

## Weekly Country Report – Bangladesh

05-11 October 2009

Tensions escalated between Bangladesh and Myanmar this week over the issue of demarcation of the maritime boundary between the two states. Bangladesh put its Border Security Force Bangladesh Rifles on high alert and subsequently sent military reinforcements.<sup>1</sup> The heightened alert came at the wake of substantial mobilizations of Myanmar military, naval and air forces across the border with Bangladesh.<sup>2</sup> According to reports, in recent months Myanmar authorities have constructed new roads and battlefield obstacles near the border. Moreover, there have been reports suggesting that fighter jets have been placed in the airfield in Sittwe close to the international border.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, diplomatic moves have been initiated between the two states to defuse the situation.<sup>4</sup>

Law enforcement agencies arrested seven members of the banned terrorist organisation Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) from four districts of the Rajshahi division over 09 and 10 October 2009.<sup>5</sup> The JMB militants have been taken on remand for interrogation.<sup>6</sup> The arrested JMB militants include the operational head of JMB in Natore district.<sup>7</sup> During the raids, police recovered a number of books propagating Jihad as well as CD's and personal computers from the different premises.<sup>8</sup>

Law enforcement authorities placed detained Indian militant Emdadullah on remand again this week for interrogation.<sup>9</sup> He was arrested earlier and is known to be involved with Lashkar-e-Taiba and had been living in Bangladesh with help from Harkat ul Jihad Al Islami – Bangladesh (HUJI-B)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Daily Star, 09 October 2009

<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=108952>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> The Daily Star, 10 October 2009

<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=109085>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> The Daily Star, 08 October 2009

<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=108825>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

Meanwhile, members of the elite law enforcement unit Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) arrested a member of JMB from Jaldhaka in Nilphamari district on 05 October 2009. The JMB militant Nazrul Islam was arrested based on a tip off from his village home.<sup>11</sup>

*Prothom Alo*, the leading vernacular daily in Bangladesh in a special report on 11 October stated that the banned terrorist organisation Harkat ul Jihad Al Islami – Bangladesh (HUJI-B) made several attempts to assassinate the current Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after she stepped down as Prime Minister prior to the elections in 2001.<sup>12</sup> It has been established that HUJI-B carried out two attempts to assassinate Sheikh Hasina, the first one was aborted in 2000 during a political rally while she was still in office. The second one was in August 2004, when a number of people were killed during a deadly attack on a political rally in the capital Dhaka, where Sheikh Hasina was the principal target.<sup>13</sup> This report carried information about other attempts were made to assassinate Sheikh Hasina however, they failed.<sup>14</sup>

In conclusion, the new information unearthed about attempts by a terrorist organisation to assassinate the current Bangladeshi Prime Minister gives out a very distressing picture. HUJI-B is one of the most lethal outfits in the South Asian region. What stands it apart from its peers in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the region is its close connections with Al-Qaeda and transnational nature. A close examination of the group's structure and connections illustrate that it is well networked with other major terrorist organisations in the region. Moreover, it is also believed and some evidence suggests that the group has links to terrorist organisations beyond the region. The attack carried out by HUJI-B on 21 August 2004 is by far one of the deadliest terrorist incidents that Bangladesh has witnessed. Although, it is true that HUJI-B has been largely silent for the last two years and has not been responsible for any fresh incidents, the newly uncovered information suggests that they remain active and continue to reorganise themselves. The absence of a terrorist attack does not mean the absence of terrorism. While in the recent past, bulk of the attention of the counter terrorism response community in Bangladesh has been focused on JMB for justified reasons, it is important to keep a constant vigil on the activities of HUJI-B. The outfit has demonstrated its ability to carry out deadly attacks on important targets in the past and has on more than one occasion tried to target the key political leadership, hence there is an urgent need to take it very seriously and continue to crack down on its activities.

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<sup>11</sup> The Daily Star, 05 October 2009  
<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=108360>

<sup>12</sup> Prothom Alo, 11 October 2009  
<http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2009-10-11/news/11582>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid