

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Does PDIM have any association with Christianity, or is it thought of as such?**
- 2. Please provide brief background on JMB.**
- 3. Is there a radical cell of JMB (Ah Le Hadish) known to meet at South Chiyabathi?**
- 4. Are there any reports of JMB or its like expelling residents from homes in Joydebpur in July 2006?**
- 5. Please identify and give brief background on any known group of Islamic fundamentalists who attacked a church in Buniachong or similar.**
- 6. Please check whether there is any public record of attacks at the Chandana, Gazipur intersection by Muslim fundamentalists.**
- 7. Do employees of PDIM or other NGOs (particularly in microcredit) face threats or harassment from fundamentalists?**
- 8. Please provide some comments/references on whether the authorities' respond to fundamentalist activity, particularly violence against Christians.**

RESPONSE

Background note on the locale of Gazipur: According to an entry on the Wikipedia* website: Gazipur “is a town located within the Gazipur Sadar sub-district of Gazipur District in the Dhaka Division of Bangladesh”. Background on Gazipur Sadar Upazilla is available from the website of the Gazipur Deputy Commissioner’s Office. Further background on Gazipur District, with some mention of the suburb of Joydebpur, and a map showing Gazipur’s

* Users should be aware that [Wikipedia](#) is a Web-based free-content encyclopaedia which is written collaboratively by volunteers. The Research Service recommends that users of Wikipedia familiarise themselves with the regulatory practices which Wikipedia employs as a preventative measure against vandalism, bias and inaccuracy. For more information, see the recommended background reading available in the Wikipedia Topical Information Package.

location relative to Dhaka is available on the Banglapedia website. A detailed map of the area is supplied sourced from the website of the National Democratic Institute of Bangladesh (NDIBD) ('Gazipur' (undated), Wikipedia website <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gazipur> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 2; 'Gazipur Sadar Upazilla' (undated), Deputy Commissioner's Office, Gazipur website <http://dcgazipur.gov.bd/AtAGlance.aspx?UID=4> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 1; 'Gazipur District' (undated), Banglapedia website http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/G_0065.htm – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 3; 'Gazipur District Map' (undated), Banglapedia website http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/Maps/MG_0065.GIF – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 4; for the NDIBD map, see: 'Gazipur District Map' (undated), National Democratic Institute of Bangladesh website <http://www.ndibd.org/admin/map/29010777.pdf> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 5).

1. Does PDIM have any association with Christianity, or is it thought of as such?

No specific statements could be located on the Web which specifically addressed the manner in which Participatory Development Initiatives of the Masses (PDIM) represents itself, or is perceived by others, in terms of being a Christian, inter-faith or secular institution. Information was located to indicate that PDIM is partnered by Christian organisations and also by the Bangladesh government's peak micro-credit body. An overview of this information follows below.

Background information on the PDIM was located on the Microfinance Information eXchange Market (MIXMARKET) website. The MIXMARKET background lists the PDIM as receiving financial assistance from Dutch Interchurch Aid and CORDAID (Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid), another Dutch Christian organisation. The "Largest funder" of the PDIM is listed as the Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF; Rural Employment Support Foundation) and this would appear to be a secular government institution. PKSF is the Bangladesh government's apex microcredit funding and capacity building organisation (for more on this see the sources below on the PKSF). No mention is made of whether the PDIM is a secular organisation or whether it is affiliated with one or more faiths:

Background: PDIM began its journey by implementing a child sponsorship program at the outskirts of Dhaka city in 1992. The program was phased out in 1994. It further embarked on a 'food security and nutrition improvement' project in the following year with financial assistance from Dutch Interchurch Aid, the Netherlands. In total 1850 households benefited from the various project interventions including micro finance assistance. The project was graduated in 2000. PDIM became one of the partners of PKSF in 1997. It has been getting loan from PKSF to operate micro credit program in Gazipur since then. PDIM has recently started micro credit operation for hardcore poor in Sherpur district with support from PKSF. In addition PDIM has been implementing a multi-sectoral development project for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in Jhenaigati of Sherpur district with grant from CORDAID, the Netherlands. The major challenges are: (a) Keep the membership drop out rate at a minimum level (10%) (b) Avoid MF-program overlapping with other NGOs (c) Maintain the repayment rate over 98% (d) Meeting burgeoning demand of loan by the group members (e) Up-scaling of the micro-credit program to promote local enterprise (f) Maintain professionalism and standard in delivering lending services.

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(‘PDIM (Participatory Development Initiatives of the Masses)’ (undated), Microfinance Information eXchange Market website <http://www.mixmarket.org/en/demand/demand.show.profile.asp?ett=1623> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 6).

Dutch Interchurch Aid is one of the ‘interchurch aid’ programs of the Christian ecumenical World Council of Churches (WCC) (see: ‘Dutch Interchurch Aid’ (undated), World Council of Churches website http://www.oikoumene.org/en/ecumenical-links/advocacy-aid-relief/humanitarian-aid-and-emergency-relief/link/getviewdetailsforlink/0/dutch-interchurch-aid.html?tx_ablinklist_pi1%5Bcategory_uid%5D=0&cHash=78df34dbe3 – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 7).

Background information on CORDAID is available in Attachment 8 (‘Cordaid general’ (undated), Cordaid website http://www.cordaid.nl/English/About_Cordaid/Index.aspx?mId=10182 – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 8).

The website of the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) provides the following information on its genesis and operations:

5. Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF): Apex Funding Organization

Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), since its establishment in May 1990 by the Government, has been working as an apex microcredit and capacity building organization for eradicating poverty initially in the rural areas and subsequently in urban areas. The basic operational strategies of PKSF (Rural Employment Support Foundation) are the following:

- * It does not directly lend money to the landless and the assetless people rather reaches its target groups through its Partner Organizations (POs);
- * It provides greater thrust to institutional development, both its own capacity as an apex organization as well as the capacities of POs;
- * It favours no particular model; instead, innovations and different approaches based on experience are encouraged;
- * It acts as an advocate for appropriate policies and regulations useful for the microcredit sector. (‘Microcredit Programs in Bangladesh: Giving a Chance to the Poor’ (undated), Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation website http://www.pksf-bd.org/Microcredit_bangladesh.htm – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 9).

For information on the possible association of micro-credit / micro-finance with Christianity, the west, or behavior deemed un-Islamic, see the information supplied in response to Question 7.

2. Please provide brief background on JMB.

Background on the Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) is provided in previous Research Responses of May 2006 and July 2004 (see: RRT Country Research 2006,

Research Response BGD30121, 19 May – Attachment 10; RRT Country Research, *Research Response BGD16828*, 5 July – Attachment 11). Updated information can be provided on request.

Ahle Hadith

No information could be located connecting JMB to a group titled Ah Le Hadish but a number of sources make reference to the term “Ahle Hadith”. Information on this group was limited. Examples of the kind of information available follow below.

The South Asia Terrorism Portal’s (SATP) page on the JMB makes reference to the Ahle Hadith in the following entries:

The JMB has, for long, promoted the building of mosques and Madrassas (seminaries), some of which have developed into effective training centres for the outfit’s radical mobilisation. For example, with assistance from Ghalib, JMB cadres used the facilities of some 700 mosques built across Bangladesh by the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society, which is based in Kuwait.

In 2003, decoded diaries of some arrested Islamist militants is reported to have revealed that the outfit had training camps in 57 districts with bases at the **Ahle Hadith mosques** and seminaries. “They have well-equipped training stations in all the 16 northern and some southern districts, and small stations in other districts where they operate,” the then Inspector of Joypurhat Criminal Investigation Department, Khalilur Rahman, had told The Daily Star.

...JMB leader Asadullah Ghalib, who is also the **Ahle Hadith** Andolon Bangladesh chief, after his arrest on February 23, 2005, admitted to have spent ‘crores of taka’ for building mosques and seminaries, giving military-style training to Madrassa students and other organisational works. Similarly, JMB chief Abdur Rahman’s international connections are spread over few Islamic countries, including Saudi Arabia (‘Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)’ 2006, South Asia Terrorism Portal website <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/JMB.htm> – Accessed 3 May 2006 – Attachment 12).

On 17 December 2006, *BBC Monitoring South Asia* published a translation of the following report which appeared on the same day in Bengali in *Prothom Alo*. The report notes the launch of the Ahle Hadith Movement as a political party and its plans to contest a seat in Gazipur.

Ahle Hadith Movement is to formally announce formation of a political party. A number of top level leaders of the organization confirmed that the announcement of formation of a political party will be given through a press conference in the capital, Dhaka, tomorrow, Monday. They have decided to name the new party as “Insaaf Party” [Justice Party]. However, Ahle Hadith will continue its work as religious wing side by side the political wing.

It has been decided that the former acting chief [ameer] of the organization [Ahle Hadith Movement] Dr. Muslehuddin will be the chief of the new political party. Professor Sirajul Islam will be the deputy chief [nayeb-e-ameer] of the party and Abdul Latif will take charge of the secretary general. Besides, they have constituted a 15-member working committee. Abdus Samad Salafi, who is now acting up as the chief [of Ahle Hadith]; will continue as the chief of the religious wing. Dr Muslehuddin came to Dhaka on 8 December only to announce the political party.

Ahle Hadith’s target is not only to announce a political party they are also interested to participate in next elections. Preliminarily they have identified 60 constituencies [for

parliamentary polls] and carrying out organizational works in those constituencies for the last few months. Ahle Hadith claims they have at least 25 million followers all over the country. Most of their followers live in [western] Rajshahi and [southwestern] Khulna divisions.

The decision to announce political party has been finalized at the latest meeting of majlis-e-shura [policy making body] of the organization [Ahle Hadith] on 17 November in the capital. At that meeting an ad-hoc committee with Dr Muslehuddin as the convenor has also been formed.

Dr Muslehuddin told Prothom Alo that he is personally interested to participate in the next parliament election. From a rally of the organization held in Muktangan [in Dhaka] on 2 June he announced that they would participate in the election and would form a party.

Sources said the chief of Ahle Hadith Dr. Asadullah Al Ghalib has been in jail for the last 22 months. The leaders of Ahle Hadith think that if they had a strong political organization the government could not arrest Dr Ghalib even if the charges against him were significant. Dr Ghalib is yet to get bail in two cases although he got bail in three cases on 13 December.

[DR. Ghalib was accused in eight cases following a series of bomb blasts in NGO (non-government organization) offices and cultural functions in different parts of country that allegedly showed obscene dances and arranged gambling. He was arrested on February 26, 2005 from his residence in Rajshahi. Of the eight cases, the lower court had relieved him of charges in five, as police investigation did not find his involvement in the blasts. Now he is facing trial in two cases and the other is under investigation.]

At an extended meeting of Ahle Hadith's central committee they took preliminary decision of forming a political party. At the latest meeting of majlis-e-shura [policy making body] of the organization [Ahle Hadith] on 17 November in the capital they constituted an ad-hoc committee with Dr Muslehuddin as the convenor, and publicity secretary of Ahle Hadith Md. Abdul Latif and majlis-e-shura member Professor Aminul Islam have been made joint convenors.

When contacted regarding this the acting chief of Ahle Hadith Movement Abdus Samad Salafi they will announce a political party in a press conference soon. Publicity secretary Md. Abdul Latif said they will announce this on Monday.

Ahle Hadith thinks they will fare well if they contest in 60 constituencies [in the next parliamentary polls]. They said they will take stand against Jamaat-e-Islami [party] in other constituencies as well. A number of leaders of the organization [of Ahle Hadith] told Prothom Alo that in principle they were lenient to the four-party alliance during the last election [held in October 2001]. But this time after the incidents regarding the arrest of Dr Ghalib they were very annoyed with four-party alliance, especially Jamaat-e-Islami party.

The preferred seats [constituencies] of Ahle Hadith: Primarily the constituencies that Ahle Hadith identified are: Meherpur-2, Panchgar-1, Chapainawabganj-2 and 3, Noagaon-4, Rajshahi-1, 2, 3 and 5, Joypurhat-1 and 2, Bogra-1, 2 and 7, Dinajpur-4, 5 and 6, Natore-2 and 4, Rangpur-4 and 6, Gaibandha-4 and 5, Kurigram-2, Lalmonirhat-2, Nilphamari-3, Pabna-3 and 5, Sirajganj-1, 4 and 5, Khulna-4, Bagerhat-1 and 2, Satkhira-1 and 2, Kushtia-1, Jhainadah-3, Jessore-5 and 6, Tangail-2, 4 and 8, Gazipur-1, 2 and 4, Dhaka-5, 12 and 13, Narayanganj-1 and 2, Narshingdi-2, Jamalpur-2 and 4, Mymensingh-2, 5 and 7, Comilla-4 and 5, and Sylhet-5 ('Bangladesh religious group to announce new political party – paper' 2006, BBC Monitoring South Asia, source: *Prothom Alo*, 17 December – Attachment 13).

On 6 January 2006 it was reported that an arrested JMB member had informed police that attacks in Gazipur had been planned in “an Ahle Hadith mosque of Shakhipur”:

THE suicide-bomber in Chittagong, narrowly escaping death, confessed to the police about the ghastly blast he had carried out. He also spoke a lot about the activities of the banned Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

He informed a joint interrogation by police and intelligence agencies that all militant bomb blasts since August 17, including suicide attacks in **Gazipur** and Chittagong, were planned at the meetings at an **Ahle Hadith mosque** of Shakhipur and at the JMB hideout in the hilly area of Chittagong ('Attack planned at Shakhipur mosque' 2005, *Daily Star*, 1 December <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/12/01/d5120101022.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 14).

On 24 February 2005:

Waking up to the militants' threat, the government at last banned Islamist outfits Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMJB) and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) yesterday accusing them of a series of bomb attacks and killings to create anarchy.

The ban following a persistent denial by the government of the existence of JMJB throughout last year coincided with yesterday's arrest of Dr Muhammad Asadullah Al Galib, chief of another Islamist militant outfit Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (Ahab), with three of his top associates in Rajshahi.

...AHAB, JMB & JMJB

Three years after preparations for a Islamic revolution had begun in the country, Galib splitting from an organisation named Jomiyat-e-**Ahle Hadith** in 1978, when he was a student of Dhaka University, and formed Ahab's youth wing **Ahle Hadith** Jubo Shangha (AHJS), AHJS workers said.

...Corroborating the information, militants arrested in Thakurgaon, Joypurhat, Bogra and Natore told the police that **Galib was their leader and used to meet with them at Ahle Hadith mosques** ('Govt finally cracks down on militants; Galib arrested' 2005, *Daily Star*, 24 February <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/02/24/d5022401011.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 15).

3. Is there a radical cell of JMB (Ah Le Hadish) known to meet at South Chiyabathi?

Information was located which referred to a Gazipur suburb called "South Chayabithi" but no information referring to an Ah Le Hadish or an Ahle Hadith was located in association with this area (though as noted above in response to Question 2 a report was located which related that the Ahle Hadith Movement planned to contest a Gazipur constituency; and on 6 January 2006 it was reported that an arrested JMB member had informed police that attacks in Gazipur had been planned in "an Ahle Hadith mosque of Shakhipur") (for a Gazipur suburb called "South Chayabithi", see: 'Abducted businessman, 2 others found dead' 2005, *New Age*, 13 October <http://www.newagebd.com/2005/oct/13/home.html> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 16; for the previous reports, see: 'Bangladesh religious group to announce new political party – paper' 2006, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, source: *Prothom Alo*, 17 December – Attachment 13; and: 'Attack planned at Shakhipur mosque' 2005, *Daily Star*, 1 December <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/12/01/d5120101022.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 14).

Various reports make reference to attacks, arrests and executions involving JMB or HUJI in the Gazipur area. Some examples follow:

- On 16 February 2008: “A top militant leader of Harkatul Jihad-i-Islami (HuJi) and the second in command of detained top militant leader Mufti Abdul Hannan of Harkatul Jihad (HuJi), Mufti Moin Zandal was arrested from Gazipur, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) today said” (‘Security forces arrest top militant leader in Bangladesh’ 2008, *Press Trust of India*, 16 February – Attachment 17).
- On 23 January 2007: “The intelligence wing of the Rab arrested two members of JMB on January 10 from a house at Badda in the city, and recovered a huge amount of explosives. Police nabbed two persons with a huge amount of arms, ammunition and detonators, from a bus in Tangail on December 29. Following their confessional statement, the Rab members seized a huge quantity of bomb-making materials from Dhaka, Gazipur and Narayanganj on December 30” (Hague, N. 2007, ‘Resurgence of religious extremism’, *Daily Star*, 23 January <http://thedailystar.net/2007/01/23/d70123020332.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 18).
- On 5 May 2007: “The JMB militants have already created a huge panic through throwing bomb at a RAB vehicle, killing traffic constable in Gazipur, grenade attack on the police in Jamalpur and killing a public prosecutor in Jhalokathi” (‘Bangladesh militants prepare for attack in small groups – paper’ 2007, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, source: *Prothom Alo*, 5 May – Attachment 19).
- On 4 February 2006 the arrest of “three JMB cadres” was reported, including a “Jahirul Islam alias Jahir”: “Quoting Jahir, police said he took part in the August 17 bomb blasts at Gazipur road-intersection. He also said the recovered grenades were produced at a local factory of JMB” (Shakil, M. 2006, ‘Over 100 JMB men hiding in Tangail-Gazipur forests’, *Daily Star*, 4 February <http://thedailystar.net/2006/02/04/d60204070179.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 21; for further background on the events of 17 August 2005, which allegedly also involved HUJI, see: ‘Twin JMB suicide strikes spell carnage in courts’ 2005, *Daily Star*, 30 November <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/11/30/d5113001011.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 21; ‘HuJi helped JMB carry out Aug 17 blasts’ 2005, *Daily Star*, 18 December <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/12/18/d5121801033.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 22).

The SATP website’s page on the JMB makes reference to the Gazipur locale in the following entries:

January 30: A JMB ‘regional commander’ of the Tongi-Uttara area, Abdullah al Sohail al Maruf alias Akash, was arrested by the RAB personnel from Ashulia in the Gazipur district.

...January 8: A huge cache of arms and explosives, including three kilograms of gunpowder, one pistol, two country-made shooter guns, one foreign-made shutter gun, 16 bullets, five cartridges and three knives are recovered by police from a JMB hideout at a graveyard in the Dakkhin Khan village of Gazipur district.

...November 29: Nine people, including two lawyers and a police constable, were killed and 78 persons injured in two suicide bomb attacks by the JMB cadres in the Chittagong and Gazipur court premises. The Gazipur suicide bomber was killed and the Chittagong suicide bomber, Abul Bashar, was seriously injured in the incident

(‘Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)’ 2006, South Asia Terrorism Portal website <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/JMB.htm> – Accessed 3 May 2006 – Attachment 12).

4. Are there any reports of JMB or its like expelling residents from homes in Joydebpur in July 2006?

No reports could be located for Joydebpur or the surrounding area of Gazipur. Searches for this time period were run in the Factiva news database. It may be of interest that there were reports of home invasion robberies in the area of Gazipur at this time and, on 31 July 2006, a man was reportedly “beaten to death by some terrorists”. The reports follow.

On 23 June 2006:

Gazipur, June 23 (UNB) – Dacoits looted valuables worth over Tk 5 lakh from two houses at Kaliakoir upazila here Wednesday leaving five people injured.

Local people said the bandits swooped on the house of Mofiz Mondol of Tiler Tek village and Sobed Ali of Kalampur village at night and looted jewelry and other valuables.

They also exploded five cocktails while fleeing.

Five people including Mofiz were injured as dacoits beat the inmates of the houses indiscriminately.

Another report from Noakhali adds: A daring robbery was committed at a house at village Siladi in Senbag upazila Wednesday night and the muggers took away cash and valuables worth Tk 4 lakh leaving five inmates injured.

Locals said the gang numbering 10/15 stormed into the house of Abul Hossain at dead of night and beat the inmates mercilessly. They later looted valuables including Tk 1.05 lakh in cash and decamped with the booty (‘Dacoits loot valuables from two houses in Gazipur’ 2006, *United News of Bangladesh Limited*, 23 June – Attachment 23).

On 31 July 2006:

Gazipur, July 31 (UNB)- A trader was beaten to death at Bariaboho village in Kaliakoir upazila Sunday night.

Local people said Mokhlesur Rahman, 40, was beaten to death by some terrorists on his way home from his shop at Kaliakoir bazar.

On information, police recovered the body and sent it to hospital morgue for autopsy.

Police suspected that the victim might have been killed following a past enmity (‘Trader beaten to death in Gazipur’ 2006, *United News of Bangladesh Limited*, 31 July – Attachment 24).

5. Please identify and give brief background on any known group of Islamic fundamentalists who attacked a church in Buniachong or similar.

Reports of a Buniachong (also: Baniachang, Baniachar) Church bombing were located but were not continuous in their reporting of the reaction of the authorities or of the identities suspected by the authorities as being the perpetrators. A number of sources, including the

South Asia Analysis Group, India's Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies and *The Daily Star*, refer to the militant Islamist group Harkat ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI) as the suspected perpetrators and report subsequent arrests of HUJI suspects and what appears to be a continuing investigation into the matter. Reports by the US Department of State, however refer to no arrests, report that no progress on the case has been made, and note that a government commission has accused the Awami League of responsibility for this and a number of other bombings. An overview of the available source materials follows below.

According to a March 2008 by B. Raman for the South Asia Analysis Group (SAAG) there was an "explosion in a Roman Catholic church at Baniachang in Gopalganj on June 3, 2001, killing 10 worshippers". Raman's report, along with several others, relate that a militant Islamist group, Harkat ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), was reportedly responsible for the attack. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), on 8 June 2001: "The accused in the June 3-Baniachang Church bomb blast, suspected top-ranking leader of the HuJI and a vice-principal of a seminary, the Siddirganj Madaninagar Qumi Madrassah, is arrested along with three more accomplices in the Kakrail area, Dhaka". India's Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies also relates that: "HuJI members were...arrested for their involvement in the attack on a church in Baniachang on June 3" (Raman, B. 2008, 'US Designates HUJI (B) as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation-International Terrorism Monitor', South Asia Analysis Group website, no.378, 9 March

<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers27%5Cpaper2613.html> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 25; for arrests see: 'Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) Terrorist Group, Bangladesh' (undated), South Asia Terrorism Portal website

<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/Huj.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 26; 'Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-BD)' (undated), Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies website

<http://www.ipcs.org/newDatabaseIndex3.jsp?check=70&database=1005> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 27).

On 5 November 2007 *The Daily Star* reported that:

The home ministry was, meantime, told yesterday investigators have enough evidence that Harkat ul-Jihad (Huji) leader Mufti Abdul Hannan and his operatives launched grenade and bomb attacks on Sheikh Hasina, CPB conference at Paltan, Ramna Batamul and Baniachang church.

...At yesterday's meeting, investigators claimed to have been confirmed that Mufti Hannan and his operatives were behind grenade attack on Hasina and bomb attacks on CPB conference at Paltan, Ramna Batamul and Baniachang church (Ashraf, S. 2007, 'Charge sheet against JMB men in week', *Daily Star*, 5 November

http://www.thedailystar.net/pf_story.php?nid=10397 – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 28).

On 13 March 2008 *BBC Monitoring South Asia* produced an English language translation of a Bengali 8 March 2008 report published by Dhaka's *Jai Jai Din* which related that:

the name of Harkatul Jihad [HUJI] was widely discussed following its involvement in the bomb attacks at Baniachar church in Gopalghanj District and some cinema halls in Memensingh District. Law enforcing agencies began frantic effort to arrest Mufti Hannan after these bomb attacks. And consequently Mufti Hannan went into hiding.

Mufti Hannan continued his operation from hiding. The Harkatul Jihad launched a grenade attack at a public meeting of Hasina at the Bangabandhu Avenue of the capital on 21 August 2004. He was arrested from Badda area [in Dhaka] on 1 October 2005. It may be mentioned here that the then four-party alliance government banned some militant organizations, including the HuJI, following a series of simultaneous bomb attacks in 63 districts of the country by the Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh. In continuation of this trend, the United States included HuJI in the list of foreign terrorist organizations on 5 March 2008 ('Report looks at history, activities of banned Bangladesh Islamic militant group' 2008, BBC Monitoring South Asia, source: *Jai Jai Din* (8 March 2008), 13 March – Attachment 29).

Other reports provide a differing account of how the reaction of the authorities has proceeded. In October 2001 the US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report referred to the incident and, while noting a reaction from the authorities, referred to no arrests and found that "no progress had been made on the case":

On June 3, 2001, in Baniachar, Gopalganj district, a bomb exploded inside a Catholic church during Sunday Mass, killing 10 persons and injuring 20 others. The army arrived to investigate approximately 10 hours after the blast. The bomb, which the army concluded was produced outside of the country, had been placed just inside a side door in a jute bag. Police detained various persons for questioning, but by the end of the period covered by this report, no progress had been made on the case (US Department of State 2001, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2001 – Bangladesh*, 26 October – Attachment 30).

Subsequent US Department of State International Religious Freedom Reports, such as that produced in November 2005, note that a "judicial commission" was formed to investigate the Baniachar Church bombing in December 2001. And that this commission submitted a "final report" in September 2002 which "blamed Sheikh Hasina and other AL party members for six of the seven bomb attacks that occurred in 1999, 2000, and 2001, including the June 2001 attack". The US Department of State relates that "two of the three commission members dissented, alleging that the head of the commission, Judge Abdul Bari Sarkar, had inserted his personal views in the final report". It was also noted at this time that: "the Government took no further action on the basis of the 2002 commission report, and the police are not pursuing the case actively".

In June 2001, in Baniachar, Gopalganj District, a bomb exploded inside a Catholic church during Sunday Mass, killing 10 persons and injuring 20 others. The army arrived to investigate approximately 10 hours after the blast. Police detained various persons for questioning, but by the end of the period covered by this report, the police reported no progress on the case. A judicial commission was formed in December 2001 to investigate the Baniachar bombing. In September 2002, the commission submitted its report to the Government. The commission's final report blamed Sheikh Hasina and other AL party members for six of the seven bomb attacks that occurred in 1999, 2000, and 2001, including the June 2001 attack. However, two of the three commission members dissented, alleging that the head of the commission, Judge Abdul Bari Sarkar, had inserted his personal views in the final report. During the period covered by this report, the Government took no further action on the basis of the 2002 commission report, and the police are not pursuing the case actively (US Department of State 2005, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2005 – Bangladesh*, 8 November – Attachment 31).

In September 2007, ten years after the bombing, International Christian Concern (ICC) claimed that the victims of the bombing were financially crippled by the event and had received no justice from the government who the ICC claimed were indifferent to the matter ('Six Years from Bomb Attack on Church in Bangladesh and No Justice' 2007, International

Christian Concern, 19 September

<http://www.persecution.org/suffering/newsdetail.php?newscode=6070> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 32).

6. Please check whether there is any public record of attacks at the Chandana, Gazipur intersection by Muslim fundamentalists.

Numerous incidents of political violence, criminal violence and misadventure, have reportedly taken place at the Chandana intersection in Gazipur and also at Gazipur intersection. A February 2006 report notes a JMB attack that took place on 17 August 2005. Some examples follow below.

- On 9 October 2007, it was reported that: “A Correspondent from Gazipur adds: A Dhaka bound minibus from Konabari ran over an unidentified person aged about 55 at Chandana intersection of the Gazipur Sadar at 10:00am while he was crossing the road” (‘Road accidents kill 12, injure 27’ 2007, *Daily Star*, 9 October http://www.thedailystar.net/pf_story.php?nid=7240 – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 33).
- On 1 February 2007: “A traffic police constable was killed and two others were injured when unidentified miscreants hurled a bomb at Chandna intersection in Gazipur at around 7:00pm on Tuesday” (‘Cop killed, 2 injured in bomb blast’ 2007, *Daily Star*, 1 February <http://www.thedailystar.net/2007/02/01/d70201012714.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 33; see also ‘On-duty traffic police bombed to death’ 2007, *New Age*, 1 February <http://www.newagebd.com/2007/feb/01/nat.html> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 34)
- As is noted in response to Question 3, on 4 February 2006 the arrest of “three JMB cadres” was reported, including a “Jahirul Islam alias Jahir”: “Quoting Jahir, police said he took part in the August 17 bomb blasts at Gazipur road-intersection. He also said the recovered grenades were produced at a local factory of JMB” (Shakil, M. 2006, ‘Over 100 JMB men hiding in Tangail-Gazipur forests’, *Daily Star*, 4 February <http://thedailystar.net/2006/02/04/d60204070179.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 21; for further background on the events of 17 August 2005, which allegedly also involved HUJI, see: ‘Twin JMB suicide strikes spell carnage in courts’ 2005, *Daily Star*, 30 November <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/11/30/d5113001011.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 21; ‘HuJI helped JMB carry out Aug 17 blasts’ 2005, *Daily Star*, 18 December <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/12/18/d5121801033.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 22).
- On 23 November 2005: “Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal and Sramik Dal men assaulted eight opposition leaders and activists including Kashimpur Union Jubo League president Belayet Hossain Babul at Chandana intersection yesterday, reports UNB” (‘City put ‘under siege’ to restrain rally goers’ 2005, *Daily Star*, 23 November <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/11/23/d5112301022.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 35).
- On 15 May 2005: “Five persons, including three officers of Palli Bidyut, were injured critically, when they were working at the power greed substation of Palli Bidyut at Chandana intersection under sadar upazila in Gazipur on Saturday” (‘Five Palli

Bidyut men injured critically' 2005, *New Age*, 15 May
<http://www.newagebd.com/2005/may/15/nat.html> – Accessed 14 May 2008–
Attachment 36).

- On 25 December 2004: “unidentified criminal was killed and a rickshaw-puller injured in criminal-police crossfire near Chandana intersection in Gazipur Friday” (‘Five more killed in “crossfire”‘ 2004, *New Age*, 25 December
<http://www.newagebd.com/2004/dec/25/front.html> – Accessed 14 May 2008 –
Attachment 38).

Other reports of violence in Gazipur in late 2007

Incidents of violence and misadventure in the area of Gazipur appeared regularly in late 2007. Some examples appear below as an indication of the kind of reports appearing in this period referring to incidents in Gazipur generally.

- On 3 October 2007: “At least seven people were killed and 22 others injured in separate road accidents in Gazipur, Faridpur, Khagrachhari, Comilla, Rajshahi and Barisal yesterday and on Monday” (‘Road accidents kill 7, injure 22’ 2007, *Daily Star*, 3 October <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=6443> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 39).
- On 6 October 2007: “A teenager was gunned down in Mohammadpur, a hotelier was stabbed to death in Gazipur and police recovered the decomposed body of a businessman in Moghbazar during the last couple of days” (‘Two murdered, businessman’s body recovered’ 2007, *Daily Star*, 6 October
<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=6846> – Accessed 14 May 2008 –
Attachment 40).
- On 9 October 2007: “At least 12 people were killed and 27 others injured in separate road accidents in Gazipur, Tangail, Bogra, Bagerhat, Chandpur, Satkhira, Sirajganj and Gaibandha yesterday and on Sunday” (‘Road accidents kill 12, injure 27’ 2007, *Daily Star*, 9 October http://www.thedailystar.net/pf_story.php?nid=7240 – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 33).
- On 15 December 2007: “A MAN, who was critically injured by armed robbers in Gazipur on Wednesday, died in Dhaka Medical College Hospital Thursday” (‘One killed, 2 hurt by robbers’ 2007, *New Age*, 15 December
<http://www.newagebd.com/2007/dec/15/home.html> – Accessed 14 May 2008 –
Attachment 41).
- On 27 December 2007: “At least nine persons, including two garment workers, were killed and 34 injured in separate road accidents in Gazipur, Bagerhat and Satkhira on Wednesday” (‘Nine killed in road mishaps’ 2007, *New Age*, 27 December
<http://www.newagebd.com/2007/dec/27/nat.html> – Accessed 14 May 2008–
Attachment 37).

Searches of Christian and minority monitors

The database of International Christian Concern logged only one report of an attack on a Christian person in Bangladesh for the month of October, and this involved the alleged

kidnapping of a worker of the “Christian Life Bangladesh ‘Jesus Film’ team in Khagrachori district”. This was also the only story covered in October 2007 by the Christian monitor *Compass Direct* (‘Anti-Christian Rumor Helps Fuel Attacks’ 2007, International Christian Concern website, 16 October <http://www.persecution.org/suffering/newsdetail.php?newscode=6270> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 42; ‘Bangladesh: Anti-Christian Rumor Helps Fuel Attacks’ 2007, *Compass Direct*, 16 October <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&idelement=5086&lang=en&length=short& backpage=index&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=0> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 43).

A prominent Bangladesh minority violence monitor, the Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist, Christian Unity Council (Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad, BHBCOP) has regularly produced reports on violence against religious and ethnic minorities in recent years and published monthly bulletins on its website. Unfortunately no further bulletins have appeared since July 2007 (see <http://www.bhbcop.org/bulletin/atrocity.html> – Accessed 13 May 2008).

A brief site search was conducted of the website of another group, the Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM), but no reports could be located (<http://www.hrcbm.org/> – Accessed 13 May 2008).

Joydebpur intersection (Joydebpur chowrasta)

Some reports of note were located for this locale and examples follow:

- On 16 March 2008: “RAB personnel arrested Mohammed Hares Sarder, a regional leader of the Rad [*sic*] Flag faction of the PBCP, from Joydebpur intersection in the Gazipur district” (‘Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP)’ (undated), South Asia Terrorism Portal website <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/PBCP.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 44; see also ‘3 outlaws held, 6 firearms seized’ 2008, *Daily Star*, 18 March <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=28234> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 45).
- On 4 May 2007: “sub-inspector (SI) of police was arrested and the officer-in-charge (OC) of Joydebpur Police Station in Gazipur was closed yesterday following allegations of taking bribe, torture and forcing a detainee to sign a blank paper were found to be true” (‘SI held, OC closed for bribery’ 2007, *Daily Star*, 4 May <http://www.thedailystar.net/2007/05/04/d70504012920.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 46).
- 28 July 2007: “Mohammad Jewel, 25, an employee of a jewellery shop, and Nazrul Islam, 26, employee of a tailoring shop, – were found slaughtered near the Shaheed Muktijoddha College. ...Joydebpur police sent the bodies to Gazipur Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy” (‘2 youths found slaughtered in Gazipur’ 2007, *Daily Star*, 28 July <http://www.thedailystar.net/2007/07/28/d70728063078.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 47).

7. Do employees of PDIM or other NGOs (particularly in microcredit) face threats or harassment from fundamentalists?

In the short time available to conduct this research no information could be located which reported attacks on workers or offices of the Participatory Development Initiatives of the Masses (PDIM). Information was located reporting both threats against, and attacks on, NGOs in Bangladesh, including providers of microcredit / microfinance. Sources vary in their reporting of the extent to which the threat to NGO workers is isolated or widespread and ongoing. In the time available to conduct this research a thorough overview of the situation could not be located or produced through an exhaustive search for attacks and threats. An overview of the kind of reports available appears below. Also appearing below is information dealing specifically with the situation of providers of microcredit / microfinance. In the short time available only reports of bomb attacks in 2005 could be located (these affected two of the largest and most prominent microcredit / microfinance providers, Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)). Nonetheless information was located to indicate that certain Muslim groups, including JMB, perceive microcredit / microfinance to be an un-Islamic activity, and that threats have been made against such service providers have a long history. A 2007 report by Geof Wood of Bath University finds that micro-credit NGOs have become associated with women's politics and western associations as a consequence of their use by underprivileged women and minorities. Another report, by Mokbul Morshed Ahmad, discusses the manner in which microcredit / microfinance NGOs have drawn adverse attention, noting that such service provision "has resulted in resistance from some religious leaders and organisations" as "[c]harging of interest is forbidden in Islam". The located information is presented below (Wood, G. 2007, 'Clashing Values In Bangladesh: NGOs, Secularism And The Ummah', University of Bath website, ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries, no. 31, April <http://www.bath.ac.uk/econ-dev/wellbeing/research/workingpaperpdf/wed31.pdf> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 49; Ahmad, M. M. Undated, 'Roots of Funding, Roots of Trust: The Struggle for Survival and Credibility among the Religious NGOS (Non-Governmental organizations) in Bangladesh', South Asia Research Network website <http://sarn.ssrc.org/sarfp/publications/MMA.pdf> – Accessed 29 September 2005 – Attachment 48; for 2005 bomb attacks on microcredit / microfinance providers, see: ('Four Firebomb Attacks Injure At Least 8 Development Workers In Bangladesh' 2005, Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance website, 17 February – Attachment 52; 'Brac, Grameen Bank under bomb attack' 2005, *Daily Star*, 17 February <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/02/17/d5021701011.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 53; for a 1997 report of attacks on users of such institutions, see: Jolis, A. 1997, 'Microcredit: A Weapon In Fighting Extremism', Grameen Bank website, source: *Herald International Tribune*, 19 February <http://www.grameen-info.org/mcredit/weapon.html> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 54).

Micro-credit / micro-finance and adverse reaction from some Islamic groups

On 17 February 2005 the website of the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance carried the following report on a bomb attack against the micro-credit provider Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). The report notes that "Daily Star news said that it is believed the attacks were carried out by an extremist Islamic group targeting NGOs they believe are un-Islamic"; and that while "[s]poradic grenade and bomb attacks related to crime and politics are not unusual in Bangladesh", at this time "the targeting of major local NGOs and development workers has not been common". The

Grameen Bank micro-credit provider was reportedly also attacked at this time and the comments of Grameen Bank Managing Director Mohammad Yunus are noted below:

At least 8 development workers have been injured in a string of firebomb attacks in northern Bangladesh, since Sunday (February 13). On Sunday, two employees of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) were injured in a bomb attack in Joypurhat district, about 280 km (174 miles) northwest of Dhaka. At least 6 workers at the office of a major local NGO, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), were injured in an initial attack on Tuesday (February 15) in Bogra district, about 180 km (110 miles) north of Dhaka. The next evening, 3 similar bombs were thrown into the offices of the Grameen Bank in Sirajganj district, about 100 km (60 miles) northwest of the capital, injuring two people. Three firebombs were recovered from another BRAC office yesterday before they could explode. Grameen and BRAC are two of the largest NGOs in the country that provide charity and development loans to the poor for sustainable livelihoods, which has benefited millions of Bangladeshis. No one has claimed responsibility for the attacks, and police are currently investigating the incidents. Sporadic grenade and bomb attacks related to crime and politics are not unusual in Bangladesh and dozens have been killed in attacks at political rallies in recent months. However, the targeting of major local NGOs and development workers has not been common. The Daily Star news said that it is believed the attacks were carried out by an extremist Islamic group targeting NGOs they believe are un-Islamic. In recent years, some extremist Islamic groups have reportedly targeted movie cinemas and other cultural functions that they consider obscene, and no suspects have been arrested. However, Grameen Bank Managing Director Mohammad Yunus said today the attack on the bank was “not an isolated local and religious incident, but a political and planned attack” aimed at showing the current government could not control law and order in the country. The World Bank today also expressed concern in a statement: “It’s important that development agencies like BRAC and Grameen Bank be able to continue their good work unhindered by fear or violence.” Meanwhile, NGOs across the country have stepped up security. BRAC has at least 1,100 offices in the country, while Grameen Bank has 1,350 branches (‘Four Firebomb Attacks Injure At Least 8 Development Workers In Bangladesh’ 2005, Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance website, 17 February – Attachment 52).

On 17 February 2005 *The Daily Star* reported:

Eight people – six employees of Brac and two of Grameen Bank – have been injured in identical bomb attacks on two Brac offices and a branch of the bank since Sunday, while three grenades were recovered from another Brac office yesterday morning.

...An arrested JMJB operative, Shafiqullah, in his statement given to First Class Magistrate Mostafizur Rahman Mridha in Bogra last Monday admitted that JMJB has been responsible for a number of bomb attacks on NGOs.

He said the JMJB bomb squad would continue attacks on NGOs like Brac and Karitas and on cultural activities that they consider as anti-Islamic until an Islamic revolution takes place in the country.

Shafiqullah, arrested with explosives in a fellow operative’s house on January 16, one day after JMJB had carried out a bomb attack on a jatra (folk theatre) show at a village in Bogra, also said they use motorbikes for making these attacks.

Twelve operatives of Jama’atul Muzahidin, the former name of JMJB, arrested in Natore, also gave similar statements confessing to have carrying out bomb attacks on ‘anti-Islamic’ cultural shows and NGOs (‘Brac, Grameen Bank under bomb attack’ 2005, *Daily Star*, 17

February <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/02/17/d5021701011.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 53).

According to Mokbul Morshed Ahmad's study:

Recently, most NGOs in Bangladesh have taken microcredit as their major activity, which has resulted in resistance from some religious leaders and organisations. Charging of interest is forbidden in Islam. NGOs said the fundamentalists had objected to Muslim women going out to work. Other NGO activities like non-formal schools for children and trees planted by NGO clients have also been attacked (Ahmad, M. M. Undated, 'Roots of Funding, Roots of Trust: The Struggle for Survival and Credibility among the Religious NGOS (Non-Governmental organizations) in Bangladesh', South Asia Research Network website <http://sarn.ssrc.org/sarfp/publications/MMA.pdf> – Accessed 29 September 2005 – Attachment 48).

According to Geof Wood's 2007 study:

The Islamicisation of political culture is also generating a split within the NGO community. Some NGOs, with a previous secular perspective, have opted to avoid engagement by re-positioning their profile solely in terms of service delivery. Other, often more recent, NGOs promote 'Islamic values' and are comfortable with their incorporation into a concept of 'ummah'. However, there remains a significant third group of NGOs, with secular origins, which are trying to steer a complex course, pursuing secular democracy via a rights based agenda especially around women, yet differentiating themselves from the donor, western agenda.

...The microcredit model to emerge from the Grameen Bank evolved into the microfinance model for the NGO sector as a whole, via large scale imitation. While microfinance has its limitations⁷, it has also been a major technological contribution globally to the relief (if not removal) of poverty. It has thus put Bangladesh, via its NGO movement, on the global development map.

...it was also clear as Grameen Bank got underway that the highest proportion of its borrowers were women. PROSHIKA and Nijera Kori had a more inclusive class analysis, in which other inequalities (gender, ethnicity, even literacy) took second place. However, gender soon became prominent for them also. Thus women's groups alongside men's groups were organised, alongside mixed groups (in which men inevitably dominated). Programmes of functional literacy for women, which also embraced family planning issues, were therefore also adopted by these NGOs. All these dimensions of inequality (and of course including the ethnic based inequalities for the Hindu and tribal minorities) involved a critique of the local alliances between religious figures and the landlord interests. It also entailed a critique of the conservative mullahs who were resistant to the mobility or autonomy of women and any tendencies towards their empowerment (later on this included resistance to girls' education in non-formal primary education). Indeed, it was the gender issue, and the related microcredit interventions³⁴, which became a central confrontation between these secular NGOs (with a 'feminist' dimension – especially urged upon them by the external feminist representatives of donor aid) and the ummah, and especially the more fundamentalist wing of the ummah (Wood, G. 2007, 'Clashing Values In Bangladesh: NGOs, Secularism And The Ummah', University of Bath website, ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries, no. 31, April <http://www.bath.ac.uk/econ-dev/wellbeing/research/workingpaperpdf/wed31.pdf> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 49).

The following extracts are taken from a 1997 *Herald Tribune* report carried on the website of the Grameen Bank:

Microcredit was invented 20 years ago in Bangladesh by Muhammad Yunus. Today, Professor Yunus's Grameen Bank and copycat organizations have 3.5 million women borrowers; adding their dependents, that amounts to about 20 percent of Bangladesh's population. In the latest elections, held on June 12, 1996, these newly enfranchised flexed their muscle. The Islamic Society, the fundamentalist party antagonistic to the West that wants to keep women at home, lost 14 of its 17 seats in Parliament.

Immediately after the vote, Mr. Yunus began getting angry phone calls from people blaming him for the results. But Mr. Yunus assured them that fundamentalists had only themselves to blame. It was their supporters who burned down microcredit banks, attacked borrowers and condemned microcredit as un-Islamic because it helps women become self-employed.

Every woman borrower I interviewed in Dhaka, Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar had suffered enormously at the hands of fundamentalists. Some were beaten; others were told they would be denied proper Islamic burial; still others that Grameen would sell them into slavery, feed them to tigers, take them out to sea and drown them, or tattoo their arms with a number and secretly turn them into Christians (Jolis, A. 1997, 'Microcredit: A Weapon In Fighting Extremism', Grameen Bank website, source: *Herald International Tribune*, 19 February <http://www.grameen-info.org/mcredit/weapon.html> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 54).

Research Response BGD30397 of August 2006 provides an extensive overview of these issues and is supplied as Attachment 50 (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response BGD30397*, 7 August – Attachment 50).

Examples of other reports on NGO worker security

In August 2007 DFAT advice included information on the situation of women's rights organisations and for workers associated with UN operations:

Post spoke with the officer responsible for the security of all UN operations in Bangladesh. All threats to and security incidents involving UN staff are reported to this person. He was unaware of any specific incidents which could be characterised as involving "serious harm" to UNDP personnel.

...D. Post spoke with a prominent female NGO worker who has been working to promote women's rights for the past 20 years. She currently runs a NGO of her own named "Nari Uddog Kendro (NUK)" or "Centre for Women's Initiatives". NUK has 22 partner NGOs and 1200 women's rights organisations that work in all the 64 districts of Bangladesh. A large number of female workers who are known as "human rights defenders" are working throughout Bangladesh as a part of this network. She said that being active in promoting women's rights meant they faced different kinds of hurdles. However, she, confirmed that such activists were not at risk of "serious harm". She also said that these types of initiatives or activities have gained wider social acceptability, and received cooperation and support from the local community and local government authorities including the police (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 679 – Bangladesh: RRT Information Request: BGD31915*, 3 August – Attachment 51).

According to the US Department of State's most recent report on religious freedom in Bangladesh:

Religious organizations were not required to register with the Government; however, all NGOs, including religious organizations, were required to register with the Government's NGO Affairs Bureau if they receive foreign financial assistance for social development projects. The Government had the legal authority to cancel the registration of an NGO

suspected to be in breach of its legal or fiduciary obligations and to take other actions, such as blocking foreign funds transfers, to limit its operation. During the reporting period, the Government cancelled the registration of one NGO, Revival of Islamic Heritage, because of alleged links to terrorism financing. In the past, members of NGOs intending to travel to religious freedom events abroad reported pressure by law enforcement and intelligence officials to remain at home, but there were no reports of this occurring during the reporting period.

...On May 1, 2007, three small, near-simultaneous explosions occurred at railway stations in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet. There were no deaths, and only one injury. Police recovered signs at two blast sites with anti-Ahmadiyya inscriptions, along with a demand that NGO workers cease their work in Bangladesh within 10 days. The government ordered increased security at key installations, including Ahmadiyya institutions and NGOs. Although an unknown organization claiming to be a faction of Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks, the initial government findings were that these were the acts of a minor fringe group (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – Bangladesh*, 14 September – Attachment 57).

On 31 October 2007 *The Daily Star* reported:

Amid increasing threat on NGO workers by religious militants, high officials from over 15 national and local NGOs yesterday met at the regional office of NGO POPI at Battrish in the town to discuss ways to resist the criminals.

NGOs are playing a vital role in nation building but their staff working in remote areas are exposed to attacks by religious militants and criminals and the perpetrators often go unpunished, speakers said at the meeting.

They urged all the NGOs to take a collective stand against any assault on NGO workers so that no militant dare attacking them ('NGO officials meet on ways for protection' 2007, *Daily Star*, 31 October <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=9606> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 55).

On 10 July 2007 *The Daily Star* reported: "Sajida Foundation has also expressed concern that NGO workers have been attacked in different locations in the last few months while they were returning after collecting money" ('NGO worker robbed' 2007, *Daily Star*, 10 July <http://www.thedailystar.net/2007/07/10/d70710061890.htm> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 56).

According to the US Department of State's 2006 report on religious freedom in Bangladesh:

On July 27, 2005, two Bangladeshi Christian NGO workers were killed in Boalmari, Faridpur. They worked primarily in the areas of arsenic poisoning, mother and child healthcare, and AIDS prevention, but they also showed religious films with the permission of the villagers. A week before the attack, the NGO workers were reportedly threatened by local leaders angry at their attempts to convert local persons to Christianity. Two men were arrested for the killings (US Department of State 2006, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2006 – Bangladesh*, 15 September – Attachment 58).

In July 2003 *The Guardian* reported:

Leading Islamic scholars are appalled by the repression and the rise of fundamentalism. "What we are seeing is the Talibanisation of Bangladesh," Maolama Abdul Awal, former

director of the Bangladesh Islamic Foundation, said. “If we allow them to continue ... [minorities] will be eliminated. Bangladesh will become a fascist country.”

An NGO director said: “I am being called a terrorist. They telephone me personally demanding money, saying they will push me out of the country and that my children will be killed ... They intend to wipe us out. I do not understand why the British government is turning a blind eye to what is happening” (Vidal, J. 2003, ‘Rape and torture empties the villages’, *The Guardian*, 21 July <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2003/jul/21/bangladesh> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 59).

8. Please provide some comments/references on whether the authorities’ respond to fundamentalist activity, particularly violence against Christians.

Information relating to effective protection for Christian communities in Bangladesh follows below. For information on the relationship between the current caretaker government of Bangladesh and Islamist groups (of both the legal and proscribed militant variety) see the information provided under Question 1 of *Research Response BGD32131* of 6 August 2007. An update of this advice could not be provided under the time constraints in which this response was produced but could be addressed at a later date (RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response BGD32131*, 6 August – Attachment 60).

Bangladesh Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities

In February 2008 the Secretary General of the Bangladesh Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities noted an improved situation for minorities noting that: “occurrences of violence and mistreatment against minority groups were comparatively lower now than compared to pre-January 2007”. The advice was provided to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who had been asked, by the Tribunal, to consult with local human rights groups “with an interest in Bangladesh’s Hindu minority, such as the Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist, Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) or the Bangladesh Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM)”. The relevant extract follows:

Question 6B. Is DFAT able to consult with any local human rights groups with an interest in Bangladesh’s Hindu minority, such as the Bangladesh Hindu, Buddhist, Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) or the Bangladesh; Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM)? If so, please seek these groups’ assessments of the current security situation (since January 2007) for Hindus in Khulna district. Please provide an indication of whether these groups have any reason to think that the current security situation might change in the near future?

DFAT contacted the Secretary General of HRCBM who advised that the occurrences of violence and mistreatment against minority groups were comparatively lower now than compared to pre-January 2007. According to him, the community including security agencies, non-Hindus, lawmakers and other neighbourhood groups, had been less aggressive towards minorities due to the current emergency situation. However, he believed that the current situation might not be sustained were the State of Emergency to be lifted.

DFAT would note that any assessment of the security situation in a post-Emergency period should be treated with caution, as it is unclear as to when the State of Emergency might be lifted, and under which circumstances this would take place (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2008, *DFAT Report 764 – RRT Information Request BGD32527*, 4 February – Attachment 61).

Research Response BGD33007 of March 2008

The situation of Christians in Bangladesh was recently addressed by *Research Response BGD33007* of March 2008 which looked at the situation of Christian converts in Bangladesh (see: RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response BGD33007*, 3 March – Attachment 62). The following sources may be of interest.

Research Response BGD33007 noted information from the most recent US Department of State *International Religious Freedom Report* of September 2007. The report refers to Christian representation in, and consultation with, the current national government. Nonetheless, the US Department of State also notes that Christians have been affected by violence and that “Police were often ineffective in upholding law and order and were sometimes slow to assist religious minorities”. This noted it is also reported that after “recent converts to Christianity” were attacked “in the village of Durbachari”, that police “stationed a special protective team in the village Durbachari to prevent violence and ensure the converts are able to remain in their homes and work their fields”. It is also reported that: “Through additional security deployments and public statements, the Government promoted the peaceful celebration of Christian and Hindu festivals, including Durga Puja, Christmas, and Easter”; while it is also the case that “The Bangladesh Christian Association lobbied unsuccessfully for the inclusion of Easter as a national holiday”. Relevant extracts follow:

Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities experienced discrimination and sometimes violence by the Muslim majority.

...Of the ten advisers or ministers in the new [caretaker] government, one is Christian. In the 300-seat Parliament that was dissolved in October 2006, religious minorities held eight seats.

...Sunni Muslims constitute 88 percent of the population. Approximately 10 percent of the population is Hindu. The remainder is mainly Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist.

...Bengali and ethnic minority Christians could be found in many communities across the country; in cities such as Barisal City, Gournadi (Barisal), Baniarchar in Gopalganj, Monipuripara in Dhaka, Christianpara in Mohakhali (Dhaka), Nagori in Gazipur.

...The Ministry of Religious Affairs administered three funds for religious and cultural activities: the Islamic Foundation, the Hindu Welfare Trust, and the Buddhist Welfare Trust. According to the Government, the Christian community did not want government involvement in its religious affairs and requested that there not be any similar organization for their community; however, the Government told Christian leaders it would soon establish a welfare trust for Christians.

...There were separate family laws for Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, based on their respective traditions with few significant differences.

...In June 2005, the government in Dinajpur razed the homes of 65 families to make room for a government project. According to press reports, the evicted families consisted of fifteen families from the indigenous Santali Christian community and fifty Hindu families. The families have been allowed to continue living on the property, but the government has not provided any assistance in rebuilding their houses. The Christian community offered to provide them economic assistance.

...The Government took steps to promote interfaith understanding. For example, government leaders issued statements on the eve of religious holidays calling for peace and warned that action would be taken against those attempting to disrupt the celebrations. Through additional

security deployments and public statements, the Government promoted the peaceful celebration of Christian and Hindu festivals, including Durga Puja, Christmas, and Easter.

...On June 26, 2007, according to press reports, a group of Muslim villagers attacked recent converts to Christianity in the village of Durbachari. On June 12 several dozen Hindus and Muslims converted to Christianity. In the June 26 incident, a group of Muslims in the village allegedly attacked some of the converts and gave them 24 hours to leave the village. Two or three Christians were injured when they were struck with sticks. Police have stationed a special protective team in the village Durbachari to prevent violence and ensure the converts are able to remain in their homes and work their fields. Police officers are also increased patrols of the village, and by the end of the period covered by this report, the district police superintendent had taken steps to reduce tensions in the area.

...The Forestry Department has also been involved in allegations of abuse against minority communities in other parts of the country during the reporting period. On March 18, 2007, Choilesh Ritchil, a Christian Garo from Madhupur, was arrested by local soldiers along with a relative. According to human rights organizations, Ritchil was tortured to death at a local army camp. The relative was released after also being tortured. Ritchil and other local Garos have also been involved in a legal battle with the Forestry Department, which oversees the Madhupur Forest where many Garos live and work. The army denied torturing Ritchil, and claimed he died when he was intoxicated and ran into a tree while fleeing on foot.

The government arrested several high-level Forestry Department officials and charged them with corruption. Since these arrests, no new charges have been filed against indigenous groups living in the forests, and harassment has been curtailed considerably (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2007 – Bangladesh*, 14 September – Attachment 57).

Research Response BGD33007 noted the following reports from news sources and Christian monitors. These reports are revisited below noting details, and other related reports, of particular relevance to the issue of state protection:

- In October 2007 the Christian monitor *Compass Direct* reported on the kidnapping of a member of “the Christian Life Bangladesh (CLB) ‘Jesus Film’ team in Khagrachori district” (this incident is also noted in response to Question 6) and attacks on converts in the area of the villages of Durbachari and Nilphamari. As is noted above the US Department of State reported the deployment of police to keep the police but according to a *Compass Direct* report of August 2007: “Police provided eight officers to protect area Christians on July 28 but left on August 5” after which violence again ensued (Shalom, Aenon 2007, ‘Bangladesh: Anti-Christian Rumor in Bangladesh Helps Fuel Attacks’, *Compass Direct News*, 16 October – Attachment 63; for the subsequent August 2007 report, see: Shalom, A. 2007, ‘Muslims Force Converts in Bangladesh Back to Islam’, crosswalk.com website, source: *Compass Direct*, 22 August <http://www.crosswalk.com/root/news/religiontoday/11552056/page0/> – Accessed 14 May 2008 – Attachment 64).
- In January 2008 *Compass Direct* reported on a fatal arson attack on the home of a 70 year old woman, Rahima Beoa, who had converted from Islam to Christianity in Rangpur district of Bangladesh. A subsequent February report related that: “Family members did not file charges with police over Beoa’s death because they could not trace anyone to the arson, Mintu said. He added that filing charges would also hamper evangelistic efforts” (‘Bangladesh: Elderly Christian Woman’s Home Set Ablaze’ 2008, *Compass Direct News* website, 24 January

<http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&id=element=5204> – Accessed 29 February 2008 – Attachment 65; ‘Bangladesh: Elderly Convert From Islam Dies From Burns’ 2008, Compass Direct News website, 4 February

<http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&id=element=5211> – Accessed 29 February 2008 – Attachment 66).

- In August 2007 *Compass Direct* reported that a “Bangladesh court in Dhaka district” had sentenced “Mohammad Salauddin, a leading figure in the banned Islamic militant group Jamayetul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB),” “to death for the murder of Hridoy Roy”, a convert to Christianity. According to the report: “The death sentence is the second that Salauddin has received. He and JMB leader Hafez Mahmud were sentenced to death on November 9, 2006 for the murder of another Christian convert from Islam, Abdul Gani Gomes, in September 2004” (‘Bangladesh: Islamic Militant Convicted of Another Murder’ 2007, *Compass Direct News* website, 28 August <http://compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&id=element=5004&lang=en&length=short& backpage=index&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=0> – Accessed 26 February 2008 – Attachment 67).
- In December 2007 *News From Bangladesh* reported on the celebration of Christmas by Bangladesh’s Christian communities noting that: “The government has taken adequate security measures to avert possible subversive activities by the vested quarters to jeopardise the celebration” (‘Christmas Day Today’ 2007, News from Bangladesh website 25 December <http://www.newsfrombangladesh.net/view.php?hidDate=2007-12-25&hidType=TOP&hidRecord=0000000000000000181837> – Accessed 25 February 2008 – Attachment 68).

Research Response BGD33007 notes that the Odhikar group, a prominent human rights monitor in Bangladesh, makes no mention of violence against Christians in its Human Rights Report 2007. Though it does make reference to the failure of the government to protect ethnic and/or Hindu minority communities in its Section F. of the report on ‘Ethnic & Religious Minorities’. According to the report there were 135 reported human rights violations against religious minorities in Bangladesh in 2007 (see pages 21 to 22 of: Odhikar 2008, ‘Human Rights Concerns 2007: Odhikar Report On Bangladesh’, Odhikar website 1 January http://www.odhikar.org/documents/hr_report_2007.pdf – Accessed 29 February 2008 – Attachment 35).

2006 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada report

In August 2006 the Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada provided information on the question of “The situation of Christians; the availability of state protection and of internal relocation”. This information may be of interest as historical background and is available as Attachment 69 (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2006, *BGD101510.E – Bangladesh: The situation of Christians; the availability of state protection and of internal relocation (2004 – 2006)*, 9 August – Attachment 69).

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