

According to some reports, recent efforts by Bogota to enforce tax codes and root out corruption and smuggling hit Maicao's merchants particularly hard, especially Arab Muslims who figure prominently in the local economy. This includes merchants engaged in both legal and illegal business. As a result, Maicao's Arab Muslim population is said to be dwindling, as local merchants seek out opportunities elsewhere in Colombia and in the region (Los Cromos, April 1, 2005).

Many observers worry that al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations can exploit Maicao and the Colombian island of San Andres, another FTZ located off the coast of Panama, to raise funds to finance operations. San Andres is also home to a sizeable Arab Muslim and Christian community. FTZs in Colon, Panama, Iquique, Chile, Margarita Island, Venezuela, and elsewhere in the region are frequently cited as potential terrorist finance centers.

#### Conclusion

Despite a lack of concrete evidence to date, Colombia appears susceptible to al-Qaeda infiltration, but it is highly unlikely to come in the form of an alliance with FARC or the radicalization of Colombia's Muslims. In contrast, Colombia's weak institutions and ongoing conflict may present an opening for radical Islamists to gain a foothold. Given this background, it is important to consider the politics behind allegations of al-Qaeda infiltration, as they may divert attention away from the far more pressing themes shaping the threat at hand.

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## Students Islamic Movement of India: A Profile

By Animesh Roul

Following the October 2005 deadly bombings in New Delhi, the Union Home Department claimed that Islami Inquilabi Mahaz, or the Islamic Revolutionary Front (a hitherto unknown outfit), which accepted responsibility for the Delhi blasts, is associated with the outlawed

Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), a radical Islamist organization. Intelligence sources revealed that the masterminds behind the October blasts had several meetings with SIMI cadres in the southern cities of Gulbarga and Hubli. SIMI is also suspected of involvement in the blast at Ahmedabad railway station in Gujarat on February 19 and the twin blasts in Varanasi on March 7 that killed 18 people and injured over a hundred others (*Daily News and Analysis*, February 22; *Hindustan Times*, March 30).

Although SIMI was outlawed immediately after 9/11, the Indian government claims its subversive activities have continued relentlessly. In 2005, SIMI allegedly struck twice in a single month; for instance, on July 5, suspected SIMI operatives staged an attack on the disputed temple complex in Ayodhya, and, on July 28, SIMI operatives allegedly played a role in the bombing on board the Shramjeevi train that killed 12 passengers and injured at least 52 others (*The Hindu*, August 1, 2005).

#### Background

SIMI was founded on April 25, 1977 at the Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh, as a radical student outfit with a mission to revive Islam in India and transform the entire country into an Islamic state. SIMI's founding president was Mohammad Ahmadullah Siddiqi, currently a professor of journalism and public relations at the University of Western Illinois. The group's three core ideological concepts were: Ummah, Caliphate and Jihad. SIMI's ideological inspirations were Muslim thinkers who had launched major Islamic movements in the subcontinent, in particular Shah Waliullah, Sayyid Ahmad, Haji Shariat Allah and the legendary Maulana Maududi, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).

Specifically, SIMI was deeply inspired by Maududi's goal to make Islam the supreme organizing principle for the social and political life of the Muslim community. In its annual report, SIMI reiterated these tenets, urging Muslim youths to struggle for the revival of Islam in the light of the Quran and Sunnah (South Asia Analysis Group, October 30, 2003). In fact, the Maududi influence was so deep-rooted that in the early years of SIMI's existence the organization was dominated by the Indian wing of JI, called Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH). In due course, SIMI emerged as a coalition of student and youth Islamic bodies, namely the Muslim Students Association, Students Islamic Union, Students Islamic Organization and Muslim Youth Association.

SIMI's pro-Taliban stance in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, anti-U.S. demonstrations in the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan and the glorification of Osama bin Laden as the "ultimate jihadi" prompted the Indian government to impose a ban. Since the ban, some reports suggest that SIMI has been operating under the banner of Tahreek Ihya-e-Ummat or Movement for the Revival of the Ummah (*The Milli Gazette*, January 2002).

SIMI is believed to have 400 full time cadres called "Ansars" and some 20,000 ordinary members known as "Ikhwans." The leadership is in complete disarray following the ban in September 2001. The last known leaders of the outfit were Shahid Badar Falah and Safdar Nagori as the national president and secretary-general, respectively. While Falah was arrested and charged with sedition and communal tension in north India in September 2001, Nagori has so far evaded arrest. It has been reported that Nagori is trying to revive SIMI and has established links with Pakistani intelligence operatives, the Palestinian group Hamas and other like-minded organizations beyond India's borders (*The Pioneer*, July 21, 2003).

The ideological affinity with Hamas was revealed by SIMI's financial secretary Salim Sajid following his arrest in June 2002. According to Sajid, Hamas' former spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmad Yasin had endorsed the "freedom struggle" in India's Jammu and Kashmir state and the reconstruction of the demolished Babri Masjid in Uttar Pradesh (*Times of India*, June 29, 2002). Sajid's interrogation also exposed SIMI's covert connections with Saudi Arabia's Jamayyatul Ansar (JA) and Bangladesh's Islamic Chhatra Shivir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (*Times of India*, June 29, 2002). JA is primarily comprised of expatriate Indian Muslims working in Saudi Arabia and is suspected of channeling funds to SIMI. Other sources of funding have included the World Assembly of Muslim Youth in Riyadh, the International Islamic Federation of Students Organizations based in Kuwait and the U.S.-based Consultative Committee of Indian Muslims (*The Hindu*, September 28, 2001).

While SIMI's strong ties with Jamaat-e-Islami units in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal are well documented, not much is known about its ties with Pakistan's notorious Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI). According to some reports, SIMI cadres were being trained by the ISI to launch terrorist attacks in India (rediff.com, April 27, 2004). One arrested Sikh militant

revealed in 1993 that SIMI cadres, along with Kashmiri and Sikh militants, had been brought together by the ISI through the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan to carry out training and subversive activities in India (*The Hindu*, September 28, 2001). Moreover, it has been reported that the ISI has maintained contact with key SIMI operatives during their trips to Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries, either for Haj or fund-raising activities (*Daily Excelsior*, October 9, 2001). In early 2003, a senior police official in Lucknow (tasked with investigating SIMI in Uttar Pradesh state), warned that the group was trying to re-organize with the help of the ISI. His claim was based on the confessions of two detained SIMI operatives, Obaid Ullah and Mohammed Arif (*Press Trust of India*, January 27, 2003).

Intelligence sources have stated that after proscription, large numbers of SIMI cadres fled to the northeastern parts of India and neighboring Bangladesh for sanctuary, training and bonding with other Islamic groups. In previous years, SIMI had formed local branches in West Bengal, especially in the border districts of Malda, Murshidabad, North and South Dinajpur and even Kolkata. They organized regional meetings in West Bengal and in Chittagong (Bangladesh) under a different banner in 2003 where they were reportedly planning to infiltrate Islamic education centers, libraries, and other cultural bodies (*Daily Excelsior*, December 12, 2003). SIMI is also believed to be active outside the Indian subcontinent, mainly in Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states. In 2003, as many as 350 Indian Muslims working in Jordan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and other Middle-Eastern states were allegedly recruited by SIMI to fight U.S. forces in Iraq at the behest of the International Islamic Front (*Intelligence Online*, August 28, 2003).

Additionally, Pakistani terrorist outfits like Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) have had strong logistical and operational ties to SIMI. In late 2002, Maharashtra police seized as many as 30 compact discs containing speeches of Maulana Masood Azhar, chief of Jaish-e-Muhammad, along with clippings of communal riots in Gujarat from SIMI offices in Aurangabad. Furthermore, there is clear evidence of operational ties between HM militants and SIMI. The arrest of Sayeed Shah Hasseb Raza and Amil Pervez with explosives in the Kolkata railway station in 2002 substantiated earlier claims of terror ties. Both Raza and Pervez were senior members of SIMI and earlier worked for HM. Investigation officers believed that the duo were in Kolkata to carry

out subversive activities and recruit youth for jihadi activities (*Times of India*, March 2, 2002).

#### Conclusion

The major concern for the Indian government and the United States revolves around al-Qaeda's possible penetration of SIMI. While there is no evidence linking SIMI to al-Qaeda, SIMI leaders are known to have made declarations of support for Osama bin Laden and his organization. In October 2001, Safdar Nagori stated in Lucknow that declaring bin Laden as an international terrorist was part of "an evil design of the U.S." He later admitted to distributing audio cassettes of bin Laden's speeches in and around Kanpur city (*The Milli Gazette*, October 2001). This was not a single instance of SIMI's brazen anti-Americanism. Earlier, in July 1998, SIMI cadres held demonstrations in the major cities of India against the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, which they called "a sinister plot on the part of the enemies of Islam to desecrate and capture its holiest site" (South Asia Analysis Group, October 30, 2003). Furthermore, during a special operation, security forces recovered CDs, tapes, books, journals, posters of bin Laden and documents urging all Muslims "to take revenge for the Babri Masjid demolition, to support the secession of Kashmir as well as the jihad of bin Laden in West Bengal" (*The Statesman*, October 5, 2001).

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