

South Asia Conflict Monitor

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HEFAZAT-E-ISLAM BANGLADESH: A WHIRLWIND IN FORMATION

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In the last 13 years, one of the significant achievements of the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh has been to maintain strict control over the growing Islamic radicalism in the country. She became prime minister for the second time in 2008 when religious radicalism was at its peak due to Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) alliance with fundamentalist groups like Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), unchecked external funding to Madarasas, and anti-minority and anti-secular policy of the BNP. The consolidation and proliferation of radical groups reflected when 459 bombs were detonated in 63 out of 64 district towns within seven minutes on August 17, 2005. Despite that, between 2005 to 2009, only four terrorist groups -- Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B), Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Shahadat-e al Hikma, were officially banned out of around 33 terrorist groups present in Bangladesh. More than 100 Islamic political parties and organisations were present at that time in the country. [1]

As mandated in the party principles for upholding democracy and secularism, the Hasina government enacted the country's first anti-terrorism law in 2009, which was amended in 2013. This amendment took

place after a series of attacks on secular bloggers, writers, publishers, cultural activists, and politicians. The amendment allowed the Courts to accept videos, still photographs and audio clips used in Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and other social media for trial cases. Moreover, the government previously formulated the Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012, further shrinking the organisational growth of the fundamentalist groups, who were getting funds from external sources.[2] Prime Minister Hasina declared a "zero-tolerance" policy after the July 2016 Holi Artisan cafe attack in which 29 people were killed, including five militants. This approach brought substantial control over the proliferation of fundamentalism in Bangladesh.[3]

Tactical coexistence

Although the Hasina government took strong measures, including arrests (on an average 150 cadres in a year since 2016), shirking of funding and recruitment sources, dismantling of training camps, neutralising online radical preaching and also soft approaches like counselling of cadres against some major fundamentalist organisations like JMB, Ansar

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al-Islam/Ansarullah Bangla Team, Allahar Dal, Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B), and Neo-JMB, interestingly, the Awami League (AL) went soft on the Hefajat-e-Islam (HeI).

There could be broadly three factors behind AL's engagement with the HeI despite knowing the latter's views on secularism, democracy, minorities and its linkages with external forces, including Pakistan. First, the AL needed a group with a strong grassroots presence to counter JeI. Second, former Amir of HeI, Late Allama Shah Ahmed Shafi, was considered a moderate leader with an excellent personal relationship with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Since the AL was targeting Islamist political groups associated with the BNP, it did not feel antagonised with HeI to keep the Ulemas divided. On the other hand, from Shafi's perspective, the tactics would have been to maintain a friendship with a potential challenger until the HeI emerges as a strategic balancer. The third factor could be, as one scholar has interpreted, the domination of 'Ulemas' in the domestic politics of Bangladesh.[4]

Despite knowing the nuisance values of the HeI, these factors forced the AL to adopt a softer approach towards it, which later turned out to be a big mistake after the death of Shafi in September 2020 and when the control of the organisation went to racial fundamentalist leaders like Junaid Babunagari who has been opposing Shafi's reconciliatory approach towards AL despite the killing of around 50 HeI cadres by the police in the Shapla square incident in 2013.

Media sources claimed Junaid Babunagari to be a Hadith scholar who studied in Pakistan's Jamia Uloom-e-Islamia for four years. Multiple sources have confirmed that Babunagari and his groups have been in constant touch with the Pakistani mission in Dhaka and have also met with ISI agents in some cities of South-East Asia and the Gulf countries.[5] Since the JeI was deregistered as a political party by the Supreme Court in 2013, Pakistan has been trying to use HeI to dethrone the AL government, which is ideologically against Islam as interpreted by contemporary Islamic radical groups active in Pakistan, Turkey, Malaysia, the Taliban, and the Gulf countries.[6]

The new leaders of the HeI, who were waiting to show their popularity and control over the organisation and wanted to express their intention against the AL government, took advantage of

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka on March 26, 2021. Prime Minister Modi undertook a two-day official visit to Dhaka to participate in the 50th Independence Day event. It also coincided with the birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's founder and father of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.



The cadres of the Hefajat organised violent street demonstrations after holding Friday prayers in the mosques in Dhaka, Hathazari, Brahmanbaria, and other Hefazat dominated places. Around 13 cadres of the HeI were killed in police firing. Hundreds of the organisations were arrested for a series of violent demonstrations organised by the HeI in several parts of the country.

Evolution and linkages of HeI

Evidence indicates that the HeI was formed in 2010 with its headquarters at Hathizara in Chittagong district when a politico-cultural vacuum was created due to strong actions by the AL government under the counter-terrorism law and reopening of the war crimes trials against the BNP-led alliance partners. The AL government set up a special tribunal on March 25, 2010, to trial "war criminals" accused of genocide and those who sided with the Pakistani military during the 'Liberation War'. [7]

Although the HeI was formed officially in 2010, its conceptual and structural inception perhaps began clandestinely sometime during the BNP regime with the support of Pakistan as a plan-B in case the mainstream Islamic political parties either failed or were neutralised by the State. Otherwise, an organisation like HeI cannot mobilise many people in just three years and sustain protests in the big cities for such a long period. To note, in 2013, HeI organised a huge rally across the country and placed a 13-point demand before the government. This

rally proved how HeI has become a big party in a short period, with increased capability to hold rallies for days across the country.

Media reports said that the Bangladeshi government has been looking into the role played by Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka in supporting and funding the agitation and embarrassing the Sheikh Hasina government. Also, several MPs from the Bangladeshi parliament had tweeted suggesting links between HeI and the Pakistan High Commission and the ISI before PM Modi visited Dhaka in March 2021.

During the investigation, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) on May 5 gathered that the Hefajat militants plan to create a Taliban state in Bangladesh, similar to Afghanistan. During interrogations, the militants have also revealed that several JeI and Hefajat leaders are linked with the militant outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in Pakistan. The militant leaders also say that they are against the values of the 1971 Liberation War. Besides, the police claimed that it has also collected various evidence connected to HeI's Islamist activities. According to Mahbubur Rahman, the present Joint Commissioner of DMP, "Mamunul Huque and Harun Izhar, the Islamist radicals, led the massacres and anarchy to oust the government headed by Sheikh Hasina, mostly funded by the militant outfit of Pakistan." [8]

Other than Pakistan, HeI has been getting regular funds from the Middle East through Bangladeshi expatriates. In a press statement on May 30, 2021, the detective branch of Bangladesh policy said, "Mamunul Haque, the former joint secretary-general of Hefajat, transacted around Tk 6 crore within a year. Police also found details of multiple bank accounts maintained by Monir Hossain Kashemi, the financial affair secretary of the recently dissolved Hefajat committee." [9]

Conclusion

Therefore, available Bangladeshi media sources indicate that HeI has been ideologically and financially supported by Pakistan and also certain groups in the Gulf countries. Over a period of time, it has developed strong grassroots level cadres beyond Chittagong. Given its support base and ideological inclination to bring Bangladesh under strict Islamic law, it would be a challenging task for the Hasina government to take strong action against

its cadres, both for political and security reasons. Despite the government arresting its top leaders and imposing a ban on its central committee in April this year, the outfit has quickly formed a new central committee with Junaid Babunagari as its Ameer on June 7, 2021. Most importantly, the announcement was made in Dhaka, far from its dominant territory. Although the HeI claims to be an apolitical organisation, it retains the ability to exert influence in the domestic politics of Bangladesh in a big way in future given its Islamic ideology, strong organisational structure, committed and indoctrinated cadres and support from the external forces.

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NOTES

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[3] "Bangladesh is 'frustrated' with Pakistan, but that is not the reason it boycotted Saarc summit", IBT/Yahoo News, 14 October 2016. <https://in.news.yahoo.com/bangladesh-frustrated-pakistan-not-reason-121350776.html>

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[5] "Hefazat's Monir Qashemi met Tarique's man in Bangkok", Dhaka Tribune, June 1, 2021, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/2021/06/01/quashemi-met-tarique-s-man>

[6] "Bangladesh's EC scraps fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami's registration," Business Standard, October 29, 2018, <https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/bangladesh-s-ec-scrap-s>

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[7] “Exclusive: Anti-Modi protests in Bangladesh backed by Pakistan, say officials” India Today, April 2, 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/exclusive-anti-modi-protests-in-bangladesh-backed-by-pakistan-say-officials-1786348-2021-04-02>

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[10] “Hefajat Funding: Most of it came from Middle East”, Daily Star, May 31, 2021. <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/hefajat-funding-most-it-came-the-middle-east-2101873>

Brief-1:

India: Assam’s New Peace Talks offers to ULFA-I

There have been visible changes in the insurgency scenario in Assam after a new government was formed under Chief Minister Himanata Biswas Sarma on May 10, 2021. In his maiden speech, Sarma urged Paresh Barua led ULFA (I) to “abjure violence and come to the discussion table” (*Hindustan Times*, May 10, 2021). Earlier, although other Chief Ministers of the State and the union government had offered peace talks to the Paresh Barua faction of the ULFA, the latter did not budge. Interestingly, for the first time since 1979, the Barua faction has responded to the peace talks positively. The ULFA (I) had rejected peace offers in 2011 when a faction led by former ULFA chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa joined the peace process.



Confidence building measures

Eight days after Chief Minister’s offer for peace talks, ULFA (I) commander in chief Paresh Barua responded positively through a television interview by saying that “he was ready to find a negotiated settlement to the decades-old “Indo-Assam” conflict if the Centre was sincere in this regard.” Barua praised the Chief Minister by saying, “Sarma was a bold and courageous chief minister and appreciated his initiative.” Barua also complimented the Chief Minister for endorsing ULFA-I’s recent demands on three major oil and gas companies, particularly the one for employment of local people in these organisations (*Outlook India*, May 18, 2021).

In addition to that, responding to Chief Minister’s offer, on May 22, the ULFA (I) released kidnapped ONGC employee Retul Saikia, who was abducted in April this year. The outfit had earlier denied keeping hostage to that ONGC employee.

Interestingly, on May 15, in a press release, the ULFA (I) had announced a unilateral ceasefire for three months because of the Covid-19 induced situation. The outfit declared that “it has decided to suspend its all military operations for the next three months unilaterally with effect from today” (*India Today*, May 15, 2021).

Will the talk progress?

Given the hard-line position of Paresh Barua on peace talks and the issue of ‘Sovereignty’ which has been an uncompressing factor during peace parleys earlier, it would be difficult to ascertain how the situation would unfold in future. However, the actions of both sides appear serious. Most importantly, both leaders believe in each other’s capability and commitment towards peace and development in Assam. The personality equation ensures a strong and positive step towards optimising peace talks to achieve the desired results.

Another important aspect is ULFA (I)’s shrinking support base and funding sources. Like other active Indian rebel groups, the ULFA (I) has been seriously affected due to lockdown under the covid-19 situation. Although the outfit retains its linkages with certain groups in the bordering regions of China and Myanmar, its free movement has undoubtedly been affected due to covid-19 related restrictions across the borders.

At the same time, peace is the priority for the new government in Assam since the ruling party targets to make Assam India’s first multi-modal hub and provide the best facilities to the companies to invest in the State (*Times of India*, October 20, 2020). In general, the NE region and Assam in particular, figure firmly in the Central government’s ‘Act East Policy’. Therefore, peace is critical for the project’s success. In this context, the government may put development as the primary plan to negotiate with ULFA (I) than sovereignty issues. The ULFA is already under pressure. The civil society groups of Assam have demanded immediate peace talks between the Centre and the ULFA (I). On June 2, the Sadou Asom Devalaya Sangha (SADS) has expressed the need for immediate peace talks. The Sangha assured that it would extend all possible help for the conduct of peace talks. Similarly, supports are also extended by other groups in the State. Since the ULFA has already declared three months unilateral ceasefire and has released the ONGC employee, the ball is now in the Central government’s court.

Brief-2:

The Maldives: Reframing Counter Terrorism Policy

The fatal attack on former President and Speaker of Parliament Mohamed Nasheed on May 6 once again reflected the deep penetration of ISIS in the Maldivian society, especially amongst the youth and certain political groups opposing liberal democracy. ISIS has already claimed responsibility for the attack on Nasheed, who was targeted for his strong views against growing radicalism in the Island country. The terrorist attack on a high profile leader in a crowded public place also reflects intelligence failure despite the police having prior information about the attack. This information was gathered from eight people arrested in November 2020.

Moreover, in the post-attack period, the investigation process was delayed due to the lack of experience and expertise of the Maldives Police Service (MPS) to deal with this kind of issue and lack of authority to the MPS to search and arrest suspected people under the existing counter-terrorism act. After a month of the incident, the MPS could identify only five suspects.

Measures taken

Perhaps this kind of attack was the first of its kind on the Island, although there were reports about Maldivian youths joining ISIS. The nature of the attack indicates that some Maldivian youths trained



in the ISIS and Al Qaeda camps might have returned home without the government authorities noticing or being aware of it. There could also be the possibility of some slipping out of the government rehabilitation centres. In that case, many more such attacks might take place in the future. Minister of Home Affairs Sheikh Imran Abdulla had revealed in the parliament that there are several indoctrinated terrorists moving freely in the Maldives. The current terrorism act does not allow the authorities to take those into preventive custody.

Keeping these issues in mind, the Maldivian government on May 30 proposed amendments to the Prevention of Terrorism Act, with a clause for detention up to 48 hours without a court order. The amendments proposed will thus allow the police to arrest and detain party/parties suspected under the act of terrorism for 48 hours without a court

order. The bill came after Home Minister Imran stated that there were obstacles to arresting and detaining dangerous extremists. Previously, the Prevention of Terrorism Act had been amended in 2019 to empower officers of the MPS, allowing them to arrest and search terror suspects without a court order.

The proposed amendments to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (No. 32/2015) will have the following features to strengthen the ability of the relevant agencies to take appropriate measures to prevent terrorist activity without affecting fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution:

- Empowering officers of the MPS to arrest and detain those suspected of terrorism for a period of 48 hours.
- Detailing the amended procedure to have such suspects presented in front of a judge at court for remand or extension of detention.
- Detailing the procedure through which the Maldives Police Service officers can perform search and seizure operations on private property belonging to a party and make arrests without seeking a court order.
- Detailing the procedure for dealing with those who have left the Maldives to join militia groups abroad in war zones if they return to the country.
- Although many of those returning home from the war zones may not be active fighters, the amendment states that they are considered at risk of exposure to extremist ideologies, terrorism and propaganda, and calls for measures to be taken to protect communities from their influence. An amendment was also proposed to allow such parties to receive rehabilitation treatment following their returns.
- A third amendment was proposed to have those sentenced to a monitoring and control order, those in detention for suspected terrorism, those extremist fighters convicted of terrorism and those who have returned to the Maldives from warzones be given a legally mandated opportunity at rehabilitation treatment until they are fit to rejoin society, starting from the moment they are presented in front of the law on home soil.[1]

Apart from further empowering the security forces, the government has emphasized capacity building like intelligence gathering both from human and technical sources, specialised training of security forces, intelligence sharing with other countries and most importantly, consulting counter-

insurgency experts in the investigation process. In this regard, President Ibrahim Muhammed Solih has ordered a review of the intelligence-gathering capacities of the security apparatus.

Summing up

Given the limited resources and trained workforce to tackle the menace, the Maldives needs to review its current policy of rehabilitating former militants who have returned from warzones. There are risks in allowing the trained terrorists to return home from war zones and then de-radicalising them fully. At the same time, a softer approach needs to be taken towards de-radicalising home-grown terrorists. Second, the Maldives needs to take stringent measures against external funding to the mosques and madrasas that may aid terrorist organisations. Unless these preventive measures are taken seriously, no counter-terrorism act can guarantee that the Maldives will be terror-free in the future.

NOTE

[1] “Amendments proposed to Prevention of Terrorism Act, detention possible for 48 hours without court order,” *Raajje*, May 30, 2021, <https://raajje.mv/100888>

NEWS ROUNDUP: MAY 2021



AFGHANISTAN

MAJOR EVENTS:

May 01: The US begins the process of troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, virtually bringing the decades long war nearer to an end. The process will be completed by September 11, 2021. An estimated 226 Afghan civilians and military personnel have been killed in Taliban led violence in the last fortnight (April-15 -30). (*Tolo News/ (NDTV)*)



May 04: The Taliban have announced a ban on Covid-19 vaccination campaign in at least 14 districts of Paktia province. It also shut down several immunisation centres. (Telegram)

May 07: US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said that the US is seeking a new chapter of relationship with Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the US forces from the country in September as ordered by President Biden. According to him, the US is shifting to a new bilateral relationship with Afghan security partners and will work toward common goals in some new and different ways. Austin further said, “We will continue to support after we retrograde with

funding, with logistics, we will remain partners with the Afghan government, with the Afghan military and certainly we hope to our continued support to Afghan security forces.” (Tolo News)

May 15: Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the deadly attack on a mosque in the Shakar Dara district, near capital capital Kabul on May 14. In a statement it said the explosion targeted Muhammad Numan Fadli, a leading Sufi figure who incited fighting against IS. Fadil was among ten others have been killed in the explosion. and nearly 40 people were injured. (Hindu)



May 17: General Scott Miller, US and Coalition Forces commander said that the Taliban might increase violence after the three-day Eid ceasefire that ended on May 15. Gen. Miller added that the insurgents would try to mount pressure on different provincial capitals. He said it was the time for the Afghan security forces to show their strength. (Pajhwok)

May 22: The death toll reached 100 and 160 others wounded in the May 08 suicide bombings in front of the Sayed Al-Shuhada Girls High School in Dasht-e-Barchi, a Shia-Hazara predominated locality of Kabul. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio

Guterres condemned the attack and expressed his deepest sympathies to the victims' families and to the Afghan government and people. Both Taliban and Islamic State Khorasan province were blamed for this violence, though no group claimed responsibility. (Gandhara; Gandhara)

May 26: The Taliban issued a statement warning neighboring countries against hosting US military bases. It said that the Taliban will "not remain silent" and "will fulfill its religious and historical responsibilities in the same way as it has performed throughout history.” (Tolo News)

May 28: Islamic State group (IS) has claimed attacks on government oil tankers in Parwan. It has previously threatened to target government's economic interests and infrastructure ranging from oil, gas and energy installations. Early in May the group also claimed carrying out two similar attacks on oil tankers. trucks belonging to the Afghan government. (Telegram)

BANGLADESH

MAJOR EVENTS:



May 02: Bangladesh's elite police force Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) arrested four Ansar al-Islam militants from Azizia Markazul Ulum Madrasa at Terokhada in Khulna district. ([Dhaka Tribune](#))

May 04: Bangladesh police (CTTC) arrested two Neo-Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (Neo-JMB) militants including a juvenile from Jatrabari area of Dhaka. The arrested militants have been allegedly involved in carrying out propaganda on social media like Facebook and other online platforms inspired by violent extremist ideology. ([Dhaka Tribune](#))

May 09: The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Bangladesh police arrested four Ansar al Islam militants for conspiring to target on the security patrols of police and border guards. The militants are identified as Mohamad Jashimul Islam, Mohamad Abdul Mukit, Mohamad Aminul Haq and Sajib Ikhtiar. They were planning to carry out sabotage using oxygen cylinders as explosives. ([Dhaka Tribune](#))



May 12: Al Qaeda linked Ansar Al Islam-Bangladesh militant group plans to recruit youth from religious and mainstream education background. The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) recently retrieved some documents which suggested that the

group urged its members saying, the 'war' was not limited just to guns and gunpowder. It was essential to be skilled in language, knowledge, work and strategy. ([Prothom Alo](#))

May 16: Bangladesh police said that the arrested cleric Ali Hasan Osama is a spiritual leader of Al-Qaeda-inspired militant outfit Ansar Al Islam and an active member of Hefajat-e-Islam (HeI). Osama took his oath from a top HeI leader. Osama had written several instigating books in the last five years and we kept him under surveillance for the last two years. Osama popularly known as "Banglar Osama" was arrested from Rajbari on charges of inspiring and advising Muhammad Sakib to be involved in terrorist acts. ([Daily Star](#); [Dhaka Tribune](#))

May 25: Dhaka Court sent Mufti Amir Hamza, an Islamic speaker on a five-day remand in a case for inspiring and planning an attack on Parliament building. He was arrested for spreading extremism online and through sermon gatherings. Muhamad Sakib of Ansar al Islam arrested for parliament attack plot early in May 2021, confessed that he was attracted toward extremism watching videos with Jihadi attack messages of several Islamic speakers like Amir Hamza in the name of Waz Mehfil, spreading misleading messages about issues of Islam ([United News Bangladesh](#))

May 31: Bangladesh police investigations revealed that large part of funds for radical organisation Hefajat-e-Islam (HeI) came from the Middle Eastern countries through Bangladeshi expatriates. The funds were donated for multiple purposes such as aiding the Rohingya community, helping madrasa students, and the welfare of HeI. (Dhaka Tribune)

INDIA

MAJOR EVENTS:



May 05: Media report citing Andhra Pradesh police inputs informed that Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) have recruited nearly 700 school children aged between 12-18 years during the Pandemic lockdown. CPI-Maoist group have organized a training camp for school children in the Abujhmad area in Chhattisgarh. Most of the newly recruited children are from Bijapur, Sukma and Narayanpur Districts of Chhattisgarh and some of them are from Maharashtra and Odisha. (Hindustan Post-Marathi)

May 10: The NIA has launched investigation against CPI-Maoist commander Madvi Hidma, (commander of Battalion-I, People's Liberation Guerilla Army), in connection

with the seizure of a cache of explosives. Hidma was the mastermind behind April 3 ambush in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district in which 22 security force personnels were killed. (Hindustan Times)

May 11: Three Lashkar-e-Taiba (Pakistan) militants were killed in an encounter in Vailoo area of Kokernag, Anantnag District. They were later identified as Ilyas Ahmad Dar, Ubaid Shafi and Aqib Ahmad Lone alias Sahil (India Today).

May 15: The United Liberation Front of Asom - Independent (ULFA-I) announced a unilateral ceasefire for three months with immediate effect. In a press statement, ULFA-I declared that due to COVID-19 pandemic in Assam, every activity of the group will be stopped during the period of 90 days ceasefire. This is the second time ceasefire has been declared since 2006. Earlier the newly elected Assam Chief Minister (CM) Himanta Biswa Sarma had appealed to ULFA-I leader Praesh Baruah to come forward for peace talks. (The Hindu)



May 18: Al-Qaeda linked Kashmir jihadist group Ansar Ghazwat al-Hind (AGH) urged for 'jihadist unity for the liberation of Palestine', in its latest statement of solidarity with the Palestinian people. The two page written statement titled "From al-Aqsa to Kashmir: one body, one soul, one jihad" was

released in Urdu, Arabic and English-language. It was produced al-Hurr media and shared online b AGH's official online distributor, the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). (Telegram/RicketChat)

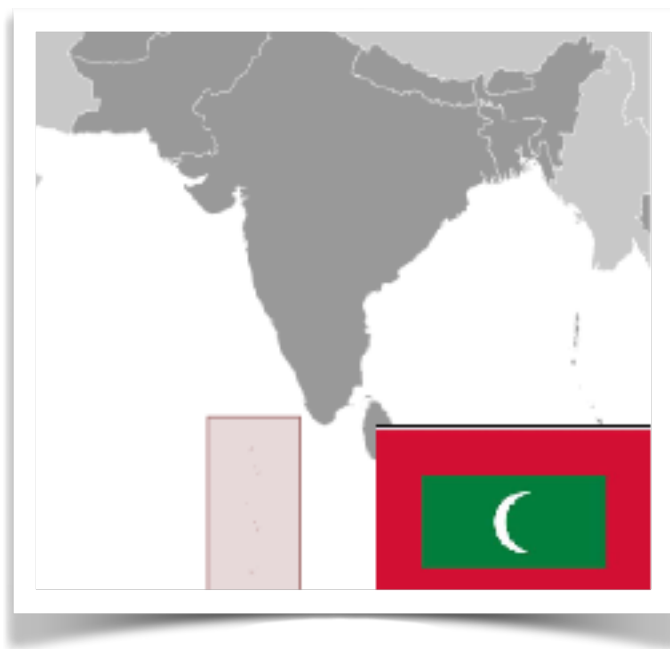
May 23: Around 13 CPI-Maoist militants were killed in an encounter with Maharashtra Police commandos in Padi forest area of Etapalli, Gadchiroli on May 21 (Indian Express)

May 29: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Islamic State (IS) linked terror suspect, Mohamed Ashiq from Nedur area in Mayiladuthurai of Tamil Nadu. He reportedly pledged his allegiance to the IS in 2018 ([New Indian Express](#))

May 29: The NIA filed a chargesheet against a Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT) member Mohammad Iqbal (Senthil Kumar), under Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Iqbal was charged for promoting establishment of the Islamic State Caliphate. Investigation revealed that posts on the Facebook page ‘Thoonga Vizhigal Rendu is in Kazimar Street’ were uploaded by Iqbal for denigrating a particular community. The posts were designed to incite communal disharmony amongst different religious groups, in a manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order”. Iqbal, a resident of Kazimar Street, Madurai, was arrested on December 2 , 2020. ([Hindustan Times](#); [The Week](#))

MALDIVES

MAJOR EVENTS:



May 06: Mohamed Naseed, former president of Maldives and present speaker of parliament (Majlis) along with five people were injured in an IED explosion in capital Male. ([Raajje](#))

May 09: Maldives police have arrested three suspects so far in connection with IED explosion in Male. Police arrested Mujaz Ahmed, Thahmeen Ahmed and Adhuham Rasheed from the capital Male and Hulhumale. They denied any involvement in Naseed’s assassination attempt. ([One Online](#))

May 13: President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih said to bring the perpetrators behind the terrorist attack on Speaker Mohamed Nasheed’s life will be brought to justice. ([Raajje](#))

May 19: Maldives Police Service (MPS) and Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) have arrested several people in the last three days from Addu, Male and Dharavandhoo in connection with the May 06 blast. On May 15, seven Maldivians with suspected links to the Islamic State (IS) terror groups were arrested from Addu City. ([Edition](#); [Edition](#))

May 19: President Ibrahim Solih has appointed British national and Human rights expert Abbas Faiz as the government’s special envoy to oversee the investigation of arrested suspects linked to May 06 terror attack on Mohamed Nasheed. ([President’s Office](#))

May 28: Maldives National Defense Force (MNDF) and Maldives Police have arrested three terror suspects from Hulhumale. One of the arrested individual is identified as Mohamed Zoomaal Zareer. ([Sun](#))

PAKISTAN

MAJOR EVENTS



May 01: Islamic State's Pakistan province released its first Urdu-language magazine titled Yalghar (Call for Assault or War). This 30 odd page magazine comprised articles and infographics of latest attacks in India and Pakistan. It also featured an old interview of slain IS Khorasan chief Hafiz Saeed Khan (Telegram)

May 02: Police have arrested three Islamic State Pakistan members in the Shikarpur district of Sindh province. Arrested suspects have been identified as Khalid Mehmood, Siddique Brohi, and Usman Brohi. They were involved in several terrorist attacks in Shikarpur district. (Samma TV news)

May 05: Four Frontier Corps (FC) soldiers were killed while several others were injured in a clash with unidentified armed militants along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in the Manzakai sector in Zhob, Balochistan. The Foreign Office (FO) Pakistan, in a statement said that around 20 militants were involved in the attack and they used small arms and heavy weapons during the ambush. (Dawn)



May 26: Four Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants were killed in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) in Killi Aghbarg area of Quetta, Balochistan. A senior TTP commander Riaz Thekedar along with his associates identified as Fazalur Rehman, Syed Ramzan and Syed Matiullah were killed while trying to escape from their hideouts. Riaz Thekedar was involved in many terrorist attacks on security forces, politicians and civil society members in Quetta and Pishin. (Dawn)

May 31: Five militants and four Frontier Corps (FC) soldiers were killed in an exchange of fire when militants attack a FC post near Pir Ismail Ziarat in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan, in the night of May 31, reports Dawn. Six FC personnel and eight militants also sustained injuries. (Geo TV News)

SRI LANKA

MAJOR EVENTS



May 02: Police have arrested Navaneethan Pillay Mohan under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) for promoting LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) ideology through social media channels. He was arrested from Chenkaladi of Eravur town in the Batticaloa district. ([Hiru News](#))

May 13: Police arrested an associate of Zahran Hashim, mastermind behind the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks (April 2019) in Mutur town of Trincomalee. The unidentified extremist was taken into custody in connection with the offense of conducting extremism classes in the Mutur area back in December 2018. He was conducting the classes on the instructions of

Zahran Hashim of National Towheed Jammath, an Islamic State linked group. According to the police sources, over 700 persons taken into custody since the 2019 Easter attacks. The Terrorist Investigations Division (TID) and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) are continuing probes into the incidents. ([Island](#))



May 18: Ten people were arrested for commemorating the slain Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in Kalkudah town of Batticaloa. ([Daily News](#))

May 19: Minister of Public Security Sarath Weerasekera told Parliament that Naufer Maulavi has been confirmed to be the mastermind behind the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings. He also said that the Criminal

Investigation Department (CID) of the Sri Lanka Police, as well as the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Australian Federal Police, are currently conducting an investigation into the attack. ([Island](#))

May 21: The Terrorism Investigation Division arrested Mohamed Shahim for conducting classes promoting extremist ideologies from Mawanella town of Kegalle District. Shahim had conducted these classes between December of 2018, and January 2019, in the Oluvil and Muttur areas, with children who had just completed their Advanced or Ordinary Level exams as his students. The TID have made a total of seven arrests, including Shahim's, over charges of teaching and promoting the extremist ideologies of Zahran Hashim. ([Cylon Today](#))

May 30: Police arrested Ahamadu Lebbe Subaddheen, a marriage registrar in Oluvil in Ampara District (Eastern Province), for allegedly providing refuge to suicide bomber Zahran Hashim, along with his four associates in 2017. The Terrorism Investigation Division has been interrogating two of the five suspects who were hiding in the marriage registrar's house. ([Daily News](#))

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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