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Between November 16 and December 01, 2015, Singapore authorities detained 27 Bangladeshi construction workers on charges of conspiring to carry out terrorist attacks on another country – Bangladesh, not Singapore.

This was recently disclosed by Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs. Of the 27 workers 26 were deported to Bangladesh after informing the Bangladeshi authorities. One worker is undergoing a jail sentence in Singapore for trying to leave the country illegally.

According to the MHA, the 26 were members of a close religious study group that subscribed to extremist ideology and studied the writings of radical leader Anwar-al-Awlaki, who was connected with the al-Qaeda. The MHA also stated that the Internal Security Department (ISD) of Singapore recovered a "significant amount" of radical and jihadi-related material such as books and videos containing footage of children being trained in jihadi camps. Additionally, documents with graphic images and instruction detailing how to conduct "silent killings" using different methods were recovered. Incidentally, the recent killing of secular bloggers in Bangladesh were done silently, using knives and machetes, not bombs or guns.

The ISD investigations revealed that this group sent monetary donations to groups in Bangladesh believed to be engaged in extremism. The group was trying to recruit other Bangladeshi workers to wage armed jihad against the government of Bangladesh. Their approach was similar to extremist Sunni terrorists, committed to killing other Muslims like the Shias and Ahmedias.

It is somewhat strange that the Bangladeshi authorities reacted only on January 21, after the Singapore MHA came out with the incident through a press release on January 20. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police Joint Commissioner Monirul Islam said in his statement that 14 of

the group had been arrested, that none of them were linked to the Islamic State (IS) or al-Qaeda, but were connected to the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), headed by Mufti Jashimuddin Rehmani. They were also supporters of the war criminal, Delwar Hossain Sayedee, leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI).

Under the conditions of Islamic threat that Bangladesh is currently facing, the police chief's statement was anodyne, to say the least. He made no mention of the other 12 deportees from Singapore, whether they were in detention, being interrogated, or still being investigated.

The ABT appeared in Bangladesh in 2007 as Jama'atul Muslimeen, funded by several NGOs. When the Bangladeshi authorities clamped down on foreign funding, it ceased its activities. It reappeared in 2013 with renewed strength, changing its name to Ansarullah Bangla Team. It became clear that the organization adopted itself as a front for al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS). Bangladeshi counter-terrorism has also ascertained that the ABT is supported by elements connected to JEI supporters and has closer connection with the Islamic Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the students' wing of the JEI. If supported by the JEI, the ABT would not lack in funding as the JEI has legitimate and sub-legitimate earnings through its enterprises, and receives unregistered donations from its members and supporters.

The expose` of the Singapore module suggests that it may be receiving funding from its members and supporters in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia, where a large number of Bangladeshis work in blue-collared jobs. Many of them in the past have contributed to other extremist Islamic organizations, most notably the Jamatul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) and others. This is one channel of funding that the Bangladesh government has found difficult to choke, since such fundings do not necessarily come through bank transfers but through workers coming home for holidays or after their job contracts end, and through *hawala* transaction. Not deterred by the Singapore deportation, the ABT recently sent a letter to the Press Club at Natore, Bangladesh, threatening to assassinate the Bangladesh Minister of State for ICT, Zunaid Ahmed Palak, who is from Natore, and 21 others, including two local members of parliament also from Natore. The letter stated that another list of targets would be released soon. The local police believe the letter was sent to create panic, but the matter was being investigated seriously. The ABT was banned officially by the Bangladesh government in May, 2015, after a series of attacks and assassination of atheist bloggers between 2013 and 2015 and a bank heist in April 2015.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had promised that her top priority was eradication of terrorism, and she kept her promise. But in the last one year at least, she has been overwhelmed. In 2011, Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HUT), an insidious Islamic organization which took birth in 1952 in Jerusalem, and wants to establish an Islamic caliphate, tried to oust her and her government. Other attempts were made on her life in a conspiracy between elements of the BNP and the Islamic terrorist group HUJI, which has links with Pakistan's ISI. She, her government and her country are consistently threatened by the JMB, which has support from the BNP and JEI. To top it all, she had political challenges but succeeded in transforming her country, which Henry Kissinger had labelled "a basket case," to a nation with the highest human development indicators in South Asia.

What she requires is unstinted support from neighbours and western powers who have tried to play "good boys" with Bangladeshi Islamic

extremists and destructive political parties who are still opposed to the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. The trial of the 1971 war criminals, who indulged in mass rape and killing during the Liberation War on behalf of the Pakistani army, is being seen by the successors of the anti independence groups as an existential threat,

On the one hand, it appears that Bangladesh may be emerging as a battle ground between the IS and al-Qaeda. The IS has adopted the JMB as their ideological compatriots in Bangladesh, and rejected the JEI. On the other hand, the JEI elements appear to have aligned with the al-Qaeda with whom they appear to have a shared ideology.

The JMB has already infiltrated parts of neighbouring India as the Burdwan (W.Bengal) blasts revealed. Simultaneously, the Ansar-ut-Tawhid fi Bilal al-Hind (AUT), an IS front in South Asia, is taking roots in India as recent arrests and investigations by Indian counter-terrorism agencies have revealed. These developments cannot be dealt with in terms of vote bank politics in both India and Bangladesh.

Finally, the deportees from Singapore may not have plotted any action in the country itself. But Singapore will be negligent if it does not take this development seriously. This city state is tiny compared to other countries. The dream of a caliphate of both IS and al-Qaeda includes South East Asia. Islamic terrorism is spreading like wild fire, as the recent bombings in Jakarta exemplify. Malaysia is also very much on the screen, as are parts of the Philippines. Reports are available that the Indian Ocean state of Maldives has been affected by extreme Islamic ideology which has been metamorphosing there for some years and may be becoming more acute.

Having said the above, Bangladesh and India are in the cross-hairs of deadly Islamic extremism.

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