

# **Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-BD)**

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## **Origin**

The Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-BD) was established by drawing inspiration from Osama bin Laden and with the assistance of bin Laden's International Islamic Front (IIF) in 1992. Earlier, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) were under the single banner of Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuA). The US State Department placed HuA in the world terrorist organizations list soon after the group kidnapped few American and European tourists in Jammu and Kashmir through its Al-Faran operation in 1995. The HuA, therefore, forked as HuM and HuJI and continued its subversive activities in Pakistan and Kashmir. In Bangladesh, however, the HuA just renamed itself as HuJI-Bangladesh and started functioning under HuJI-Pakistan.

## **Leaders**

HUJI-BD is headed by Showkat Osman alias Sheikh Farid while Imtiaz Quddus is the General Secretary.

## **Objectives**

The primary objective of HuJI-BD is to establish the Islamic Hukumat (Islamic rule) in Bangladesh. It has very strong Wahabi and Taliban influence and campaigns against liberal and secular societal practices like music, dance, movies and television as anti Islam. It vehemently opposes Indian and Western cultural influence in Bangladesh, which it projects as the Hindu and Christian cultural influences over Islamic culture. HuJI-BD is influenced by HuJI-Pakistan and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), which also advocate similar objectives in

Pakistan and Kashmir. It targets people, especially progressive intellectuals and secular politicians, who are secular and ideologically challenge the militant path of the radical Islamists. It criticizes NGO activity as un-Islamic because these organizations are involved in spreading Western ideas of women empowerment and social transformation. Harkat's leanings towards Afghan's Taliban ideology is reflected in its slogans like Amra Sohail Hobo Taliban, Bangla Hobe Afghanistan (We will all become Taliban and we will all turn Bangladesh into Afghanistan).

## **Strength**

It is estimated that HuJI-BD might have 15,000-20,000 cadres, majority of whom madaris (religious scholastics) educated in madrassas (religious seminaries); large portions of the Islamic middle class and lower class families in Bangladesh educate their children in Madrassas where they are inculcated the Islamic way of life and customs right from childhood. The new recruits receive their training in camps based in Bangladesh and, sometimes abroad, like Afghanistan and/or Pakistan.

Harkat recruits not only its own nationals; a significant source for its membership is the huge refugee population from Myanmar. The stateless Rohingya Muslims, who fled their native place from Myanmar over the years, have enthusiastically joined the HuJI due to religious persecution. In the 1990s, the Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuA) had set up training camps in Bangladesh for training local recruits as well as those from India, Arakan, and the Abu Sayyaf group in

southern Philippines. It is reported that Harkat's recruits were present in Jammu and Kashmir, Afghanistan and Chechnya.

### **Funding**

In a report released by the Bangladesh CID police in 1999, Osama bin Laden's IIF had sanctioned taka 20 million (US \$ 0.40 million) for recruitment and training of cadres and organizing terrorist and subversive activities in Bangladesh. The money was transferred through a Pakistani national and coordinator of the pro-bin Laden terrorist organizations in South Asia, Mohammad Sajed. It was distributed through the local leaders of HuJI-BD to 421 madrassas that were helping HuJI-BD in recruitment and training. It is reported that bin Laden's monetary assistance to the HuJI-BD comes through his organization Servants of Suffering Humanity International situated in Dhaka. Those madrassas that receive money from the Gulf countries also fund HuJI-BD. That apart, other militant organizations like the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and HuJI-Pakistan also chip in. Financial assistance from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan are routed through many Muslim NGOs based in Bangladesh including Adarsa Kutir, Al Faruk Islamic Foundation and Hataddin.

### **Areas of Influence**

The coastal region in southern Bangladesh stretching from Chittagong through Cox's Bazaar to the Myanmar border is the principal area of operation for most illegal groups in the country involved in piracy, smuggling and arms trading. Harkat has a base there in addition to six camps in the hilly areas of Chittagong, where their cadres are trained in the use of weapons. Its influence extends up to Cox Bazaar and it is believed that the group has few training camps in this area too. The cadres of the outfit allegedly infiltrate frequently into the Indian territories in the

East and Northeastern areas where Harkat maintains contacts with proscribed terrorist groups.

### **Activities**

The Harkat has focused its activities against liberal and secular models, and their targets include academicians, journalists, minorities and political parties like the Awami League. The arrests and subsequent interrogations after the brutal killing of journalist Shamsur Rahman on 16 July 2000 in Jessore, revealed that HuJI had planned to kill 28 prominent intellectuals, including Prof Kabir Choudhury, writer Taslima Nasreen and the Director General of the Islamic Foundation, Maulana Abdul Awal. HuJI's two times unsuccessful assassination plots against former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in July 2000 confirms its hatred towards secular political parties and their leaders. Mufti Abdul Hannan, an important Central Committee Member of the HuJI, who was arrested in the Hasina assassination plot, manufactured all the explosives at Sonar Bangla Chemical Industries Limited near Gopalganj where huge quantities of live bombs, gunpowder and other explosive materials including 60kg of explosives were later recovered. HuJI members were also arrested for their involvement in the attack on a church in Baniachang on June 3. The outfit was also responsible for the New Year bomb blast in Dhaka on April 14 that left 8 dead. The bomb blasts at the Mymensingh cinema hall, that killed 18 people, was the handiwork of HuJI-BD with help from al Qaeda.

### **Internal Network**

The most important alliance of the HuJI-BD inside Bangladesh are the Islamic fundamentalist political parties like Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote, Kilafat-e-Majilis, Islami Shasantantra Andolan and Islami Chattra Shibir. Among these, the Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote

are partners of the ruling Bangladesh National Party coalition government and Jamaat-e-Islami has two ministers in the government. Importantly, HuJI-BD's advisory council is drawn from senior leaders belonging to the above-mentioned fundamentalist Islamic parties; Maulana Mohiuddin Khan, heads the 16-member council which includes Jamaat-e-Islami MP Maulana Delawar Hossain Saidi, Islamic Shasantantra Andolan leader Maulana Saikul Hadis Allama, Islamic Oikya Jote chairman and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Ameer Azizul Huq

### External Linkages

HuJI-BD was established with the influence of Osama bin Laden's International Islamic Front. It also maintains links with the erstwhile Afghan Taliban regime; some members had even fought against the Soviet troops alongside the mujahideens in Afghanistan. HuJI-BD is reported to have contributed the largest number of iihadis for the IIF's fight against the Americans in Afghanistan, followed by the HuM, the LeT and JeM. The Harkat members who fought with the fundamentalists and have now returned to Bangladesh are spearheading the Islamic movement. Reportedly, a team of Taliban mujahideen reached Bangladesh in June 2001 to train HuJI cadres.

The outfit also has strong links with Pakistan. Many of its members received their arms and training from Pakistan based camps to fight in Afghanistan. It has a steadfast relationship with Pakistan's Inter Services intelligence (ISI), which is an important source for arms, training as well as money. According to the police report, Mufti Abdul Hannan, who was arrested in connection with the plot to assassinate the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in July 2000, was trained in Peshawar in Pakistani and had even fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Hannan's brother, who was also arrested for the same case, revealed the outfit's

links with Pakistan's diplomatic mission in Bangladesh as well as the ISI's training camps in Kurigram and Rangpur, near the Coochbihar border of Bangladesh, for both Bangladesh and Indian youths. Training camps in Rangmari, Sundermari and Masaldanga provide training in use of sophisticated arms and explosives.

HuJI maintains close links with United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the latter's training camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts exists with the assistance of Harkat members. Soon after the attack on the American Centre in Kolkata, West Bengal, on 22 January 2002, HuJI-BD, Asif Reza Commando Force and JeM claimed responsibility for the attack. The arrest and subsequent interrogation of Aftab Ansari alias Aftab Ahmed alias Farhan Malik, the prime accused in the American Centre attack, confirmed the Harkat's involvement in this attack and its network with JeM, LeT and HuJI-Pakistan.

Fazle Karim, a HuJI operative who was arrested by the Calcutta police on October 2002, accepted that the No 2 in the al Qaeda organization, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and some more al Qaeda terrorists had entered Bangladesh in September 2002 with help from HuJI,. In February 2002, more than 100 Taliban and al Qaeda operatives arrived in Chittagong to escape from US led search operation. Further, from February 2002 onwards, some 300 to 400 Southeast Asian members of Osama bin Laden's International Islamic Front have passed through Bangladesh on their way back to Indonesia, Philippines and Malaysia.

HuJI-BD's chief had endorsed bin Laden's 1998 call for jihad against the West, India and Israel. On July 2002, the Delhi police arrested seven HuJI terrorists, including Bangladesh and Indian members, who were sent to India to assassinate Indian President Abdul Kalam and kidnap famous cricket personalities.