between the Taliban and the US – a pact that many thought would bring peace, political stability and development in Afghanistan. There were expectations that the same would facilitate intra-Afghanistan talks as well. But 14 months after the deal, there has not been any change in conflict scenarios in Afghanistan. Rather, the mutual animosity, suspicion, and violent attacks have intensified between the state and Taliban militants. Most importantly, the Taliban has intensified attacks on civilians. In fact,



more civilians have died from Taliban related attacks than Covid-19 infection in the last year.

The situation could turn worse as the western forces plan to leave Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. The Taliban has endorsed the new deadline of force withdrawal as per its agreement with the US. As part of the Doha deal, the US had committed to withdrawing its 12,000 troops by May 2021. As of April 2021, around 2,500 American troops are remaining in Afghanistan. Some of the important air and military bases, including Kandahar, are already transferred to the Afghanistan forces. The NATO forces will be leaving while the state forces and the Taliban are engaged in intense area domination operations.

### **Why did the violence continue?**

There are four major factors behind continuing violence in Afghanistan despite the peace deal and after several rounds of intra-Afghanistan meetings in the last 14 months. In addition, as per the February 2020-deal, a large number of Taliban prisoners were released by the Afghanistan government, baring a few militias with serious charges. Despite these two important developments, both the parties failed to come closer because of the following reasons:

First, from the Taliban's point of view, the February deal was a tactical one. It wanted to win the confidence of the US mainly due to two factors. First, the Taliban needed American financial support to run the government in the post-peace process period if a Taliban-led government is formed in Afghanistan. Second, early withdrawal of NATO forces would deprive the Afghanistan forces of combat support and training of the US forces. The Taliban wanted a weak Afghanistan force to control other regional militias and undertake military and cultural campaigning freely.

At the same time, the state forces felt neglected by the US as they were not part of the peace deal. Perhaps that was the reason the government was reluctant to release some Taliban prisoners. Like the Taliban, since the Afghanistan government was dependent on the US, it did not want to antagonise the US without open support from neighbouring countries like India and others.

Second, the Doha agreement was not a peace deal for Afghanistan. That was a deal between the Taliban and the US. One of the purposes of the deal was to facilitate intra-Afghanistan talks. The Afghanistan government was perhaps not satisfied with the Taliban's promise of preventing Al Qaida activities in Afghanistan, which did not happen in reality. Rather, in the name of checking Al Qaida, the Taliban orchestrated several attacks on security forces and

civilians. Husain Haqqani, the former Pakistani Ambassador to the US, observed that the Doha agreement was a withdrawal agreement with no elements of peace. The Taliban were made to commit to only one thing, that they would enter intra-Afghan talks. Most importantly, he also observed that from the Taliban's point of view, "once their Islamic Emirate is restored, peace is restored." Perhaps that was the reason the Taliban did not lower down its attacks on the state forces.

Third, there was a lack of consensus within the Afghanistan establishment regarding dealing with the Taliban. Initially, in the post-deal period, the political rivalry between President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, the head of the High Council of National Reconciliation (HCNR), greatly halted the prisoners' exchange programme and intra-Afghanistan talks. Later, the intense rivalry delayed the process of forging a national and political consensus over peace. Lastly, anti-US forces also played a crucial role in delaying the intra-Afghanistan talks. For example, Iran, China and Russia did not want peace in Afghanistan under the US leadership. Similarly, Pakistan, a crucial stakeholder in the region, did not want peace in Afghanistan, which would drastically reduce Pakistan's relevance in the region and reduce the US role. Therefore, Pakistan wanted control over the Taliban for strategic factors. In an interview with a German newspaper, President Ghani claimed that "Pakistan operated an organised system of support for the Taliban. The Taliban receive logistics in Pakistan, their finances are there, and recruitment happens there."

### **Observations**

After the September deadline, the Taliban will be free from all obligations to maintain peace in Afghanistan since the intra-Afghanistan talks have failed to bring peace agreements between the state and the Taliban. Most importantly, the Taliban will continue to use the tactics of aggression and terror to mould the public opinion and warlords, both active and former, in its favour. In that scenario, the level of violence might intensify in Afghanistan. Although the US has assured to extend all possible support to the Afghanistan government and forces to counter the Taliban, in the absence of US-led NATO forces, the state forces might feel demoralised due to limited combat experiences, factionalism within the establishment over negotiating with the Taliban, and the regional anti-US forces' support to Taliban.



## AFGHANISTAN

### MAJOR EVENTS:



**April 04:** At least 47 Taliban militants including several suicide attackers were killed in Arghandab district of Kandahar province in airstrikes. Their hideouts and strongholds were targeted when they were preparing to conduct operation ([The Siasat Daily](#)).

**April 10:** Afghan intelligence officials have detained Ghulam Naser al-Khorasani a senior ISKP (Daesh) member the IS - had been detained by personnel of the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) in Kabul. The arrest comes in the backdrop of a marked rise in the number of IS-claimed attacks across Afghanistan over the past few months. ([Khaama Press](#))

**April 14:** Taliban said they would no longer participate in peace talks for Afghanistan until all US-led troops withdrew from the country. The statement came amid reports that President Joe Biden was expected to delay the May 1 deadline by four months. ([Arab News](#)).

**April 19:** Five Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) members and eight Taliban militants have been killed in an air strike in the southern province of Helmand. All the slain AQIS members killed in the attack were residents of Pakistan's Punjab province. A spokesman for the Helmand-

based Maiwand Army Corps No 215, Abdul Qadir Bahadurzai, said that the raid targeted militants in the Nahr-e Seraj area of Greshk district. ([Afghan Islamic Press News Agency](#))



**April 21:** Islamic State Khorasan province (ISKP) has claimed responsibility for killing four Hazara Shia Muslims in Dawlatyar district of Ghor province in western Afghanistan. In a statement, the jihadist group said its militants attacked a

vehicle carrying a number of Shia Muslims on the road between Ghor and Kabul, killing four including a government official. (Telegram)

**April 23:** The foreign ministers of Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan called on the Taliban to reaffirm their commitment to achieving a negotiated settlement for lasting peace in Afghanistan. The ministers have underlined the urgent need for an immediate ceasefire to end the violence and provide a conducive atmosphere for peace talks. ([MFA, Afghanistan](#))

**April 28:** Afghan security forces have arrested three Islamic State group (IS) members in an operation in the Farm Hada area of Jalalabad. During the operation, Mawlawi Ruhollah, member of IS' propaganda group and Sajid Amarkhel, a member of IS' targeted killings group were arrested ([Afghanistan Islamic Press](#)).

## BANGLADESH

### MAJOR EVENTS:



**April 02:** At least 20 people, including seven police personnel, were injured in a clash between Hefajat-e-Islam activists and police in Gazipur. The incident happened when HeI activists tried to go to the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway to stage a demonstration after Juma prayers at Chandona Chourasta Jame masjid ([Daily Star](#))

**April 04:** Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan told the parliament that a total of 17 people died during the HeI mayhem between March 26 and 28, 2021 ([New Age Bangladesh](#)).

**April 18:** Hundreds of cadres of the Hefazat-e-Islam (HeI), a hardline Islamist group, including joint secretary of HeI Mamunul Haque, were arrested by Bangladesh police over the past week in late March the days-long demonstrations over Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit. Around 13 protesters were died during the demonstrations. Some leaders were expected



to be charged with the outbreak of violence during the anti-Modi protests and demonstrations in 2013 that left nearly 50 people dead ([Wion News](#)).

**April 23:** Ten Hefazat-e-Islam supporters were arrested in connection with Brahmanbaria violent incident of March 27. On that fateful day, at least five people were killed and around 50 others, including 25 cops, injured in clashes between members of law enforcement agencies and locals during Hefazat's demonstrations at Nandanpur in Sadar upazila. They had staged the protests against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh. ([Dhaka Tribune](#))

**April 26:** Bangladesh intelligence agencies indicated that the militant outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B) is emerging in the garb of Hefajat-e-Islam (HeI). HuJI-B was found to be involved in the three-day HeI mayhem that was carried out across the country from March 26 to March 28 in protest against the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

## INDIA

### MAJOR EVENTS:



**April 01:** The National Investigation Agency (NIA) filed a charge sheet against two suspected Islamic State (IS) sympathisers Abdul Cader and Irfan Nasir for their suspected involvement in forming a group to further the pro-IS activities in India.

**April 03:** Twenty-two security personnel were killed and 31 others were sustained injuries in the encounter with Naxalites in Chhattisgarh. The Maoists had taken hostage of one security personnel, who was later released later after having a negotiation between the State and the Maoists. The Maoists had decamped with the weapons, bullet-proof jackets, and the shoes of dead personnel ([India Today](#)).

**April 04:** Jammu and Kashmir police have arrested Malik Umaid (Abdullah), an Islamic State Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK) commander from Jhajjar Kotli in Jammu District with arms and ammunitions. Umaid is a resident of Yaripora in Kulgam and travelling to Jammu to carry out terrorist attacks. He confessed to have in contact with other ISJK members.

**April 09:** A special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court in India has sentenced Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT-Bangladesh) terrorist Rizual Islam to seven-year rigorous imprisonment in a 2017 case related to planning to commit terror acts in India. The Kolkata (West Bengal) Special task force police had registered this case on November 21, 2017 pertaining to arrest of five members of ABT, a proscribed al Qaeda linked terrorist organisation in Bangladesh.

**April 11:** Four Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Al-Badr militants including those involved in the killing of an off-duty Territorial Army soldier in Anantanag on April 9, were gunned down in two encounters with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir ([Business Standard](#)).



**April 12:** The Al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent linked group Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGH)-Kashmir has released a letter eulogising the seven members of the AGH who were killed in the Southern Pulwama and Shopian districts on April 09 in Kashmir. The AGH's present leader, Ghazi Khalid Ibrahim in this letter urged other Kashmiri Muslims to follow the footsteps of these slain militants. Seven AGH members were identified as Hafiz Muzammil Tantary, Imtiaz Ahmad Shah, Adil Ahmad Lon, Basit Ismail Bakhshi, Zahid Ahmad Koka, Younis Ahmad Kahnday and Kashif Bashir Mir. The letter was produced by the AGH media wing al-Hurr. (Telegram)

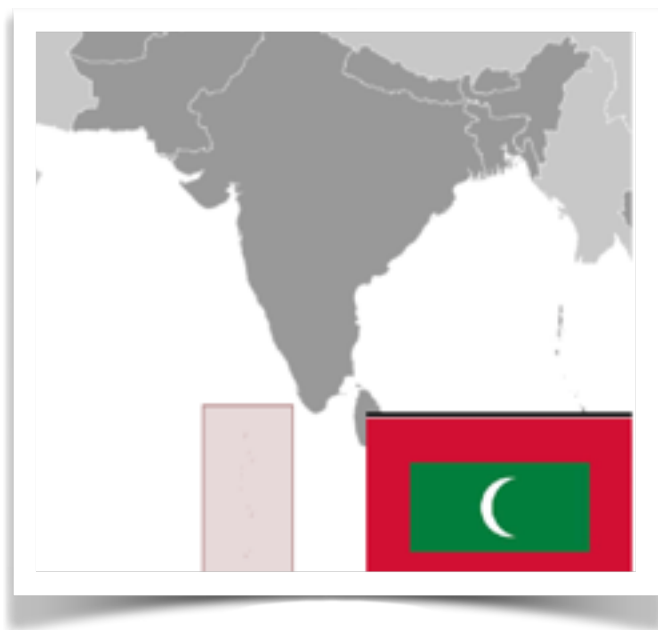
**April 16:** The purportedly legitimate Sawt al-Hind (Voice of Hind), issue 15 was released with a cover story titled Deception in International Law. The article criticised the United Nations under the 'Jewish-Crusader' influence since its establishment. This issue also feature a picture from IS weekly Al Naba claiming that its militants set fire to agricultural crops owned by Hindus in Nagla-Brahman town in Uttar Pradesh in the previous week. No mainstream local media reported this incident. To note, Al Naba wrongly mentioned Nagla Brahman in Uttar Pradesh which is located in Haryana State. (Telegram)

**April 22:** The April 2021 edition of a competing version of Sawt al Hind (Voice of Hind-No.10) the pro-Islamic State group (IS) magazine was published online. The propaganda magazine was critical about India and Bangladesh ties in the light of recent visit of Indian Prime minister to Dhaka in the cover story titled 'Jihad is the way to Jannah'. (Telegram)

**April 23:** The Islamic State group (IS) has claimed an attack on an Indian police barracks in Srinagar's Natipora area. Its statement claimed that several police were injured in the attack. The statement said IS Wilayah Hind militants fire-bombed the police barracks. No mainstream media reported any such incident in Natipora so far. (Telegram)

## MALDIVES

### MAJOR EVENTS:



**April 08:** India and the Maldives strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms, including cross-border terrorism, and emphasised the need for strengthening international cooperation to combat the menace in a comprehensive and sustained manner. The assertion was made by the two countries at their first meeting of Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism, Countering Violent Extremism and De-Radicalisation. The Indian side was led by Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs, Vikas Swarup, while the Maldivian side was led by Foreign Secretary Abdul Ghafoor Mohamed. ([Outlook India](#)).

**April 16:** The pro-IS Sawt al-Hind magazine (No. 15) dedicated the opening article to Maldivian affairs and its strategic collaboration with the US and India. The article titled "Their Alliance with the Disbelievers Affirm the Firmness of Their Apostasy" criticised the Maldivian government for its anti-Islamist policies and agreements it made with India and the US in recent years. The propaganda magazine particularly mentioned the India and Maldives defence cooperation entered around Uthuru Thilafalhu atol. (Archive.com)



**April 23:** The Presidential Inquiry Commission on Enforced Disappearances and Deaths (DDCom) in Maldives has stated that they are carefully following hearings in the murder trial of social media activist and blogger Yameen Rasheed. DDCom in a statement said that despite it being an ongoing trial, the commission had been working to uncover who orchestrated the murder. Yameen Rasheed was killed on April 23, 2017, by a group of extremists near his residence in capital Male. (PSM News)

## PAKISTAN

### MAJOR EVENTS



**April 11:** Waseem Alam, the joint editor of local newspaper, Sada-e-lawaghir was killed by unidentified gunmen in the Karak district of Khyber Pakhtunkwa ([Dawn](#)).

**April 13:** Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) militant linked to the Shehryar Mehsud faction was killed during an intelligence-based operation in the Ladha area of South Waziristan ([The Express Tribune](#)).

**April 18:** Three operatives of banned radical Islamist party Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) were killed and dozens were injured in a fresh operation launched by Pakistani security forces in Lahore. TLP carried out violent protests to force the government to expel the

French ambassador over a blasphemous caricature published in France ([Hindustan Times](#))

**April 19:** The Islamic State in Pakistan province (ISPP) has claimed killing a senior Taliban member Mullah Naik Muhammad Rahbar in a gun attack in Haji Camp Adda in Peshawar city. Rahbar was a leading Taliban figure in Afghanistans Nangrahar. Later, Afghan Taliban issued a statement on Rahbar's death ([Ling News](#); [Al Emarah News](#))

**April 21:** Five people were killed and over a dozen others wounded in a bomb explosion in the car park of the Serena hotel at Shahrah-e-Zarghun Road in Quetta, Balochistan. Provincial home affair minister Mir Ziaullah Langove said that the Chinese ambassador being the apparent target of the attack. Langove said that the ambassador or any Chinese delegation was not present at the hotel when the explosion occurred. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the blast. ([Dawn](#))

## SRI LANKA

### MAJOR EVENTS



**April 06:** Sri Lankan government officially announced that Nawfer Moulavi has been identified as the mastermind behind the Easter Sunday attacks that killed more than 270 civilians on April 21, 2019. Moulavi has been involved in brainwashing Saharan Hashim's team into following the Islamic State ideology. ([Daily News](#))

**April 13:** The Sri Lanka government issued an extraordinary gazette notification proscribing 11 Islamic Organisations that have links with extremist activities. Earlier, Attorney General Dappula de Livera had authorized the proscription of eleven such organisations. Accordingly, these regulations may be cited as the Prevention of Terrorism (Proscription of Extremist Organizations)

Regulations No. 2 of 2021. The organisations are United Thawheed Jamma'ath (UTJ), Ceylon Thawheed Jamma'ath (CTJ), Srilanka Thawheed Jamma'ath (SLTJ), All Ceylon Thawheed Jamma'ath (ACTJ), Jamiyathul Ansaari Sunnaththul Mohomadiya (JASM), Dharul Adhar (Jamiul Adhar), Srilanka Islamic Student Movement (SLISM), Islamic State of Iraq & Syria (ISIS), Al- Qaeda, Save the Pearls and Super Muslim ([Newsfisrt.LK](#))

**April 17:** The Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) of Sri Lanka arrested five Tamils, including one former LTTE cadre in Jaffna. The TID claimed that four people were arrested on charges of forming groups aimed at re-establishing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) reportedly after having a telephone conversation with individuals arrested on weapons charges in India. ([Tamil Guardian](#))



**April 21:** Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa marking the second anniversary of deadly Easter Sunday attacks stated in Parliament that all those responsible for the devastating attacks will be brought to justice. Delivering a special statement, the Prime Minister said that the report and other documents prepared by the Easter Commission based on the information revealed have been referred to the Attorney General for legal action. The Prime Minister stated that the Government will not interfere

in the judicial process and will provide the necessary assistance to make the judicial process a success ([Colombo Page](#)).

**April 22:** Three extremist suspects were arrested by the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) for attending slain Islamic State terrorist Zahran Hashim's lectures from Kekunagolla in Kurunegala District, North Western Province. Police Media Spokesperson DIG Ajith Rohana said that the father-in-law of Zahran Hashim is also among the arrested persons. ([HiruNews](#))

**April 24:** The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested former Minister and Wanni District Parliamentarian Rishad Bathiudeen and his brother Riyad Bathiudeen over Easter Sunday attacks. Both of them were arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) for aiding and abetting the Easter Sunday attackers ([NewsFirst](#)).

**April 24:** Sri Lankan police spokesman DIG Ajith Rohana said a total of 702 suspects have been arrested over the Easter Sunday bomb attacks as of April 24, 2021 and 202 of them are currently in remand custody while 83 others have been detained by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) and Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) for interrogations. He further added nearly 80 persons were arrested recently for having attended extremist ideology lessons or for conducting classes propagating extremist ideology ([Lanka Net News](#)).

**April 27:** Sri Lanka government granted approval to produce a draft bill banning burqa (Veil) and other full-face coverings that conceals the identity of the person in public places. Cabinet Spokesman, Minister of Mass Media and Information Keheliya Rambukwella said that it was decided to take this step as it is difficult to verify the identity of a person, especially if the face is completely covered, which is a threat to national security. ([The Hindu](#))

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**The South Asia Conflict Monitor (SACM)** aims to provide in-depth analyses, country briefs, summary sketches of important players and a timeline of major events on issues relating to armed conflicts, insurgencies and terrorism. It also aims to cover the government's strategies on conflict resolution and related policies to tackle these risks and crises.

**The South Asia Conflict Monitor** is a monthly bulletin designed to provide quality information and actionable intelligence for the policy and research communities, the media, business houses, law enforcement agencies and the general reader by filtering relevant open source information and intelligence gathered from the ground contacts and sources.

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The Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict (SSPC) is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan research organization based in New Delhi, dedicated to conduct rigorous and comprehensive research, and work towards disseminating information through commentaries and analyses on a broad spectrum of issues relating to peace, conflict and human development. SSPC has been registered under the Societies Registration Act (XXI) of 1860. The SSPC came into being as a platform to exchange ideas, to undertake quality research, and to ensure a fruitful dialogue.

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