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Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) in North East India

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Of particular concern for India is the increasing collusion between Pakistan's ISI and Bangladesh's military intelligence establishment, the DGFI, to keep India's North East bleeding "with a thousand cuts" by stepping up anti-India activities from Bangladesh. The ISI facilitates meetings between various Indian insurgent groups, arranges funds, weapons and ammunition for them, which has resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh as a major transit base for smuggling of arms into India. Another disquieting development has been the large-scale illegal migration of Bangladesh nationals into the region that has altered the demography of the entire Northeast. Such steps have been taken by the ISI to create an autonomous Islamic state over there and ensure that its separatist anti-India agenda is carried out successfully to its logical conclusion.

Pakistan's Directorate for Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) has over the years become the most important political force within the country and dominates Pakistan's domestic and international political agenda.¹ Since its inception the ISI has been an elite group comprising officers from the three services with specialized skills in the collection, analysis and assessment of external intelligence, both military and non-military. Given the backdrop of Pakistan's partition from India, the main focus of its attention has naturally been India-centric as has been well documented.² The ISI has been equally thorough and ruthless in repressing political opponents to the military regimes that have ruled over Pakistan for more than half of its fifty-seven years of existence. In the early years of its creation, the ISI's role was mainly confined to liaising with foreign

Military Attaches posted at Islamabad and supervising the functioning of Pakistani Military Attaches posted abroad, reporting to the Chief of Army Staff. However, following the imposition of martial law by Field Marshal Ayub Khan in 1958, the role of the ISI was expanded, and it was assigned the task of safeguarding Pakistan's interests, monitoring opposition politicians, and sustaining military rule in Pakistan.

Wide-ranging functions are performed by the ISI and it is the principal agency for the collection of external and internal intelligence within Pakistan. The ISI also co-ordinates all aspects of the intelligence functions of the three military services, surveillance over its cadre, foreigners, the media, politicians, diplomats of other countries stationed in Islamabad and Pakistani diplomats serving outside the country; the interception and monitoring of communications; and the conduct of covert offensive operations.³ In fact, there is very little that does not come under the purview of the all-powerful ISI.

The ISI continued to gain in stature and influence through the 1960s under Ayub Khan, becoming more like an extra-constitutional body "answerable neither to the leadership of the army, nor to the President or the Prime Minister."⁴ The ISI witnessed further growth in its power under Yahya Khan, the successor of Ayub Khan, and again when the CIA began to collaborate with it during Richard Nixon's

¹ In 1948, Maj Gen R Cawthorne, then Deputy Chief of Staff in the Pakistan Army, founded the ISI. Later in the 1950s President Ayub Khan had expanded the role of ISI in safeguarding country's interests, monitoring opposition politicians, and sustaining military rule in Pakistan. Some comprehensive works on the ISI and its activities are: Sean P Winchell, "Pakistan's ISI: The Invisible Government", *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, No. 16, 2003; Bhure Lal, *The Monstrous Face of ISI: Real Story Behind the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency of Pakistan*, Siddharth Publications, Delhi, 2000; Bidanda M Chengappa, *Pakistan's Fifth Estate: Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate*, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi 2000; and Srikanta Ghosh, *Pakistan's ISI: Network of Terror in India*, APH Pub. Corp., New Delhi, 2000.

² B. Raman, "Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence", *South Asia Analysis Group*, Paper No. 287, August 1, 2001. <http://www.saag.org/papers3/paper287.html>

³ For a brief profile of the ISI, See Federation of American Scientist's website <<http://www.fas.org/irp/world/pakistan/isi/>>

⁴ Ibid.



administration to counter the growing Soviet influence in Afghanistan through the 1980s. During this phase anti-India operations too were steadily stepped-up and a plan drawn up to provide support to separatists in Punjab to abet the separatist Khalistan movement there.

General Zia-ul-Haq transformed the ISI into an all-powerful entity within Pakistan during his rule. Zia, the son of an Islamic cleric, was a fundamentalist, who had used the ISI to seize power in a military coup in 1977. He was fuelled by an intense desire to transform Pakistan into a powerful regional player that would be an effective counter-balance to India, and this, according to Zia, could not be achieved without the discipline of a totalitarian state.⁵ It was this line of thinking that led to the Islamisation of the Pakistan army during his time. Simultaneously, Pakistan also emerged as a frontline state in the US strategy of jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. This policy was not new. Right since its creation, Pakistan has been an integral part of the US policy of Containment of Soviet Russia and it became a formal part of the US-led defense alliance system (CENTO) in 1954. Within Pakistan, the strategy of jihad meant that a close

⁵ Sean P. Winchell, "Pakistan's ISI: The Invisible Government", *op. cit.* p.377.

relationship was established between the Army and the Islamic parties of Pakistan. A certain degree of Islamic indoctrination of the army was a natural corollary that eventually led to the increasing involvement of the ISI in providing support to the Taliban in Afghanistan and to the militant Islamic groups operating in Kashmir⁶ and other parts of India, especially Northeast India.

A strong obsession with India has been the cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy and national security apparatus since 1947. This has translated into an intense desire to settle scores with India right since Independence over Kashmir and

more so for its role in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. And, given the disparity in size and conventional resources of the two countries, low-intensity covert warfare, which depends heavily on intelligence inputs, has become the preferred option for Pakistan vis-à-vis India. Pakistan looks upon "terrorism as a political tool to frustrate India's aspirations of emerging as a major regional power, as an equalizer to neutralize the quantitative and qualitative superiority of the Indian armed forces over their Pakistani counterparts."⁷ The positioning of the US forces in Pakistan post-9/11 and the operations in the Wana region of Pakistan against Islamic fundamentalists have forced Pakistan to change its tactics and area of operation in India. Of particular concern for India is the increasing collusion between Bangladesh's military intelligence establishment, the DGFI (Directorate General of Forces Intelligence), and Pakistan's ISI to step up anti-India activities in India's vulnerable Northeast. In recent months, the ISI has increasingly stepped-up its covert support

⁶ Satish Kumar, "Reassessing Pakistan As Long Term Security Threat", Public Lecture No. 7, *Center for Policy Research (CPR)*, New Delhi, March 2003.

⁷ B. Raman, "Pakistani Sponsorship of Terrorism," *South Asia Analysis Group*, February 25, 2000. <http://www.saag.org/papers2/paper106.html>

to separatist groups in the Northeast in their fight against Indian authorities.

Pakistan's State-sponsorship of terrorism against India in the tribal areas of the Northeast started in the 1950s. From about 1956 the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) district of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, was used as a safe haven by Pakistan to provide weapons and training to the Naga and Mizo rebels to fuel insurgency in India. The ISI facilitated the travel of Naga gangs to the CHT via the Upper Chindwin district and the then Chin Hills Special Division of Myanmar.⁸ Due to repeated requests by the Government of India, the Ne Win Government that had seized power in 1962, ordered a crackdown on Naga groups, making it difficult for them to travel to CHT. But Pakistan was not deterred. The ISI helped the Nagas establish contacts with the Chinese intelligence, which in turn, set up training camps for the Nagas in Yunnan in 1968 and the first Naga gang led by Mowu Angami crossed over to Myanmar in the last week of October 1968, and reached Yunnan in February 1969 with the help of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).⁹ After this Naga gangs began going to Yunnan regularly for training and to procure arms and the Myanmar Army was unable to stop this traffic due to its weak control over the Kachin State.

Similarly, the ISI started to patronize the Mizos in 1966 after the Indian Army launched an offensive against the Mizo National Front and regained control of Aizawl from them. The latter, led by Laldenga, fled to the CHT, set up its headquarters there and got full support of the Pakistani intelligence for their training and supply of weapons. The Indian authorities got clinching evidence of the nexus between Pakistan's ISI and Northeast Indian insurgent groups when Indian commandos raided the headquarters of the Mizo National Front (MNF) in CHT in December 1971 during

the war in East Pakistan. Although MNF leader Laldenga and other MNF cadres managed to escape to Myanmar, from where they were taken to Pakistan, incriminating MNF records were captured by the Indian Army. Laldenga remained in Pakistan till 1975 but got disillusioned and fled to Afghanistan, from where he went to Geneva and got in touch with the Indian diplomatic mission in Switzerland. He opened negotiations with the Government of India that ultimately led to a peaceful political settlement in Mizoram. During his talks with the Government of India, Laldenga gave complete details of the ISI's role in instigating acts of terrorism and insurgency in the Northeast.¹⁰

Buoyed by the success of its role in fomenting terrorism in Punjab and Kashmir, the ISI began to look towards the North East to open a third front against India since at least 1990. There are definite indicators of linkages that the ISI established with the North East Insurgent Groups, especially the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and United Liberation of Assam (ULFA) at this time. Initial contacts with ULFA were established through the Punjab militant groups, and this led to the visit of various ULFA leaders to Pakistan and even Afghanistan in the early 1990s. Munim Nabish, an important ULFA activist, who later shifted to Bangladesh to coordinate the action of ULFA activists in that country, admitted during his interrogation after he was arrested by the Assam Rifles that he had visited Karachi and Islamabad in late 1990 and early 1991 to work out the logistics of sending ULFA militants to Pakistan for training. Other ULFA leaders like Arbind Rajakhwa, Pradeep Gogoi and Paresh Barua, who are at present sheltered by Bangladesh, also visited Pakistan in March-April 1991 and the ISI arranged a meeting with the Afghan warlord, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who promised to supply weapons to the ULFA. A diary of Rajakhwa and other ULFA documents recovered during counter-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. Also see, Jaideep Saikia, *Terror Sans Frontiers: Islamist Militancy in North-East India*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 2004.

¹⁰ B. Raman, "Pakistan and Terrorism: The Evidence", *South Asia Analysis Group*, Paper No. 390, January 8, 2002.

insurgency operations by Indian security forces mention about these activities and links of Indian insurgent groups.¹¹

In January 2003 the interrogation of the arrested NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland) vice president, Dhiren Bodo confirmed NDFB's links with the Pakistan ISI and also that the NDFB was trying to forge an agreement with various fundamentalist groups within Pakistan and the Maoist rebels in Nepal to step-up anti-India activities in the Northeast also came to light. It also came out that 13 NDFB cadres had been sent to Pakistan for advanced arms training.¹² Another arrested NDFB leader, one of its three deputy commanders-in-chief, Ajay Brahma, disclosed that the ISI had sponsored the visit of four top leaders of the NDFB including that of Ranjan Daimary, the President, in the early 1990s and their training for over two months in a camp on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Brahma also disclosed the indulgent attitude adopted by Bangladeshi agencies towards NDFB leaders including the arrest and subsequent release of Daimary by the Bangladesh police in 1995. Reports also provide indicators of NDFB's continuing links with the ISI. Daimary is at present reported to be in touch with a Pakistani ex-serviceman with links to a Kuwait daily newspaper and provided the latter with some documents which underline the right of Bodos to freedom.¹³

The early efforts were however aimed at providing tactical support for buying arms and giving terrorist training. But since 2002 there has been a qualitative change in the activities of Pakistan's ISI in the North East. Complete logistic support is being provided to terrorist groups, terror acts are

better coordinated and meticulously executed. The targeting of innocent civilians in public places on the Kashmir pattern is a relatively new development in the North East. Attempts to bring about a change in the demography of the North East is another dangerous recent trend. During this period, terrorists caught by Indian security forces have been confessing to an ongoing demographic warfare, targeted primarily at Assam and also the larger North East. A news item in *sifynews.com* dated August 28, 2003, refers to the statement of an Indian Border Security Force officer:

Pakistani military commanders and the ISI have been indulging in a covert operation to separate Jammu and Kashmir in the North, create a Muslim majority state in the North East and carve out another state on the same lines in the South [...] by engineering mass scale infiltration of Bangladeshis into Assam in the North East, the ISI appears to have managed a foothold in that region. The interrogations also revealed that the Southern Peninsula has been the target of the ISI for fomenting trouble in this part of India. Cadres of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) were in fact being trained clandestinely by the ISI operatives with the aim of launching subversive strikes in the country. They have been indoctrinated to such an extent that now they are talking about balkanising India by carrying out large scale terrorist strikes..."¹⁴

Well-documented sources indicate that Pak ISI, from its bases in Bangladesh, has been sponsoring Indian Insurgent groups like National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), ULFA, NDFB, NSCN, Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), etc., to keep the pot boiling in the Northeast states of India. Reportedly, ISI sent about

¹¹ For details, see B. G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance and Development*, Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 1997.

¹² Sanjoy Bhadra, "Bodo Militants' Link to ISI Unearthed", *The Asian Age* (New Delhi), January 16, 2003.

¹³ Sultan Shahin, "A Disturbing Report on ISI Activities in Bangladesh, or Simply Fiction," *South Asia Tribune*, Issue No. 83, March 14-20, 2004. Also see South Asia Terrorism Portal database on NDFB activities < www.satp.org >

¹⁴ Arindam Banerjee, "The Threat in the North East", April 27, 2004. <www.rediff.com>

40 of its agents to Chennai and Gujarat in January 2004 and 20 well-trained cadres to Delhi during 2nd week of February 2004 through the Benapole border in South Bengal to effectively coordinate the activities of its cadres in India.¹⁵

According to media reports based on intercepts available with Indian intelligence agencies, the ISI has also been organizing regular meetings with representatives of the Lashkar-e-Toiba, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Bangladesh's Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami, ULFA, the People's Liberation Army, the All Tripura Tiger Force and Al Qaeda operatives. The ISI secretly conducted two high-powered meetings on Jan 20 and 22 in Bangladesh at Mirsarei and Chittagong respectively. Among those who were present at the meetings were twenty-three representatives from Pakistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK), a leader each from Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and MULTA of Assam, two leaders from Lashkar-e-Janghvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba and two senior leaders of United Jihad Council. Twelve representatives, including Maulana Farid of HUUAI (Bangladesh), were in attendance. One of the important decisions taken at the meeting was the formation of Coordination Jihad Council for South Asia with the objective of continuing jihad and discuss the ways to 'activate' the eastern and northeastern borders of India. Some retired Pak military officers, who could well be ISI officials in disguise, connected to the Tabligh-e-Jamaat were reported to have agreed to provide advice to this forum.¹⁶

"Thus, the ISI is developing an operational model for bringing together all terrorist groups in the North East with leadership being provided by Pakistani-based terrorist groups. The ISI funnels arms, helps setup co-operation meetings, provides local media support for anti-India causes (Protham Alo and Ittefaq) and in general plays the role of a command and control centre."¹⁷

Of particular concern for India is the increasing collusion between Bangladesh's military intelligence establishment, the DGFI, and Pakistan's ISI to step up anti-India activities from Bangladesh. Bangladesh is fast emerging as an alternate base for Pakistan's proxy war against India. According to the Indian Director General, Border Security Force, there were "firm reports" that Pakistan's ISI had set up new training camps for militants in Bangladesh and that "terrorist groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir were also being trained there [...] It (ISI) is now fully concentrating in Bangladesh."¹⁸ With the fencing of the LOC almost complete and a ceasefire in place since November 2003, this is only natural.

The modus operandi adopted by Pak ISI is simple but highly effective. The Pak High Commission in Dhaka has emerged as a focal point that effectively coordinates the activities of Indian insurgent groups, Islamic fundamentalists and criminal elements within Bangladesh. The ISI facilitates meetings between various terrorist groups, arranges funds, weapons and ammunition for them, which has resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh as a major transit base for smuggling of arms into India. The arms seizure near the Chittagong Port on April 2, 2004 was not the first such incident that has been reported from Bangladesh. The ISI has also reportedly established a Refugee Maintenance Cell at its Headquarter in

¹⁵ "Pakistan's ISI has 10,000 Spies in 60 Centers in India," *South Asia Tribune*, Issue No. 81, February 29-March 6, 2004. Also See, B L Kak, "No Relief to J&K Dreaded Outfits," *The Daily Excelsior*, (Jammu & Kashmir), December 20, 2004.

¹⁶ See Arun Shourie, "The Silent Demographic Invasion", Part- IV, *The Indian Express*, (New Delhi), October 12, 2004; "ISI Plans Terrorist Summit in Bangladesh," <<http://qrmapps.com/thugburg/poporg.asp>> January 17, 2004; "Cost of Conflict between India and Pakistan," *Strategic Foresight Group, International Center for Peace Initiatives*, Mumbai, 2004.

¹⁷ Arindam Banerjee, *op.cit.*

¹⁸ Saji Cherian, "Rhetoric and Denial," *South Asia Intelligence Review*, Vol. 2 (42), May 3, 2004. www.satp.org

Rawalpindi that is headed by a retired colonel of the Pakistan army to disburse monetary assistance and take care of all expenses of militant cadres for their activities in India. According to well informed sources the smaller outfits like AL Barq get about Rupees 7 lakhs per month while the bigger groups like the Hizbul Mujahideen get Rupees 50 lakhs per month.¹⁹

Another disquieting development has been the emergence of mosques and madrassas along the Indo-Bangladesh border. Pakistani nationals have been appointed as *maulvis* or religious teachers in these madrassas by the ISI to ensure that anti-India agenda can be carried out effortlessly and, in fact even stepped up. The Jamaat-e-Islami has drawn up plans to establish jihadi militant training camps in Bangladesh and also instructed its district *Amirs* (heads) to provide help and shelter to the ISI operatives. Pakistan Intelligence Officers based in Dhaka have also increasingly stepped-up their espionage activities against India. A highly reliable report has established that the state of Manipur has been emerging as a hub of ISI activities in Northeast India and has witnessed a mushrooming of madrassas.

In Manipur Islamic clerics have been resorting to psychological tactics by playing upon the 'fears' of the minority Muslim population in the state and motivating them in large numbers to volunteer for jihad against India. The activities of Maulvi Abdul Rashid, the cleric of the mosque at the border town of Tamu Moreh in Manipur have been under watch due to unprecedented activity since 2002 and for his role in facilitating the movement of Muslim boys for training in Bangladesh and their subsequent infiltration back into India once their training is complete.²⁰

The topography of the highly porous Indo-Bangladesh border makes the task of

these anti-India elements relatively easy. ISI has been quick to grasp the ground reality and has of late been focusing on developing the Sunderbans–Jambudwip area as a major base for anti-India operations in the future. It has also been cultivating the local people through cash incentives to assist the ISI in its objective of creating a separate Islamic country by carving out certain parts of Assam, Tripura and some other northeastern areas. The "strategic destabilization" on India's eastern flank is a deliberate ploy of Pakistan ISI and needs to be addressed immediately through effective counter insurgency measures.²¹

Islamic fundamentalist political parties in Bangladesh, like the Islamic Chattrra Shibir (ICS), the student wing of the JEI, and the HUUAI (BD), current components of the Bangladesh government, are also active in instigating militancy in Assam, West Bengal and other parts of the country. They hold regular meetings with representatives of the Hizbul Mujahideen, the JKLF, SIMI, the MULTA, the Azad Kashmir Front, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Al Nasseran from Pakistan. SIMI is well known as its activists have been involved in various acts of terrorism in India, including the Mumbai bomb blasts in 2003. MULTA is a terrorist group consisting of illegal Bangladeshi settlers in India, who want a new sovereign entity for themselves within India. In the last few months, the ISI has significantly intensified its secessionist activities in the Northeast.²²

Former Bangladesh Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina has described how fundamentalist forces led by the Jamaat-e-Islami are rapidly gaining strength in rural areas and are infiltrating all the universities. She has also been speaking about the close links between Pak ISI and Bangladesh DGFI and their attempts to

¹⁹ *The Assam Tribune*, January 7 and January 13, 2003

²⁰ Girija S. Kaura, "Manipur Emerging as Main Hub of ISI Activities", *The Tribune*, August 19, 2002.

²¹ Arindam Banerjee, *op. cit.*; Sultan Shahin, *op. cit.*, March 2004.

²² Afsir Karim, "Pakistan Sponsored Terrorism", *Agni*, Volume 6 (2), May-August 2002; Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh: Extremist Islamist Consolidation," *Faultlines: Writing on Conflict and Resolution*, Volume 14, New Delhi, 2003.

destabilize India.

ISI operates training camps near the border of Bangladesh where members of separatist groups of the Northeastern states, known as the "United Liberation Front of Seven Sisters" (ULFOSS) are trained with military equipment and terrorist activities. These groups include the NSCN (factions led by SS Khaplang and Isak-Muivah), People's Liberation Army (PLA), United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), and North East Students Organization (NESO).²³ The Indian authorities have handed over a list of 195 known terrorist camps that are engaged in anti-India activities from Bangladeshi territory but no action seems to have been taken by the Bangladesh Government on the issue.

In the recent past, the ISI has further strengthened its bases in Bangladesh and opened a training centre-cum-transit camp at Dar-ul-Uloom Madrassa under Malcha village in Jessore District. The militant outfit, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen is known to have established a network of support agents in Bangladesh and some of their cadres have settled down there with the help of the ISI and DGFI. They have established a logistic unit and a communication centre to provide assistance and guidance to their operatives in India. Pakistani instructors are also reported to be providing training to Northeast Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) cadres in the Tiristipur training camp in Chittagong Hill Tracts area of Bangladesh. The ISI has also cultivated a few officials at international check posts on the Indo-Bangladesh border to facilitate illegal influx of Bangladeshis into India and help in the smuggling of arms and ammunition.²⁴

Some instances of ISI involvement based on the interrogation of arrested militant cadres that have been reported and documented are :

1. Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF) cadres consisting of PLA, UNLF and PREPAK – People's Liberation Army, United National Liberation Front, People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak, respectively, in Manipur are receiving advanced training in Bangladesh with the ISI involvement. The explosive device used by the PLA in a recent incident in Imphal West on August 14, 2003 killing six civilians, is also suspected to have been provided by ISI agents.
2. An arrested cadre claimed the presence of MULTA camps in Bangladesh and more significantly, the employment of some Pakistani instructors in the training camps.
3. A surrendered ULFA cadre has also revealed that arms procurement for the outfit were the exclusive domain of the Paresh Barua who is also said to receive Chinese arms in Bangladesh through the assistance of the Pakistan ISI.
4. Interrogations have revealed disturbing facets of ULFA's web of linkages. ULFA cadres, including its present middle rung leadership including Raju Baruah and Ashanta Bagphukan, received training in Pakistan as recently as mid-2002, in the use of Programmed Time Devices.
5. Lt. Jibon Goswami alias Satabda Kumar of ULFA revealed that there were about 100 ULFA cadres in Bangladesh, including Executive Council members and 300 cadres in Myanmar. He also revealed that, so far, eleven batches of ULFA undergrounds have been trained in Pakistan and the last batch had gone to Pakistan via Bangladesh in July 2002.
6. Indian Border Security Force (BSF) sources quoted in the media also indicated that the ULFA cadres went

²³ Jaideep Saikia, "The ISI Reaches East: Anatomy of A Conspiracy," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 25, 2002, p. 190.

²⁴ See, "Terrorism: Chicken Come Home to Roost", *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, October 2, 1999; Chandan Nandy, "Centre Raises ISI Alarm In Assam", *The Telegraph*, August 23, 1999; and Sreeradha Datta, "Security of India's Northeast: External Linkages", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XXIV, No. 8, November 2000.

to Karachi for advanced 90-day training on October 17, 2003 by air with passports on fictitious names, arranged by JEI MPs in Bangladesh.

7. A surrendered ULFA cadre Madhav Choudhury revealed that Paresh Barua exclusively controlled arms procurement and Pakistan ISI was supplying Chinese arms through Bangladesh. This is interesting in the light of the huge consignment of small arms that was seized at Chittagong on April 2, 2004 and widely reported in the media. Reports have confirmed the involvement of Pak ISI in funding and supplying a major portion of the consignment meant for insurgent groups in India.²⁵

This has also been corroborated by Shahedul Anam Khan a retired Brigadier General of the Bangladesh Army, who has gone on record to claim:

This is not the first time that consignments of illegal weapons have been seized in Bangladesh [...] The disturbing aspect of this episode is that a government facility was being used to unload these illegal arms [...] One is not aware that there is a demand for such a large quantity of weapons in Bangladesh.²⁶

He has further expressed concern that these arms could be meant for the use of the ULFA and other militant cadres in North East India with whom the Bangladesh government maintains close links and permit ULFA leaders like Rajakhowa and Paresh Barua to live in luxury in Bangladesh. This, according to the Brigadier, would not be possible without active political patronage. "It would be unwise to totally discount the 'fringe elements' in our political spectrum who

reportedly survive on transnational patronage and who might have some use for these weapons [...] particularly of religious elements allegedly linked with the al-Qaeda."²⁷

Such activities of the ISI and the support to fundamentalist groups within Bangladesh account for the recent spurt in violent incidents in the troubled North East. This has drawn the attention of several world leaders, including the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan. The Ambassador of the United States to India, David Mulford even offered the technical help of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to the Indian Government in tracking down the perpetrators of the serial blasts in Assam and Nagaland. Another alarming development concerns with the activities of the ULFA. It has been widely reported that the ULFA has formally become a member of the Pakistan-based Muttahida (United) Jihad Council (MJC), thereby cementing its links with both the ISI of Pakistan and Bangladesh's DGFI.²⁸

Another disquieting development is the attempt by Pakistan to change the demographic composition of the Northeast by encouraging members of fundamentalist militant outfits to infiltrate into India and settle down in the region. As it is rightly observed:

"The population of the four geo-strategically positioned districts of Assam has become one of Muslim majority – a reported consequence of the illegal migration from ...Bangladesh. The ISI and the DGFI are ...encouraging the illegal influx with an eye to carving out a

²⁵ These information have been compiled from South Asia Terrorism Portal (www.satp.org) and Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (www.ipcs.org) database.

²⁶ Shahedul Anam Khan, "Chittagong Arms Haul: Time to Sit up and Act", Full text available at www.weeklyholiday.net/090404/front.html, 9 April 2004.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Sultan Shahin, "A New Dimension in India's Northeast Woes," *Asia Times*, October 23, 2004, available at <www.atimes.com>

Brihot Bangladesh (Greater Bangladesh) in the region."²⁹

The problem of illegal migrants in India is acute, and according to India's former deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, roughly about 20 million Bangladeshis are living illegally in India, with a majority of them being based in the border states of Assam and West Bengal, where they are able to merge with the local population due to physical and linguistic similarities. Several militant groups have been set up in Assam and the Northeast with the aim to establish an Islamic homeland and the ISI is directly supporting MULTA to mobilize Muslim youth espousing jihad. The Bangladesh based Harkat-ul-Jehadi Islami (HUJI), with links to the al Qaeda, is also trying to gain a foothold in Assam.³⁰

Pakistan is also making use of Islamic organizations in Nepal, especially the Nepali Islamic Yuva Sangh and the Nepali Itihad Sangh, which are funded by the ISI, to provide support to Indian insurgent groups in Northeast India. Nepal has emerged as a major source of smuggling of fake Indian currency into India with the help of officials of the Pakistan Embassy at Kathmandu. The ISI has been trying to form a new political party called Nepali Nationalist Party with a view to enhance its influence in Nepal. Smuggling, proliferation of small arms, support to Muslim fundamentalist organizations, infiltration of agents into India, use of commercial enterprise as a garb to cover up for intelligence operations against India are all part of the ISI's anti-India activities from Nepal.³¹

Observations

The ISI has qualitatively upgraded its level of support to insurgents in the Northeast in recent years. While the ISI's links with the Northeast insurgents are not new, the worrisome aspect is the fact that now a higher level of concerted support is being given by the ISI to the Northeast insurgents to escalate violent activities in that part of India as has been witnessed in the last few years.

The important aspects of the ISI's activities in the North East are:

- The ISI has upgraded its links with outfits like ULFA, PLA, NSCN-IM and KLO (Kamtapur Liberation Organization). Advanced guerilla training is provided to the Northeast insurgents in Pakistan. These organizations not only receive training in Pakistan, but also receive sophisticated weapons from that country. In addition, efforts are also made to coordinate their activities through joint meetings of the representatives of the North East insurgents groups.
- The Taliban is also involved in providing training to the North East insurgents, which is a dangerous trend and could be responsible for the recent escalation of violence in the region.

Nevertheless, a novel dimension to the violence in the Northeast India is that the ISI has been actively using other nations to destabilize India. Kathmandu and Dhaka are used as meeting points of insurgent groups with ISI representatives. From these countries the insurgents have been visiting Pakistan with the active assistance of the ISI officials either on genuine passports or fake documents arranged by ISI. Fake currency is also being pumped in from Nepal and Bangladesh to provide assistance to Northeast insurgents.

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²⁹ Jaideep Saikia, *Terror sans Frontiers: Islamic Militancy in North East India*, ACDIS Occasional Paper, Illinois, 2003.

³⁰ "ISI Design to Change North-East Demography," *North East Enquirer*, (Guwahati), Vol. 2 (4), May 22 – June 6, 2003, Guwahati.

³¹ Bidanda M Chengappa, *Pakistan's Fifth Estate: Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate*, Delhi Papers, No. 12, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Delhi, 2000, p. 39.

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