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31 July 2006

Bangladesh: Government action taken against militants allegedly involved in 17 August 2005 bombings (2005 - 2006)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

### Background

On 17 August 2005, between 200 and 500 bombs exploded (BBC 21 Mar. 2006; *Hindustan Times* 10 Nov. 2005; UNB 17 Oct. 2005) in 63 of Bangladesh's 64 districts (ibid.; BBC 21 Mar. 2006). The bombs were detonated across the country within hours of each other (*Hindustan Times* 10 Nov. 2005; see also BBC 21 Mar. 2006). According to a 17 October 2005 news report by United News of Bangladesh (UNB), a Bangladesh news service, police also recovered approximately 50 unexploded bombs. The coordinated bomb blasts reportedly killed three people and injured one hundred others (UNB 17 Oct. 2005; BBC 21 Mar. 2006).

Printed leaflets of the Islamic militant group Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) were reportedly found at the sites of the bombings (*Hindustan Times* 10 Nov. 2005; see also BBC 26 Apr. 2006). According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2005*, the leaflets indicated that the JMB was responsible for the attack (8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.a).

A 10 November 2005 *Hindustan Times* article indicates that analysts believed the bombings were a warning to the government of Bangladesh, rather than a lethal attack, in an effort to "demonstrate exactly what [Bangladesh's] Islamic extremists are capable of."

### Government action taken against militants

Sources from 2005 and 2006 indicate that the police and the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) (UNB 17 Oct. 2005), a Bangladesh paramilitary group whose members come from various law enforcement agencies (*Country Reports 2005* 8 Mar. 2006, Sec.1.a), arrested several JMB suspects following the August 2005 bombings (ibid.; BBC 15 Mar. 2006; *Hindustan Times* 10 Nov. 2005; UNB 18 Apr. 2006; ibid. 30 Mar. 2006). By mid-October 2005, as many as 400 suspects had reportedly been arrested across the country (UNB 17 Oct. 2005). According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), in October 2005, the authorities also arrested 25 Rohingyas in the Chittagong region who reportedly admitted to being involved with the Islamic militant groups responsible for the bombings (2006). Rohingyas are Muslims from Arakan state in Myanmar (Burma), many of whom live in refugee camps in southern Bangladesh (Refugees International 15 Mar. 2003).

As of April 2006, the authorities had arrested approximately 1,000 "suspected Islamic militants" (BBC 26 Apr. 2006).

Several of the JMB members arrested in connection with the bombings were sentenced to life in prison (UNB 3 July 2006; *ibid.* 6 Mar. 2006). In February 2006, 21 suspects, all in their early twenties (*ibid.* 28 Feb. 2006), were sentenced to death for their involvement (*ibid.*; BBC 14 May 2006).

In 2006, the government of Bangladesh offered a reward of US\$70,000 for any information that would lead to the arrest of two top JMB militants (*ibid.* 6 Mar. 2006), Siddiqui Islam [also known as "Bangla Bhai" (*ibid.* 29 May 2006; *ibid.* 21 Mar. 2006)] and Abdur Rahman (*ibid.*). The two men were captured within a few days of each other in early March (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 6 Mar. 2006).

By April 2006, the Bangladesh authorities had arrested all seven members of the council of the JMB (BBC 26 Apr. 2006). The seven leaders, including Siddiqui Islam and Abdur Rahman, were sentenced to death for their involvement in the murder of two judges in the town of Jhalakati in southern Bangladesh (*ibid.* 29 May 2006). No information on when the death sentences would be carried out could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International (AI), Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR), European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI.net), Freedom House, Institute for Conflict Management, United Kingdom (UK) Home Office, United States Department of State.

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