Section 2: Jamaat-e-Islami

Timeline

1941: Jamaat-e-Islami is founded by Maulana Abul Ala Mawdudi. He is inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Jamaat is one of the oldest parties in the subcontinent.

1947: Jamaat-e-Islami do not support the Partition if India initially; then they come round to the idea of Pakistan.

1950s: Jamaat starts work in East Pakistan.

1962: Jamaat wins four seats in the National Assembly and two in the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly. It contests all elections from this date onwards.

1970: In the general elections Jamaat do not win any seat in the National Assembly or East Pakistan, but emerge as the second largest political party after the Awami League. In the Provincial Assembly election of 1970 Jamaat wins one seat in the district of Bogra.

1971: Jamaat-e-Islami opposes the Liberation War in Bangladesh and the party’s Bengali leaders flee to Pakistan.

1973: Golam Azam’s citizenship is cancelled by the Bangladesh Government on 18 April.

1974: Maulana Abdur Rahim, a senior leader of the provincial party before 1971, returns to Dhaka.

1978: Legal bar on an Islamic party is lifted.

February 1978: The Jamaat Student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, is formed according to their Constitution in a mosque of Dhaka University.

August 1978: Golam Azam returns to Bangladesh on a Pakistani passport on 11 August.

1979: Jamaat-e-Islami emerges as a party in Bangladesh. It contests elections under the name of Islamic Democratic League (IDL) and wins six seats in Parliament with its leader Mawlana Abdur Rahim.

1981: Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh is formed according to their Constitution.

1986: Jamaat participates with the Awami League in the parliamentary election, held under martial law, and wins 10 seats.

1990: Jamaat joins the Awami League, BNP and leftists to topple the Ershad regime.

1991: BNP forms a government. After the elections both main parties woo Jamaat, which has 18 seats. Jamaat decides to support the BNP.

Mid-1990s: Jamaat allies with the Awami League in street protests againsty the BNP government.

1996: Jamaat wins three seats in the elections.


2001: Jamaat allies with BNP ahead of the parliamentary elections and wins 17 seats.

2001-6: Jamaat’s Ameer, Motiur Rahman Nizami, holds the portfolios of Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Industries and his deputy, Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mujahid, is Minister for Social Welfare. Both are very important and influential ministries.

2008: Jamaat is granted registration as a political party by the Election Commission on November 4, having revised its party Constitution but some questions remain.

2008: Jamaat wins two seats in parliament, as part of a four party alliance with BNP, Islami Oikyo Jote and Bangladesh Jatiya Party.

2009: A writ petition is filed in the High Court on January 25 challenging the legality of the registration of Jamaat as a political party on the grounds that, among other things, it has offices abroad and does not believe in the sovereignty of Bangladesh.
The Jamaat-e-Islami Constitution does not mention Ward and Unit level bodies but these were specified by Jamaat leaders in an interview with the Author, Feb 2013.
This structure is repeated at district, thana and ward level but not unit level.
Jamaat is the largest Islamic political party in Bangladesh and has the most numerous, active and dedicated followers. It describes itself as "a moderate Islamic political party which believes in democracy, human rights and is committed to upholding the rule of law". It has separate wings to work with students and women, as well as organisations for teachers, doctors, businessmen, lawyers, farmers and workers.

Jamaat says it had 30,000 fully-fledged members and between 750,000 to one million party workers. Police officials agree that they have up to a million active supporters, including students and say they’ve identified some 5000 as troublemakers. In the 2008 election, the party polled 3,186,384 votes or 4.6% of the electorate. It has to be assumed all its supporters voted for the party, so it’s unlikely it has anywhere near the 10 million members claimed by one Jamaat executive committee member. Jamaat itself has also claimed to have the support of 15% of the total electorate but it has never polled that proportion, with 12.3% of voters being the most it achieved, in 1991 in a seat sharing arrangement with the BNP.

Jamaat-e Islami membership structure.

It’s extremely difficult to work your way up the Jamaat membership hierarchy to become a full member or Rukun as it’s called. It requires dedication, passing examinations on Islamic texts and observing a strict behaviour code that involves being chaperoned when with members of the opposite sex and sticking to a strict no-smoking policy. Recruits have to fill in a daily personal report card, recording how many times they prayed in the mosque, how much of the Quran they read, and they must undergo Chinese-style self-criticism sessions.
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# Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh

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## NECESSARY NOTES

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Comment of responsible person

Signature ..................................

Date ...........................................

- A Higher responsible person, if feels necessary, can increase subject-column of personal report to improve/develop quality of any worker.
Some younger members of Jamaat argue the party now needs to loosen up its strict membership requirements to be more inclusive. They say they will never win a democratic election unless they present a more secular image like Islamic political parties in other countries. They propose campaigning on issues of social equality, welfare and rule of law that are consistent with secular politics. It’s not clear if this argument is motivated by expediency because the party is under unprecedented pressure or stems from a genuine impulse to reform.

Since 2008 non-Muslims have been allowed to join Jamaat but they are not allowed to be Rukan or full members. One Jamaat representative claimed 100,000 non-Muslims were associate members. He said their policies were "totally friendly" to religious minorities. Asked about allegations that Jamaat and Shibir were involved in recent anti-Hindu violence, he said it was against the party’s policy and if there were a fair commission of inquiry it would emerge that other parties were involved along with criminal elements in order to grab property.

Membership Structure of Jamaat-e-Islami

Maulana Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979)

In Vali Nasr’s seminal book on Jamaat-e-Islami, its founder Maulana Mawdudi is described as communalist in outlook and keen to defend Muslim interests in the face of an imminent Hindu challenge in the run up to the Independence of India. Mawdudi objected to the idea of Pakistan initially, not because he was opposed to the two-nation theory but because he wanted to convert the whole of India to Islam and halt the rise of Hindu power. Later he opposed the Muslim League because he felt Pakistan’s founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, was too secular. Maulana Mawdudi denounced nationalism and called secular politics a form of blasphemy.

His philosophy advocated obedience to a narrow definition of Islamic law and he strongly believed the flourishing of religion required political power and an Islamic state. He created a revivalist ideology that rejected traditional
Islam and called on Muslims to shed cultural accretion and non-Islamic traditions. Nasr’s book describes Mawdudi’s thinking as not modern butpurporting to be modern, in that it broke with Islamic tradition to create something new.

He argues that the Jamaat founder used the word “revolution” (which was in the party’s Constitution in Bangladesh until 2008) to signify progressiveness and not in the way its understood in the West. Nasr writes that, “Mawdudi believed in incremental change rather than radical ruptures…and assumed that Islamic Revolution would be heralded not by the masses but by the society’s leaders.” His is a top down, slow burning version of revolution. To achieve his aim Mawdudi outlined four steps that were necessary: intellectual change in the people, organising them into a movement, social work to reform society and then changing the leadership. These steps are closely mirrored in Jamaat-e-Islami party literature and strategy today in Bangladesh.

**Democratic Politics**

In its party documents in Bangladesh, Jamaat says it believes in achieving an Islamic welfare state, through democratic politics. It stresses this can only be done by committed Muslims. It adds that since it can’t force Islamic ideology on people, it will work inside the democratic system. Many of its critics fear this is only a tactical commitment to the democratic process.

The Jamaat literature says it “hopes that a time must come when people shall elect Islamic leaders to the parliament in a majority, paving the way for the formation of an Islamic government”. For all its avowed commitment to democracy in its Constitution, Jamaat stresses that man must first follow “the way of life given by Allah, instead of following and propagating man-made theories”. Its Constitution also says a member “will not accept anyone as King, Emperor or the owner of sovereign power, except Allah”. This has caused controversy. In its defence, Jamaat says there is no equivalent concept to “sovereignty” in Islam, which stipulates “absolute power” can only lie with God. Therefore they argue political power can lie with anyone, but not absolute power.

Jamaat’s literature stresses the need to build and train manpower: a cadre of “Islam-loving, conscious and honest” activists and leaders ready to establish an Islamic government in Bangladesh; but it also emphasises humanitarian and social service for the poor. In this sense it’s similar to the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Critics though say Jamaat’s social work only extends to its own members and supporters. One sympathetic Bangladeshi academic said he viewed Jamaat as a “regimented club” and a “small hearted party”, which, unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, only really assisted its own people, not the wider community.

The party emphasises its honesty and integrity with money. One of its demands on its members is to “make collective efforts to replace dishonest and inefficient leaders by honest and efficient ones”. This is a refrain throughout its literature, which it has to be said, must have a certain appeal in Bangladesh, where corruption was described by the UN Resident Coordinator as “a long-standing historical plague”.

Jamaat also makes much of its internal party elections, saying “Being a member of an influential family is not, at all, a criterion to be elected to a responsible post.” This contrasts sharply with the dynastic politics of other Bangladeshi and South Asian parties.

Interestingly Jamaat has no myth of resistance to fall back on and it’s not as overtly anti-Western as many Islamic parties in the Middle East. Many of its students and leaders have been educated in Britain or have ties to the country, which has a large Bangladeshi diaspora population. There are passing references to Muslims under attack in Afghanistan, Palestine, Kashmir and Iraq but they are not common.

**Performance of Jamaat in Past Elections**

It’s worth examining Jamaat-e-Islami’s election results before the creation of Bangladesh. Surprisingly, the party won a greater percentage of votes (4.5%) in the provincial assembly elections of 1970 in East Pakistan than in any other province of West Pakistan. Some argue the vote bank for Islamic parties like Jamaat is fairly static but that doesn’t mean support for them is not increasing. Many point out that with its tolerant and syncretic tradition Bangladesh should have been inhospitable to Islamists. The acrimonious relationship between the two main political parties and their lack of defining issues has undoubtedly benefited the Islamists, who can portray themselves as untainted. Jamaat has also been adept at striking alliances, becoming a kingmaker in Bangladeshi politics and exercising a disproportionate influence in relation to its votes.
The party's Constitution was amended in 2008 in order to comply with the electoral reforms introduced by the military-backed caretaker regime. It is interesting to compare the two versions of the party’s Constitution, previously issued in 2006 and then reissued in 2008. The later version includes some significant changes, which are given here in summary, but for the full version please see the Annexes:-

- A new emphasis on nationalism, independence and sovereignty - added references to Bangladesh and its "heroic freedom struggle".
- More emphasis on Islam than on the party.
- A new emphasis on democracy, human rights, social justice and opposition to terrorism.
- Dropping a reference to "revolution" and replacing it with "a desire for reform".
- A change in tone from "changing minds" and "training activists" to a softer approach involving educating people.
- Dropping references to opponents as "ignorant Jahiliats" (idolators from the pre-Islamic era or Age of Ignorance).
- Dropping a special section on the obligations of female party members, which said they were supposed to cheer up and support the male activists in their family and teach the children. This is replaced with a declaration that the party is open to all who agree with its ideas.
- Instead of a section on how a member can be downgraded if he fails in his duties, the later version allows non-Muslims to become associate members of the party.

**Challenge to Jamaat's Constitution**

On 25 January 2009 a writ was filed in the High Court challenging the legality of the Election Commission’s action in 2008 in registering Jamaat-e-Islami as a political party. The petitioners said the party had offices abroad (which is illegal), was a religion-based party that believed only Allah could make laws and did not recognise the nation’s sovereignty and independence. This, they argued, put Jamaat in violation of the Bangladeshi Constitution and the Representation of People Order (RPO) Ordinance 2008. If Jamaat loses this case it could be barred from contesting elections.

In January 2010, the Election Commission wrote to Jamaat requesting a number of alterations to its party Constitution and making the following points:

- Jamaat’s call for establishing the rule of Islam requires drastic amendments to the basic structure of the country’s Constitution, which are not allowed, even by parliament.
- Jamaat’s emphasis on Allah’s laws implied a refusal to accept parliament’s law-making power. Officials
complained Jamaat had deleted a relevant clause from its provisional amended charter in order to get registration but after the elections reinstated the clause in its ratified charter.
- Jamaat should include in the main body of its Constitution a provision for reserving 33% of posts in all party committees for women by 2020.
- Jamaat was asked to remove the new clause allowing non-Muslims to become members on the grounds that it was discriminatory in distinguishing at all.

Members of the Shahbagh movement called for Jamaat to be banned. The government said it could do this if the party was involved in instigating violence but it’s also watching the outcome of the court proceedings, challenging the legitimacy of Jamaat’s Constitution, which could have the same outcome.

Liberation War Role & War Crimes Trial

Jamaat’s role in opposing the Liberation struggle and siding with the Pakistani forces remains its Achilles heel four decades later. The trial of almost all its top leaders for war crimes has plunged the party into an unprecedented crisis and re-opened a huge rift in Bangladeshi society.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Jamaat’s literature glosses over its role in 1971 by saying the party tries “to inspire the people to strengthen the spirit of independence which is needed for the survival of the country” and to “safeguard the independence, territorial sovereignty and Islamic values of Bangladesh which emerged as an independent state in 1971 through a great war of liberation”. Its 2008 Manifesto also referred to the “sacrifice and hardship of the freedom fighters”. During the 2008 election Jamaat floated a fake freedom fighter body and offered to strengthen the Liberation War Ministry and the Freedom Fighters Welfare Trust and increase allowances for freedom fighters’ families.

The top leaders of Jamaat - now in jail - did not seem to regard their role in 1971 as a threat – they appear to have assumed people would forget. According to an academic introduced by Jamaat, some in the party had wanted the top leadership to apologise for 1971 but Golam Azam and Motiur Rahman Nizami refused. He said influential power brokers behind the scenes advised Golam Azam not to apologise, but younger members, who make up 70% of the party, felt annoyed about being penalised for events in which they didn’t participate. Born after the war, they didn’t want to be burdened with its legacy.

Some Jamaat members concede its wartime role is a serious liability for their party and will continue to damage it for years. Groupings seem to be emerging within Jamaat, with some radicals pressing for violent street confrontation and others supporting internal reform and a new image that moves away from its 1971 past. Officially though, there are no factions within the party because members of the governing body have to swear an oath to “reformists say if there were a majlis-e-shura meeting (for two and a half years the security crackdown by the government has prevented a meeting) then they would bring a motion under the party’s Constitution to discuss that they call “a face lift” for Jamaat. This could include rethinking the relationship with Pakistan. Within the party these figures now question why being pro-Islam automatically means being pro-Pakistan. They argue that in 1971 the Liberation struggle was not about saving Islam, as the older generation of Jamaat leaders maintained, but rather about justice for Bengalis.

Traditionally Jamaat has had strong ties with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood. However, one Jamaat figure said some in the party wanted to forge a new relationship with India and drop the close ties to Pakistan. This group says they sent a letter, via the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, to Delhi offering talks, but received no response. “Jamaat has made it abundantly clear it wants dialogue,” they stressed.

A more moderate Jamaat would of course please both the Awami League and Western diplomats. But a deciding factor will be whether there are executions of Jamaat leaders. Some observers believe that would be enough to drive younger activists underground into militancy, though long term the shake-up could also be good for the party, uniting it and helping it shed the 1971 stigma. It’s worth noting at their height in the mid-2000s, militant groups like HUJI and JMB did include some former Jamaat and Shibir members who found their party too moderate and gravitated towards extremism. Even today there may be localised informal links and sympathies.

Some in Jamaat also warn that if the party is pushed too far, its leadership could lose control of grassroots activists. This was echoed by a pro-BNP analyst who worried that, “In setting out to destroy Jamaat we’ve destroyed the leadership who would have been able to control the party and now Chhatra Shibir is calling the shots and they’re more radical and talking openly of how the parliamentary system is not working. We’ve destroyed their capacity to be reasonable.” There’s also the risk that executions could turn the older leaders into martyrs, as the trial is perceived by Jamaat supporters as more about who these figures are today than what they did in 1971.
Street Tactics

"The police as usual looked pathetic and one feels pity for them as they run away at the sight of an angry Jamaati mob." Afsan Chowdhury, BRAC University.

In February 2013, when Jamaat called its first solo hartal without the BNP or other opposition parties to back it up, some observers in Dhaka were shocked. They said it was unthinkable for Jamaat to pull off a strike alone. The success of the strike showed the Bangladeshi public that Jamaat had its own political street power and wasn’t just riding on the back of the BNP, quite the reverse if anything.

Jamaat’s tactics seem to be to storm the police, beat them in hit and run attacks and then disappear quickly before being arrested. This may be one of the reasons why Jamaat cadres seem to have changed their image and dress, so as to blend in better. Jamaat and youths from their student wing, Chhatra Shibir, no longer sport skull caps and beards but instead wear jeans and T-shirts.

There are questions about the commitment of the police force to tackle violent attacks by Jamaat. One senior BNP leader said Jamaat had been giving its cadres training to fight on the streets and were willing to use suicide cadres or self-immolation. He said the party was preparing to look after the families financially.

Infiltration Strategy

Jamaat has a strategy of infiltrating supporters into key positions in government and other institutions. Its aim is to build a social base at elite and local levels over decades. Some say the plan is to “use the ‘infiltrated’ to attain state power through a successful putsch when the time is right”. Journalists believe thousands of Jamaat supporters are now covertly active inside the civil service, helping the party. However it has to be said the whole civil service is intensely politicised. Those who are Jamaat members are forced to resign from the party when they join government service but often remain loyal supporters for life. During the period when Jamaat was in power with the BNP from 2001-6 they had two ministers in key positions - social welfare and agriculture - which helped extend their base.

Unrest & the Internet

There have been several newspaper articles detailing ways in which Jamaat has allegedly used doctored images on the Internet, hacked opponents’ websites, and generated misinformation online to muster support. One of the most significant is the report that Delawar Hossain Sayedee’s image had been sighted on the moon, which echoed Iran during the early days of the Revolution when Khomeini supporters claimed to have seen his face in the moon. In Bangladesh this was a photoshopped image reportedly circulated by Jamaat activists through mobile phones and announcements made through mosque loudspeakers. Shahbagh bloggers jokingly responded by photoshopping a picture of Sayedee as an astronomer, saying that’s why his face was visible on the moon.
The caption reads: "From late Friday night to early Saturday, people from Bangladesh to Saudi Arabia saw Sayedee’s face (in the moon). Such an image is God’s sign that true devotees are honoured in different ways."

"In some areas they did destructive work to such a degree we couldn’t believe it; it was beyond our imagination. This large scale and degree we didn’t see before, not since 1971."

Police Official, Dhaka, speaking about the first week of March 2013.

This one image caused significant unrest as Sayedee was sentenced to death on 28 February 2013. Sayedee is an extremely well known orator and cleric, arguably much more popular than his role in Jamaat-e-Islami alone would merit. The police say for about a week in early March 2013 they lost control of the BNP-Jamaat strongholds of Bogra, Gaibanda, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Takurgaon, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Chapainawabganj, Cox’s Bazaar, Feni and Satkhira. These were also the areas where some of the attacks on Hindus took place.

Opposition activists were prepared for trouble, according to the police, and came armed with rifles, pistols, revolvers and home made bombs in order to confront them. Most of the crowds, however, were ordinary people who just followed the mob without being aware of its plans. Local police officials were the target of much of the violence and were very scared. In some areas they deserted their posts. The police say at least three police stations were burned down as well as some police posts. Jamaat figures also say that during the March unrest as many as thirty districts had no government and the police in southern Chittagong District abandoned their posts.

Activists of the Awami League had to go into hiding because they were being targeted and the police were not able to protect them for several days until they recaptured control. It was impossible to send reinforcements because the protestors had blocked the highways with felled trees and disrupted rail lines and communications. In one district, Chapainawabganj, a power station was burned and there was no electricity for a month.

This time Jamaat protestors put women and children at the front of their lines as human shields, making it very difficult for the police to fight back. It was a new strategy.

Police officers say the photoshopped picture of Sayedee’s face on the moon was extremely successful in instigating his fans to protest; even lower ranking police constables were trying to see Sayedee’s face on the moon. Some even spread rumours that only those with pure souls and strong faith could see it, leading to reluctance to admit it wasn’t visible. The police themselves had to resort to photoshopping a local movie star’s face on to the moon and printing it out and hanging it on the walls of police stations to educate their staff about what was possible with digital technology.

Officials report that they intercepted telephone calls to London during the unrest, where Jamaat supporters on the ground explained what they were doing and promised to send photographs to London to be disseminated globally. The police say there were also frequent direct mobile phone conversations with London during the actual fighting but they do not know what was discussed.
Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin, who is under investigation for war crimes by the Bangladeshi authorities, lives in the UK, helped set up the Muslim Council of Britain and is a trustee of the UK charity Muslim Aid and was their Chairman. He was the Vice-Chair of the East London Mosque until 2010. Mr. Mueen-Uddin was also instrumental in setting up the Islamic Forum of Europe, which some reports have described as Jamaat-e-Islami’s European wing. Mr. Mueen-Uddin has denied any kind of criminal conduct during the 1971 war and said he’s happy to defend himself in a fair trial but has little faith in the current process underway in Bangladesh.

The Imam of the East London Mosque is related through marriage to the Jamaat-e-Islami chief, Motiur Rahman Nizami.

The Islamic Forum of Europe has held programmes advocating against the war crimes trial in Bangladesh and initiated a “Free Sayedee Movement”.

An Imam from the Muslim Council of Britain, Imam Ajmal Mashroor, has been active in the media complaining that the Bangladeshi government is persecuting Muslims, comparing the situation to Syria.

As tension has risen in Bangladesh over the war crimes trial, there have been tense stand offs in East London between pro and anti Jamaat supporters, with the police being called to keep the two sides apart.
Funding & Alleged Business Ties

Members’ Contributions:

Jamaat’s own documentation[^1] makes it clear its members must give monthly donations to the party, as well as pay their annual Zakat and Ushr (an Islamic tax usually paid in kind) and make one-off donations[^2]. Given how dedicated and regimented the membership of this party is, it’s likely these funds are collected more efficiently than most government revenue. The party says it also receives income from unspecified “subordinate organisations” and from publications, such as magazines for members.

Jamaat sympathisers argue the party’s funds for holding political meetings come from donations[^3] from members, which can total 10 crore taka monthly[^4]. They deny that the political party receives foreign funds.

However, creating jobs and giving loans to Jamaat supporters indirectly fills the party coffers by increasing their financial ability to make donations.

Jamaat Controlled Business Empire:

Jamaat-e-Islami has by all accounts built up a huge business empire since the early 1980s, including banks and hospitals[^5]. However, the party does not openly acknowledge its ownership or control of such establishments and nobody knows the true extent of its expansion into the economic life of the country.

The aim seems to be to cater to the whole society and ensure members are not dependent on the mainstream bodies[^6]. It’s not overtly about state power but some believe about creating a state within a state.

Banner at Shahbagh Protest Citing Jamaat’s Alleged Businesses

The Corporate Social Responsibility budgets or charitable foundations of commercial ventures linked to Jamaat are available to be used for social work to reinforce the party’s ideological aims. At another level, these Jamaat-linked business ventures enable the party to provide jobs for supporters and members in a suitably Islamic environment. Employees who are Jamaat members would be required by the party to donate a proportion of their salary. Those who are shareholders of the Jamaat-related businesses would also profit from generous dividend payments, which could be diverted to fund political activity. There is of course nothing illegal about this.

Jamaat sympathiser, S. A. Hannan, explained that “by and large recruits are Islamic minded” because there is a screening process with an Islamic test on erudite subjects like Tawhid or “the unity of God”, which an average Bangladeshi might struggle to answer adequately. An Islami Bank study of training methods for staff[^7] revealed something about the mindset of recruits. It found a fifth of the sample (of 123 people who were all male) had been at
one time educated in a madrasa. The vast majority said they’d joined because they wanted an Islamic banking job as opposed to less than 1% for whom it was about money. A similar proportion of recruits had graduated in Islamic subjects as in finance related subjects.

Bankers say that it was S. A. Hannan, when deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank, who amended the Bank Companies Act in 1995 to define Islamic banking concepts and legalise the existing functions of Islamic Banks. Islamic banks now have a huge competitive advantage because their statutory liquidity reserve requirement is only 11.5% compared to 19% for other banks. This helps make Islamic banks more profitable and erodes safeguards for customers.

Islam Bank Bangladesh

This bank was started in 1983 as the first interest-free bank in Bangladesh as well as in South Asia. It is a joint-venture public limited company involved in commercial banking based on Sharia principles.

It was started by Jamaat-e-Islami figures such as Mir Qassem Ali, (Jamaat Executive Committee member, ex-country director of the Saudi based NGO, Rabeta-al-alam-al-Islami, and currently on trial for war crimes) with the first Saudi Ambassador to Bangladesh and Shah Abdul Hannan, among others. In those days the bank had a 70% foreign shareholding. By 2013 that was reduced to a 58.03% foreign shareholding. Today there is still a strong Kuwait and Saudi shareholding.

The bank does not openly acknowledge its links to Jamaat, claiming, "Islam Bank does not belong to any political party." Asked about the links, the bank’s Deputy Managing Director, Shamsul Haque, complained nobody talked about the political links of other major Bangladeshi banks close to the Awami League or BNP. "If business people have a philosophy it’s not a crime," he said, adding, "if Muslims own shares, if some Jamaat-e-Islami people own shares, where is the crime?" Mr. Haque went on to say it was impossible to prove allegations that the bank funded Jamaat but agreed one of two of the bank’s directors belonged to Jamaat or were related to the party.

Thirty years on, it’s a huge success story - the third biggest bank in the country and one of the biggest in South Asia. Rural banking is still a growing sector in Bangladesh because it wasn’t served adequately until the advent of microcredit. In 2012 alone Islam Bank signed up a record 190,000 new accounts. Islam Bank says it has 276 branches (a fifth of them in rural areas) and 30 SME branches with six million account holders - making it the largest private network in the country. It’s also recently started a mobile phone banking scheme called mCash.

Remittances:

In 2012, about one third of Bangladesh’s total remittance inflow was handled by Islam Bank, which takes credit for encouraging migrant workers to use proper banking channels (rather than informal networks) for their remittances. This helped the bank build relationships of trust with Bangladeshi migrant workers, many of whom are in the Middle East, where they absorb more orthodox interpretations of Islam that they bring home with them. The total foreign exchange business of the bank stood at £6.58 billion at the end of 2012 and it had 116 foreign exchange houses worldwide.

Micro-Finance

The stunning success of Grameen Bank in empowering women borrowers posed a potential challenge to Islamic parties. Isami Bank was the first to introduce Islamic micro-financing to Bangladesh and it now has the biggest private programme.

Islamic micro-finance is not only premised on the prohibition of interest (riba) but also on the fact that Sharia law (i) does not recognise the time value of money and it’s therefore not permissible to make money by lending it and (ii) regards money as not an asset per se but only something that can increase in value if used productively with other resources. "Money must be used to create real economic value in which the providers of the funds are not considered creditors but investors or financiers who share rewards as well as risks with the individual seeking micro financing…"

Islam Bank started an Islamic version of group-based micro-financing under a programme called Rural Development Schemes in 1995. Unusually, this was done without any external donor or government support. One study described Islam Bank’s programme as "styled after the Grameen Bank model except that the scheme used Islamic modes of investment based on Sharia principles". By 2011 it had 608,703 beneficiaries (94% of them women) according to UNDP and by 2010 the highest recovery rate as well as the highest growth rate of any micro-finance institution. As of 2009, Islam Bank’s credit scheme covered 61 out of 64 districts nationwide.

The Islamic mode of micro-finance is different from that of Grameen Bank in that though it lends mainly to women it does not set out to empower them specifically, rather to benefit the whole family by ensuring husband and wife are jointly liable for the money. To support this approach some studies have suggested that the way conventional lenders target women can create tensions within households and even increase violence against women.
A study by academics from Chittagong University found Islami Bank’s micro-finance scheme had enhanced "moral, social and ethical values" but it recommended a greater market share could be achieved if the project was more generous and selected people "not on religious basis". It commented that the programme not only provided loans but also the "teachings of Islam".  

There is no doubt that the devout are more comfortable with Islamic financing. A survey cited by UNDP revealed many rural women worried that borrowing from conventional credit organisations might exclude them from observing purdah.

**Business Support:**

According to its managing director, Islami Bank has financed many major industrial conglomerates in Bangladesh. It’s also been a major support for small businesses throughout Bangladesh, investing about £1.537 billion in 80,000 Small and Medium Enterprises. More than 45% of its total investment has been in industrial projects, including 584 garments, 337 textiles, 203 steel and engineering, 36 pharmaceuticals and chemical, 157 printing and packaging, 63 filling stations, 483 rice mills, 50 beverage, 9 cement industries, 8 electric power industries, 13 jute, and 161 chemical industries, and 100 other industries.

**Source of Tax Revenue & Employment:**

Islami Bank is also the top tax paying financial institution to the government, paying about £70 million in tax and duties in 2011 and again in 2012. The bank claims to have created jobs indirectly for 2.5 million people through its investment schemes, while more than 12,000 people are directly employed. It is said that 7% of total investment in agriculture and agro-industries in Bangladesh has been made by Islami Bank, which alone reportedly imports about 65% of total private sector fertiliser in the country.

**Politics:**

Today Islami Bank is so entrenched and powerful that many believe there’s no way the government could take it over, allow it to fail or close it down. Indeed it’s not clear how heavily intertwined Islami Bank and Bangladesh Bank are through the purchase of bonds. The continued link with influential Gulf investors also gives Islami Bank a strong degree of international protection from state intervention. There have been reports that calls by the Shahbagh protestors for investors to remove their deposits from Islami Bank might have caused an unusual number of withdrawals. One newspaper report in February 2013 said hundreds of customers had closed their accounts in one day in Netrokona. Islami Bank says deposits continued to grow but a few small savers (maybe 10,000 they say) did withdraw their money. Overall in February and March 2013 the bank says there were 200,000 new accounts opened, despite the agitation against them. Some 10-15 (of a total of 276 nationwide) Islami Bank branches were attacked by mobs throwing stones and breaking windows, according to Islami Bank, and one ATM booth was set on fire near Shahbagh Square and another near the Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka (out of a total of 300 Islami Bank machines and a wider joint network of 1200). Jamaat sympathisers say neighbouring shopkeepers organised teams to defend the branches from attack. There have also been reports that three Kuwaiti institutional investors (together accounting for 15% of stock) were seeking to sell their shareholding in Islami Bank and had written to the Bangladeshi Foreign Ministry asking about the procedures to be followed. The bank denied this and a week later a representative for all three Kuwaiti investors was reported as saying he was "proud to be a shareholder of a leading bank that runs under Sharia law".

In April 2013 the Bangladeshi media reported that foreign banks in the US and UK were not accepting export documents from Islami Bank and that the main garment export body (BGMEA) had met the Central Bank to discuss the issue because it was causing problems for its members. It wasn’t clear if this was because of the 2012 US Treasury report into HSBC (see below) or because of the Shahbagh protestors’ call for action against Islami Bank over its alleged connections with Jamaat-e-Islami. The reports said HSBC USA, CitiBank and Bank of America had stopped transactions after the 2012 US Treasury Report came out. Deputy Managing Director of Islami Bank, Shamsul Haque, said the problems with letters of credit might be to avoid by association any stigma of links to terrorism, but dismissed such allegations as media propaganda. Jamaat sympathisers say the Bangladeshi government should have done more to defend the country’s biggest private bank when it came under attack. The common assumption amongst many in Bangladesh is that money from the bank is filtered directly to the political party but bank officials quite rightly argue that they are audited by the Central Bank and have responsibilities to their shareholders making this impossible.Islami Bank was put under the special scrutiny of the...
Bangladesh Bank (from 2010) as tension mounted between the Awami League government and Jamaat-e-Islami. Some have questioned how effective central bank regulation is; economists say staff at the Bangladesh Bank have failed to find anything incriminating and are scared of taking on a bank which has political links to a party that could be back in government again one day.

In 2011 Bangladesh’s State Minister for Home Affairs alleged that an intelligence report had found Islami Bank spent 8% of its profit (from zakat funds) on financing militancy. Islami Bank denied the report and asked why the government didn’t close them down if it were true. Given the size of Islami Bank in the economy this would be impossible in practice.

2012 US Treasury Report:

In July 2012 the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations issued a report entitled, "U.S. Vulnerabilities to Money Laundering, Drugs, and Terrorist Financing: HSBC Case History". This examined vulnerability to money laundering and terrorist financing risks when a global bank uses its US affiliate to offer US dollar services to other banks around the world. It had sections focusing on Al Rajhi Bank in Saudi Arabia, Islami Bank Bangladesh and Social Islami Bank in Bangladesh. There is no connection between Islami Bank and Social Islami Bank.

Islami Bank Diagram: Islami Bank Bangladesh and the US Treasury Report

*Al Rajhi Bank*
- Founded by Abdullah Al Rajhi, together with brothers Sulaiman, Mohammed, and the late Saleh.
- Sulaiman owns 20% of shares of Al Rajhi Bank and supported Osama bin Laden and alleged to be an officer of IIRO says US Senate Report, which adds: “His name appeared on an internal al Qaeda list of financial benefactors”.

*Yousif Abdullah Al Rajhi*
- Vice Chairman, IBBL. 10% owner of IBBL according to US Senate Report.
- IBBL says Yousif Abdullah Al Rajhi, is not a shareholder of Al Rajhi Bank.

*Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al-Rajhi*
- Foreign director IBBL Director of Al Rajhi Banking and Investment Corporation and The Al Rajhi Bank.

*Sulaiman bin Abdul Aziz Al Rajhi*
- Al Rajhi one of 4 brothers who founded Al Rajhi Bank & senior most executive.

2010 Bangladesh Bank appointed a monitor to check its transactions.

April 2013 Media reports say Bangladesh Bank opened a new wing to strengthen its surveillance of Islamic Banks.

Fined 3 times by Bangladesh Bank for “covering up militant transactions” says US Senate Report.
- IBBL says only fined once for late reporting.

**INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC RELIEF ORGANISATION (IRRO)**

2006 US banned its Indonesian and Philippines offices as a terrorist financier of Al Qaeda & a senior official, Abd Al Hamid Sulaiman Al-Mujil. Added to sanctions list for US companies. Also on 2006 added to UN sanctions list. Named in the 2002 lawsuit, on behalf of family members of victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks. The law suit failed.

"One RIHS account was with Islami Bank Bangladesh and was suspended on requests from the central bank and intelligence agencies."The story says "IMB chief Rahman also told the media in 2004 that he got funds from the RIHS" (Daily Star, 28 March 2006, Kuwait based NGO Using Funds Despite Govt ban, Rajshahi)."
The US Treasury report alleged HSBC Bank USA (known as HBUS) had supplied U.S. dollars to Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd. and Social Islami Bank, despite evidence of links to terrorist financing. Both banks flatly denied this. Islami Bank added that terrorism was "anti-Islamic, anti-state, hateful, immoral and subversive". In an interview, Islami Bank Deputy Managing Director, Shamsul Haque, said HSBC was only one of more than 190 correspondent banks worldwide. He said JP Morgan still held 3.61% shares in Islami Bank, indicating there was no problem.

The Treasury Report also alleged Al Rajhi Bank and some family members had possible links to terrorism and were linked to both Bangladeshi banks. This allegation, the report said, was based on "US government reports, criminal and civil legal proceedings, and media reports". Al Rajhi Bank issued a statement that said the allegations were "absolutely false" because they were committed to strict adherence to anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism guidelines.

It’s important to note the US Treasury report was not an investigation to substantiate media or other allegations against Al Rajhi Bank, Islami Bank Bangladesh or Social Islami Bank but rather an inquiry into the practices at HSBC for managing perceived risk, not actual risk.

Islami Bank reacted to the US report by threatening to file a formal complaint against the US Treasury. In May 2013, Islami Bank Deputy Managing Director, Shamsul Haque, said they still planned to engage lawyers to challenge the US Senate Committee report.

Some of the specific allegations in the US report were:

1. Links of Islami Bank Bangladesh to Al Rajhi Bank of Saudi Arabia

The US Treasury alleged a 37% share of Islami Bank was held by Al Rajhi Bank of Saudi Arabia. This was through:

"...ownership within the following companies: Arabsas Travel & Tourist Agency, 9.999%; Janab Yousif Abdullah Abdul Aziz Al-Rajhi, 9.936%; Al-Rajhi Company for Industry & Trade, 9.94%; Abdullah Abdul Aziz Al-Rajhi, 7.58%. This same family has major controlling interest within Al-Rajhi bank."

This was denied by Islami Bank, which said: "Al-Rajhi Bank is neither a sponsor nor a shareholder of Islami Bank." But then the statement went on to confirm exactly the same ownership companies the US Treasury report had cited, but in somewhat lesser shares:

"Institutions and individuals named Al Rajhi Company for Industries and Trade, Arabsas Travels and Tourist Agency, Abdullah Abdul Aziz Al Rajhi and Yousif Abdullah Al Rajhi of Al Rajhi group, KSA holds [sic] 27.51 percent share of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited."

Strangely the Islami Bank statement goes on to say, "Yousif Abdullah Al Rajhi, Vice Chairman of Islami Bank is not a shareholder of Al Rajhi Bank" after it’s just stated that he holds part of the 27.51% shareholding. In any case he is clearly closely tied to the bank as its Vice Chairman, whether or not he’s a shareholder.

The Bank’s denial statement also said, "Reporting Al Rajhi Bank as sponsor of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited is not based on facts." However Islami Bank has openly acknowledged that Abdullah Abdul Aziz Al Rajhi is their foreign director and he is also Director of Al Rajhi Banking and Investment Corporation and the Al Rajhi Bank.

Sulaiman bin Abdul Aziz Al Rajhi has no shares or post in Islami Bank Bangladesh but he is the senior-most executive of Al Rajhi Bank. According to the US Treasury report, his name appeared on the 'Golden Chain' list of wealthy investors. This list came to light in 2002 among seized documents from a raid on the Bosnian offices of the Benevolence International Foundation - a Saudi based charity banned in the US for its terrorism links. Among the documents was a scan of a handwritten list of 20 individuals identified as key financial contributors to al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden reportedly referred to that group of individuals as the "Golden Chain", hence the name.

2. Militants Held Accounts at Islami Bank Bangladesh

The US Treasury report said that in March 2006 Abdur Rahman, chief of the militant group Jamaatul- Mujahideen of Bangladesh (JMB), was found to have an account at Islami Bank.

On a number of occasions Islami Bank categorically denied that the JMB chief, Abdur Rahman, or his second-in-command, Bangla Bhai, held accounts at the bank. In 2006 they alleged that, "checkbooks [sic] of two other banks, one in the government sector and the other in the private sector, were also found in the same house." The statement said someone called Saidur Rahman had legally opened an account abiding by all banking procedures in 1999. A total amount of 450,000 taka (less than £4000) was transferred to the account. Later Saidur Rahman’s chequebooks were found with the JMB leader, Abdur Rahman.

Given the size and reach of Islami Bank it could be argued that it cannot be responsible for all its customers’ illegal behaviour. Shah Abdul Hannan complained of an orchestrated campaign against them and cited reports in the newspaper Amar Desh reporting that seven other banks were under investigation by the Central Bank for terror
financing. He also warned that it was dangerous “to weaken confidence in a bank that is one of the strongest of the country.” On behalf of Islami Bank, Shamsul Haque also complained that the JMB leader had been caught with cheque books from other banks where he had accounts but the media had only focused on an Islami Bank book in his custody which belonged to another verified individual.

3. Central Bank Action

The US Treasury report quoted HSBC information that an investigation by the Central Bank of Bangladesh had found that two branches of Islami Bank were engaged in "suspicious transactions" and had therefore urged action against 20 Islami Bank employees. HSBC also believed the Bangladesh Central Bank had issued a "notice of cause" to Islami Bank "to explain accounts owned by suspected Islamic Militants", and reportedly fined the bank for the third time in this connection.

Islami Bank denied being fined three times by Bangladesh Bank - saying it was only fined once in 2006 for failure to report in a timely fashion suspected transactions. It added that whenever Bangladesh Bank made inquiries about suspected accounts, Islami Bank would follow through by closing them. Shamsul Haque of Islami Bank said these penalties for lapses were routine and had been imposed more frequently on many other banks. He stressed Islami Bank was not fined for terror financing but for non-reporting of suspicious transactions on time.

4. Accounts of Islamic Charities Banned in the US

The International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO) is a Saudi charity which in 2006 had its branches in Indonesia and the Philippines and a high ranking official designated by the US as terrorist financiers and added to the list of entities with which US persons are prohibited from doing business. This charity was also named in the 2002 lawsuit on behalf of family members of victims of the September 11 2001 attacks. This lawsuit failed. Osama bin Laden’s brother-in-law, Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, is said by HSBC internal reports to have headed the Philippine branch of the IIRO in the 1990s.

Interestingly, IIRO is still registered with the NGO Bureau in Bangladesh as of 2013.

The US Treasury report cited HSBC internal communications from 2009 that indicated the IIRO had accounts at Islami Bank. Islami Bank Bangladesh confirmed to the Subcommittee that IIRO had two accounts at the bank, opened in 1993 and 1994, when IIRO was in good standing. After the IIRO was added to a UN sanctions list in 2006, Islami Bank says it froze the accounts and reported them to the Bangladesh Central Bank. In 2010 the Bangladesh Bank reportedly told Islami Bank to unfreeze the accounts and transfer the accounts to a government owned bank, BASIC Bank, which it says it did. Islami Bank says it cannot be responsible for auditing NGOs and alleges this charity had accounts in other mainstream banks in the country but the media only focused on them.

Foundations & Trusts:

There are a range of connected social businesses and charitable trusts that oversee education and medical health projects, with a strong Islamic tone. Some of the main ones are detailed below but central bankers say they believe there are myriad smaller trusts with different sources of income that are very difficult to trace.

Islami Bank Foundation

The bank says it spent £21 million during the last 30 years on assisting 10 million people working in education, health, environment, sports, industry, literature, cultural affairs and the relief sector. The Central Bank found in 2009 that Islami Bank spent more (only about £1 million though) on Corporate Social Responsibility than any other bank in the country. The report said Islami Bank had also been helping during natural disasters, assisting the victims directly as well as giving to government funds. Islami Bank has a scholarship scheme for students of the Banking & Finance Department of Dhaka University, Chittagong University and Manarat International University. One trustee complained that the recipients were being harassed by the Awami League government.

Islami Bank recently donated one crore taka to Bangladesh’s Olympic Association, which makes it difficult for the Awami League government to question its generosity, since it is also a beneficiary. The Bank also advertises in most mainstream newspapers that depend heavily on corporate advertising for their revenue. This may make them reluctant to criticise Islami Bank.

The Islami Bank Foundation runs 10 hospitals nationwide, half of which are large community hospitals and 90% of the funds are generated internally. According to Shah Abdul Hannan, for the last two years Bangladesh Bank has availed itself of a provision that allows it to appoint an officer to sit in on the Foundation’s board meetings so that it knows what decisions have been taken. This acts as a sort of protection for the Foundation, he says.
The special projects undertaken by the Islami Bank Foundation include:

1. Islami Bank Hospital
2. Islami Bank Medical College, Rajshahi. Rules for students say: "Female students are to wear scarf on their head" and "Smoking, addiction, gambling and other immoral activities are strictly prohibited".
3. A Community Hospital.
5. Service Centre
6. Islami Bank Institute of Technology
7. Islami Bank International School & College in Dhaka - an English-medium school
8. Islami Bank Physiotherapy & Disabled Rehab Centre
9. Centre for Development Dialogue
10. Bangladesh Sangskritic Kendra (Cultural Centre)
Links Between Ibn Sina Trust and Manarat and Islami Bank

Mr. Advocate Mujibur Rahman: Chairman of the Board of Trustees. He is also the chairman of the board of directors of Ibn Sina Pharmaceutical Industry Ltd.

Commodore (Retd.) Md. Ataur Rahman: Member of the Board of Trustees, Chairman Manarat Trust, Chairman Faisal Investment Foundation and founder member of the board of directors of Ibn Sina Pharmaceutical Industry Ltd. Ex. Chairman of Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd.

Shah Abdul Hannan: Member of the Board of Trustees, Founder member of the board of directors of Ibn Sina Pharmaceutical Industry Ltd & Manarat International School & College. Ex. Chairman Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd.

Prof. Abu Naseer Mohammad Abduz Zaher: Member Finance of the Board of Trustees, Chairman Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd., Present managing director of Ibn Sina Pharmaceutical Industry Ltd., Founder Member of Manarat

Ibn Sina Pharmaceuticals

Manarat Trust & School and College

Islami Bank Bangladesh

Prof. Dr. Chowdhury Mahmud Hasan: Member of the Board of Trustees.

Prof. Dr. A. K. M. Sadrul Islam: Member of the Board of Trustees. Director of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited. Member of the board of directors of Ibn Sina Pharmaceutical Industry Ltd.

Kazi Harun-or-Rashid: Board Member, Former Chairman Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited. Secretary General Industrial & Business Welfare Foundation. Member Islami Bank foundation, Member Islami Bank Medical College

Dr. Miah Mohammad Ayub: Board Member. Retired Secretary of Bangladesh Government.
Hospitals and Clinics:

The Ibn Sina Trust

This was started by Mir Qasem Ali (Jamaat Executive Committee member, accused of war crimes) and the first Saudi Ambassador to Bangladesh, the late Dr. Abdul Hameed Fouad al Khateeb.

It started with only one diagnostic centre that developed into a clinic and later one of the best-known hospitals in the country, with a Medical College for a thousand students. Some of the more profitable medical ventures, like a fully-fledged imaging centre, help fund the charity work. The Ibn Sina Trust is required to spend 25% of its income on charity. This involves exempting the poor from paying fees, offering scholarships, institutes to help widows and income generating projects. S.A. Hannan, who is a trustee, said there was little government interference in this area.

Education:

Manarat Trust

This began in 1979 with the establishment of an English-medium Kindergarten School. The Trust’s current Chairman is Shah Abdul Hannan and it runs an English-medium school, college and university (established in 2001) with 4000 students. The emphasis is on academic achievement but "in a moral environment" combined with Arabic and Islamic Studies. The Trust is careful to recruit teachers who are "Islamic minded" and can "inculcate the right sort of values into the children and protect them from immorality on the Internet, TV or through mobile telecommunication", says S. A. Hannan. The Manarat International University states its mission is "the advancement of knowledge with cosmic blend of Islam" [sic].

The Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought

This has designed 50 university courses that stress Islamic values and prepared textbooks for teachers. These are not sponsored by the Bangladesh government but teachers are free to use them as a resource. This was founded by Shah Abdul Hannan.

University Links

Several Jamaat sympathisers also sit on the boards of major Bangladeshi universities:

University Boards of Trustees: Possible Links with Jamaat-e-Islami

International Islamic University, Chittagong, 10-member board.
Chairperson is A. N. M. Shamsul Islam, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer of Chittagong City and an MP who is also an adviser for a coaching centre for students run by Jamaat’s student wing.
Board Member: Maulana Md. Abu Taheris, alleged to be close to Jamaat.

Manarat International University, 10-member board.
Chairman is Shah Abdul Hannan who is closely involved with Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Bank etc.
Member: Professor A.N.M.A. Zaher, who is involved in Islami Bank and Ibn Sina Pharmaceuticals.

Islamic University (Syndicate), Government-run, 7-member board.
Member: Kamaluddin Abdullah Zafree is a Jamaat cleric and editor of their monthly magazine Medina.

Islami Bank Medical College Rajshahi, 12-member board.
Chairman: Professor A.N.M.A. Zaher, who is involved in Islami Bank and Ibn Sina Pharmaceuticals.
Islamist Media Scene
By Kamal Ahmad

The National Press Club

Jamaat-e-Islami has a more organised presence in the media than any of the other parties, even those that have been in government. Quite a few party activists have taken up journalism as their main profession. This has helped Jamaat leaders get access to institutions like the National Press Club. Two top Jamaat leaders - Quader Mollah and Kamruzzaman - now on trial for war crimes were members of the Press Club. This strong presence gave Jamaat leverage. The party, for example, managed to get the pro-Awami League union leader, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, to support Golam Azam's citizenship in exchange for Jamaat votes for his leadership bid within the journalists' union.

Newspapers

Daily Sangram: This is the oldest party newspaper, which has been in circulation since the Pakistan era with a break for a few years after 1971 until the General Zia period, when Jamaat was revived as a political party. Sangram's readership is largely party members and supporters. No reliable circulation figures are available. Sangram has its own printing facility, which other dailies do not have.

Daily Naya Diganta: This was launched during the final years of the BNP-led alliance. Naya Diganta has a wider readership base than Daily Sangram, which supports the idea of Bangladesh as an Islamic nation. According to government statistics of 2011, Naya Diganta had a circulation of 115,000 and was among the top ten newspapers.

Weekly Sonar Bangla: This weekly is largely an organisational newsletter of Jamaat and its sister organisations.

Children's magazines: There are several pro-Jamaat children's magazines, including Phulkurir Asor, Kishore Kantho.

TV channels

Diganta TV: This satellite channel got its broadcasting licence during the BNP alliance government and came into operation during the military-backed interim government. The main architect and majority shareholder of both Diganta TV and Dainik Naya Diganta is Mir Qassem Ali, one of the accused in the war crimes trial. Mr Ali is also heavily involved in other Jamaat businesses.

Islamic TV: The majority shareholder of this channel was Khaleda Zia's late brother, Sayeed Iskander, and some of his batch-mates in the army, but its editorial leadership is in the hands of Jamaat. It has a very limited audience base.

Online

Jamaat has a very strong presence on the Internet, which indicates strategic thinking, advance planning and meticulous execution. Both Jamaat and its student organisation Islami Chhatra Shibir have their own websites, which are constantly updated despite the fact that their offices have been no-go areas for about a year. They appear to have deployed skilled IT people at a number of safe houses to run their clandestine web operations.

The style of language used in all the various platforms is popular and plain Bengali. In some instances where the original content is in Arabic or English they provide a translation.

Jamaat activists also have several other websites for communicating amongst themselves and running publicity campaigns. The "free Jamaat leaders" site, for example gives news and campaign information to party loyalists about the war crimes trial and reports on international support for their cause.

Blogosphere

Jamaat and Shibir supporters are extremely active, with several blogging sites. Some sites, especially those using WordPress, are maintained abroad, including in the United Kingdom and Turkey.

Some Shahbagh bloggers have alleged that some of their fellow bloggers on prominent Bengali blog sites are Jamaat supporters. Such allegations were levelled against the blogging platform "Somewhere in Blog", which caters to everyone who accepts the spirit of the Liberation War. Some liberal bloggers who questioned the tactics of the Shahbagh movement found themselves denounced as Jamaat supporters, as did the founder and editorial team of "Somewhere in Blog". Staff from "Somewhere in Blog" held a news conference to deny these accusations.
One of the most popular Jamaat blogs is "Basherkella". A screenshot of its Facebook page gives its address as 48/1 Purana Paltan, which is the Dhaka city office of Jamaat-e-Islami.

Basherkella Screenshot Showing Registration to Address of Jamaat-e-Islami Party Office

According to the traffic-auditing site, Socialbakers.com, Basherkella’s Facebook Page attracts more than 123,000 fans and 90% of its traffic is from within Bangladesh. It’s alleged that this site used doctored pictures and screenshots from a bogus blogsite called "Nooranichanpa" in order to malign the assassinated blogger, Rajib Haider, as an atheist and blasphemer. The authorities in Bangladesh closed down Basherkella, but it moved to Facebook and even after its first Facebook page was closed down, it opened a second Facebook page called "New Basherkella".

Social Media Networks:

Jamaat and Shibir activists seem to be way ahead of other political parties in terms of exploiting the full potential of social media networks. Most of the content is highly political, calling for the removal of the Awami League government. However, they quickly adapt their message to the rapidly changing political scenario. For example, at the beginning, their message was focused on the alleged victimisation of Jamaat leaders. After the BNP-led alliance expressed its opposition to the Shahbag movement they have tried to broaden their political message. When Hefajate Islam came to the forefront, these platforms started to emphasise the need to defend Islam without pushing any particular political party.

There are dozens of Facebook groups - some closed and some open - and Facebook pages created by Jamaat-Shibir activists. Some examples are given below:

NewBasherkella was started in January 2013 after the Bangladeshi regulators shut down the main Facebook site Basherkella. Since then this site has become their main Facebook forum. It carries news updates almost instantaneously from all over Bangladesh with video footage and pictures and has a huge following. It also has a video channel on YouTube.

MediaWatchBangladesh has 74,567 likes. It was started in December 2012 and is run by Shibir supporters judging by its content. It’s updated very speedily. Typical is a post about the alleged torture of the Shibir president during police remand, posted on Sunday April 7, 2013. This claims that the police are administering injections to revive him because he has been fainting frequently due to torture. The site also posts summaries from defence submissions at the war crimes trial, like one published within hours of the hearing that quoted the defence lawyers saying not one allegation out of 23 against Golam Azam had been proven in court.

Islamichhattrashibir This page seems to be Shibir’s Facebook page and has its office address as 48/1-A Purana Paltan, 1205 Dhaka, Bangladesh and a contact email of info@shibir.org.bd.

Sommilitoislamimanch Launched in February 2013, this promotes hatred of the leaders of the Shahbag movement, showing some of them with nooses around their necks.
Despite the fact that Twitter is not used heavily by Bangladeshis, Jamaat and Shibir activists have not ignored its impact, especially among potential audiences in North America and Europe. They have created linked accounts with Facebook and their blogs. They have promoted Basherkella and Mediawatch, using hashtags such as #FreeShibirLeader #savebangladesh and #BanglaSpring, though initially they used #shahbagh too.

One social networking analysis site found much of the anti-Shahbagh content seemed to be coming from London, whereas the pro-Shahbagh material came from Bangladesh and the US. It also discovered that political opponents on both sides of the divide were using Twitter to try and convince each other of their opinions. It found users were extremely polarized into two camps but both sides referenced stories on Al Jazeera (the orange connecting line).

Visualisation of Twitter Comments, courtesy of Technology and Social Participation Blog.
Jihadi Sites

This appears to be a new development that global jihadi websites are now picking up on the political developments in Bangladesh and covering stories relating to Jamaat-e-Islami. Surprisingly the most fanatical blog - qitaltube\textsuperscript{228} - (qital literally means the Killer) is based in the United Kingdom. This one is the most extreme, and perhaps most liable to prosecution under UK anti-terrorism laws. It also has hyperlinks to other blogsites - some of which are jihadi but some that just preach Islam.

Interestingly the ban on YouTube in Bangladesh (because of the site’s hosting of the film “The Innocence of Muslims”) seems to have had little effect because jihadi sites offer free unblocking software.

Three Screenshots from Qitaltube Site.

Interestingly the ban on YouTube in Bangladesh (because of the site’s hosting of the film “The Innocence of Muslims”) seems to have had little effect because jihadi sites offer free unblocking software.
There is no evidence of this site having a direct link to Islamic political parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami but it does carry videos of police action against Jamaat supporters. There is also a great deal of propaganda material against the Shahbagh bloggers and the Awami League government.

This has a call to the Bangladesh Army to remove the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, from power.

Caption Translation: 'Should we be begging endlessly to a government which is the agent of oppressive Jews and Christians?'
Another radical site is furqanmedia, which is described as relatively popular in Dhaka by Alexa’s ratings. It has instructions to Jamaat and Shibir activists on how to tackle atheists and the enemies of Islam who have slandered the Prophet and it has pictures of leading secular intellectuals like Shahriar Kabir and Zafar Iqbal. One story calls for the taking up of arms instead of calling hartal. Another has instructions for jihad against people who insult the Prophet.

Caption says "Punishment according to Sharia law for blasphemers against the Prophet Mohammad and Advice for Shibir (Jamaat Student wing)."

This screenshot says, "scrap all law and implement divine rules"
Pro-Jamaat content is also being spread by some pan-Islamic blogsites like mujaddeenmedia or "Voice of Jihad" as it calls itself. This site is linked to Al-Qaeda through the American born Yemeni jihadi cleric, Anwar Al-Awlaki, who spent two years in England during which he lectured at the East London mosque. The site includes photos of jihadi fighters in Syria.

This screenshot calls both the governments of Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia anti-islamic. There is an audio link, which has a sermon explaining their view of these two ladies. TRANSLATION: "Why are Hasina, Khaleda and other democratic governments in this country tyrants?"

Elsewhere the site has a section on military training, which links to a page on qitalmedia, where the banner sports a picture of Osama bin Laden. Qitalmedia also has a section on Internet security, which has links to advice on how to set up a hard disc partition.

Islameralo is another Jihadi site with a video compilation of police brutality against Jamaat supporters as well as a Bengali version of Anwar al Awlaki's lectures.

A video compilation of police brutality against Jamaat supporters, Islameralo Site.
Dawahilallah\textsuperscript{241} appears to originate in Turkey but carries content in Bengali aimed at Bangladeshis. It calls for Jihad and cites the Hadith on subjects such as what citizens should do when rulers defy Allah and religious edicts. It also calls for the annihilation of the atheists of Shahbag.\textsuperscript{242}

The alhittin.com\textsuperscript{243} site appears to be a pan-Islamic site with country-specific pages. Its content on Bangladesh includes allegations that the murdered blogger Rajib created content that was against the Prophet and it translates into English some of these alleged writings, which Rajib’s friends and family say are not actually his but planted on his blog after his death. According to the Alexa rating agency this site has an audience spread throughout Europe with a good penetration in Sweden.\textsuperscript{244} In recent years there has been significant migration of young Bangladeshis to Sweden.
Chhatra Shibir - the Student Wing

The student wing of Jamaat has a separate structure and election system from the mainstream party, but is identical in philosophy. Its five main activities are: proselytising, organising, training, addressing student problems and establishing Islamic social values. According to Jamaat figures, Shibir has about 5000 *rukun* or full members and about half a million workers. Shibir is not open to non-Muslim members like Jamaat-e-Islami.

The party acknowledges the frustration felt by many regarding Bangladesh’s political instability and offers Islam as the solution: “The root cause of all the unrest prevailing in the present day lies in the indifference of men to the divine guidance, and the only means to remove this misery is that mankind live in accordance with the Islamic way of life.”

The Central President of Shibir is Delawar Hossein, whose curriculum vitae includes a section called “Life in Jail”; he is in jail at the time of writing on what he says are politically motivated charges brought against him by the Awami League government. Interestingly he studied at Rajshahi University, while his Secretary General, Muhammad Abdul Zabbar, studied at Chittagong University - the two big Shibir strongholds. Zabbar’s earlier education was in an *alia* madrasa.

At Rajshahi University academics say not more than 15% of students are Chhatra Shibir members but they can influence others and are very well organised. The Chhatra Dal (BNP) is the biggest student party on campus. Hundreds of Shibir students are currently not able to enter the campus, so their studies are stalled and they are trying to enrol in private universities with the help of their party. They can miss one year’s studies but no more than that.

### Chhatra Shibir Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CHHATRA SHIBIR STRUCTURE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CENTRAL PRESIDENT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected by members for 1 year term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the Central President and the Council disagree then the Council’s view prevails.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXECUTIVE COUNCIL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaired by Central President and comprises 35-40 people. Term is 1 year and expires 31 Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each representative is elected by 110 members. The Central President can if he wants nominate up to 1/3 of the members as well as up to 2 from the ex-members. Vacant seats must be filled within 3 months. 2 general sessions must be convened year. 1/3 quorum needed. Operates by majority vote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SECRETARIAT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run by Secretary General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Secretariat answers to the Central President.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEMBERS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countrywide approx 5000. A Branch has on average 50 members, minimim 2. The Unit President is elected annually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To become a member there is an oath of allegiance (biyah) to participate actively &amp; be loyal. And 75 books to study as well as personal report cards to fill in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASSOCIATE MEMBERS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Branch has on average 4000 Associates. President of Associate Unit is elected annually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An associate member has to pass an oral test on a list of 50 booklets on the required reading list focusing on Koran studies, Hadith and political economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WORKERS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To become a volunteer it’s necessary to attend meetings, keep personal records on one’s religious activities, preach Islam and make donations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUPPORTERS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A supporter merely has to state that he will support Shibir.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exam Coaching Centres

These are centres that give students tips and tutoring to pass university entrance exams. Later they can assist students applying for foreign study. Many of the top centres appear to be linked with Jamaat-e-Islami’s student wing. This would help their members do well in exams and also afford opportunities to recruit non-Jamaat students.

FOCUS Coaching Centre, Dhaka: The current chief adviser is Dr. Chowdhury Mahmud Hasan, the Vice Chancellor of Manarat International University, which was started by Jamaat sympathisers.

RETINA Medical and Dental Admission Coaching, Dhaka: This was established by the former President of Chhatra Shibir at Dhaka Medical College, Shorab Hossain.

CONTRIBUT Coaching Centre, Dhaka: Specialises in engineering admissions. Established by Chhatra Shibir leaders in 2007 and now run by Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology and Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology Shibir units. Its prospectus says its director-general is the President of BUET Shibir Unit, his deputy is the President of BUET Shibir Unit and the managing director is the General Secretary, BUET Shibir Unit.

PROBAHO Coaching Centre: Specialises in public university admission. It is run by the ex office secretary of the Chittagong City wing of Chhatra Shibir, Nazimuddin.

INDEX Coaching Centre: Specialises in admissions to Chittagong University. The President and General Secretary of Chittagong University Chhatra Shibir Unit are the Chief Director and Assistant Director respectively. Jamaat-e-Islam MP for Satkhania, Shamsul Islam, is an advisor.

OPTIMUM Coaching Centre: For Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology. Gazipur District President of Chhatra Shibir, Abu Nayeeem, runs it.

INDEX Coaching Centre: One of the directors is the president of Sylhet Shahjalal University Chhatra Shibir Unit and another is the General Secretary of the same Shibir Unit.

RADAR Coaching Centre: Mainly run by Jessore City Shibir President, Secretary and Publicity Secretary.

CONTEST Coaching Centre: Established in 1988 in Rajshahi University by the local Shibir unit.

The following centres are also alleged to be run by Shibir: Radiant Centre in Khulna and Success Centre at the

Profile of a Shibir Activist:

Abul comes from a family that is devout but not connected to Jamaat e Islami. His father runs a business importing stationery; he’s the eldest child, with one brother and one sister.

The contact first starts when he’s fifteen years old. An older boy befriends him during football and cricket games and takes him to pray in the local mosque. Abul is invited to weekly Qur’an recitation classes, known as Study Circles.

The classes examine the economic, political and social system of Islam. One week might be devoted to the Prophet’s sayings, or hadith, another might explain how to preach to other students or collect charitable donations. They study books by each reading a chapter and then making a presentation on its contents to the others in the group.

Gradually Abul understands that he has fallen in with Chhatra Shibir activists.

“When I first came to know that they are Shibir, my other friends warned me not to join them because they are radicals and terrorists. I was a bit afraid,” he admits.

Abul’s parents are furious when they find out he’s involved with Chhatra Shibir. “They even threatened to expel me from home, though I don’t think they really meant it,” he says adding, “they didn’t want me to risk my life by getting involved in politics.” Abul decides to improve his school grades to win over his parents. He also tries preaching, telling them how Islam is a complete code of life and must therefore shape politics too.

Gradually Abul wins round his mother, who begins to agree with his philosophy but still objects to her son being involved in Islamic politics. Abul’s father remains staunch in his opposition, convinced that Chhatra Shibir activists are merely seeking power. There are many family quarrels.

Abul can’t be a full member while in school - the party’s Constitution prohibits anyone under Class 10 taking part in processions or street protests. He tries hard to recruit his younger brother but fails. His sister is more susceptible and they watch videos of Islamic lectures from preachers in Britain and America together.

Abul finishes school and joins college and isn’t active in Shibir for a while. The people running the Study Circles don’t know about him at first. When he starts at Dhaka University he finds Chhatra Shibir and joins their research and propaganda wing. The organisation is careful not to jeopardise his studies and leaves him time to prepare for exams. The BNP-Jamaat coalition is in power and Chhatra Shibir students are relatively free to operate.

When the government changes and the Awami League comes to power, there are constant threats and police raids of the Shibir hostels and offices. From 2010 their central office in Dhaka University is locked and cannot function because of the police presence nearby. Abul lives at home but in the halls of residence Shibir activists cannot reveal their identity lest the Chhatra League (Awami League student wing) activists catch them and beat them. It becomes really hard to recruit new members in this intimidating atmosphere – most who join have been previously affiliated with the movement.

Abul says the student party has stopped issuing paper documentation for fear of it being captured; instead they rely on online membership records that are password protected and use email for communication. Members of the Shibir Central Committee (35-40 people) and the University Committee (10 people) sleep in different homes every night to avoid arrest.
Constitutionally Shibir is independent of Jamaat-e-Islami and holds its own leadership elections though it shares the same ideology. Abul says thousands of Shibir members have not gone on to join Jamaat-e-Islami because the mainstream party’s recruitment procedures are inefficient. He believes the Jamaat structure is too monolithic to accommodate so many people from different backgrounds. 251

A Shibir member must leave the party two months after he has completed his or her final degree and ceases to be a student. Many former Shibir members remain ideologically committed while going into mainstream jobs in academia, the media or business. They have no chain of command but a loose fraternity bound by a similar outlook on life. They all vote for Jamaat in elections and help the party by providing logistical support and funds. Abul describes these former Shibir cadres as the recruitment pool for future government secretaries and District Commissioners if Jamaat comes to power.

At Dhaka University Abul works hard for three years to become a full member of Shibir. He is required to keep personal records detailing how many verses of the Quran he’s recited, how many Hadith he’s read, his reading of Islamic books, the number of times he went to pray in the mosque, his organisational activities and academic studies. He fills in a structured report card and emails it to his superiors.

During this time Abul must meticulously observe Islamic precepts in his social life and personal behaviour, showing absolute commitment to prayer and fasting. Members are tested for their leadership qualities, eloquence and influence over other students. Any kind of relationship with a girl is out of the question, as is smoking cigarettes, which Chhatra Shibir views as addictive and therefore prohibited by Islam. Also proscribed are violations of Sharia law such as theft, embezzlement or cheating, as well as any action that could bring the party into disrepute. A transgression is reported to the branch president, who informs the Central Committee which is empowered to investigate and expel anyone found guilty.

An associate member takes an oath of loyalty to become a full member, swearing not to have any dealings with any organisation against the aims and objective of Shibir. Only Chhatra Shibir insiders are allowed to be present at the oath taking ceremony. It’s conducted by a Central Committee member and is religious in nature, with participants undertaking ritual purification first, as if they were going to pray.

“I was overwhelmed with emotion at the oath taking; I burst out crying,” says Abul. He recited a verse of the Quran which says, “Verily my life, my death, my prayers, my ceremonial sacrifice are all for God.”

The preamble to the Shibir Constitution says the mission is to spread Islam throughout the world, but Abul believes that as he’s in Bangladesh his primary objective is to spread it in his own country. He sees Shibir as the party closest to Islam and the middle path between the more radical militant Islamic groups and the secular political parties. He stresses that Shibir, unlike the militant groups, accepts the democratic process.

Arrests

No precise numbers exist for how many Jamaat and Shibir activists have been arrested but it’s clear there’s been a crackdown. Most of the central leaders of the student wing are in jail. This makes it very difficult to meet any party members because they’re either in jail or in hiding; only the pro-Jamaat lawyers involved in the war crimes trial are considered safe from arrest and can safely meet journalists.

Jamaat sympathisers say between 2012 and May 2013, between 30-40,000 of their activists have been arrested but of those 20,000 have been released. Many activists are re-arrested at the jail gate. What’s upset Jamaat is that for the first time its women leaders are also being arrested, including the wives of senior leaders.

Jamaat claims it’s not paralysed by having its top leaders in jail on trial. They say there are 30-40 mid ranking leaders who are running the movement while half in hiding. The top leaders have also been able to smuggle several letters out of jail while on trial for war crimes.252 However, a senior police official described Jamaat and Shibir as “a corporate organisation” that finds it difficult to replace its top leaders.

The case study below shows how the innocent can easily get caught up in the sweeping police operations against Jamaat. It also reveals how meticulous Jamaat is as a party in caring for its detained cadres. The police say they try to identify genuine Shibir activists but it can be difficult to get what they call “quality arrests”.

Case Study

Hannan Sheikh, aged 16 years.
Male garment worker

I studied up to Class 6.253 I live in Dhaka city. I worked in a garment factory in Mirpur. I joined this garment factory in 2011 as a ‘helper.’ Over the past years I have been promoted to assistant operator of an embroidery machine. My current wage is Tk 5,000 per month. Every month I work on day shifts for fifteen days and rest fifteen days and I work on night shift.

I had worked the night shift on 13 February 2013. I returned home from the factory after finishing my work at 9am on February 14. I took a bath, ate my breakfast and went to sleep. I woke up and decided to go for a walk as it was Valentine’s Day. My mother asked me to stay at home and sleep some more. I ignored her. I went out after 11am. First I went to my paternal aunt’s home, which was close to my factory. I spent an hour there.
When I left my aunt’s home I wanted to walk a bit on the road and thought about going to the factory area to meet some colleagues. On my way there I met my friend Kalu. We were chatting on the roadside. Suddenly a police van drove in and parked near us. A few other police vehicles also parked behind the first police van. A policeman asked us, “What are you doing here?” We replied, “We are just talking here.” He said, “Don’t you know there is a protest programme by Shibir today?” We replied, “No sir, we are just standing here and talking as today is Valentine’s Day.” One policeman with a harsh voice said, “You don’t know about it, do you? You people are Shibir activists.” At that time, some policemen suddenly started beating us up with hard wooden sticks and hockey sticks. After beating us for five to ten minutes they forced us into a police van.

There were other people in that place. There were vehicles moving on the road. The policemen randomly picked up some more people from the same spot, labelling them Shibir men. There were rickshaw pullers, students and ordinary people but the police picked them, calling them Shibir activists. One policeman forced us to give our mobile phones to them and I handed it over. After detaining as many people as possible from that spot, the police van took us to the police station at Mirpur Section-2. We were all taken in front of the lock-up inside the police station. Some policemen told us to go into the lock-up but the door of the lock-up was not open and we were stuck. The policemen continuously told us to go inside and started beating us with wooden sticks and hockey sticks.

In the meantime some policemen took down our names and fathers’ names in a notebook. It was late afternoon. After beating us for some time, a policeman opened the lock-up door and pushed us inside. About two hours later, a policeman came and started to call the detainees by name one after another and took them away. When my turn came, I was taken to a room where a police officer was sitting. He asked me, “Are you an activist of Shibir?” I said, “No.” I told them, “I am a garment worker.” But that officer did not believe me. He kept on asking the same question and also asked me to name other Shibir activists and identify their locations. I kept on saying I wasn’t a Shibir activist and didn’t have the slightest idea about Shibir, so the policeman sent me back to the lock-up. I was kept in the cell at the police station for three days. They didn’t beat me up any more but I couldn’t contact my parents as the policemen had taken away my mobile phone. Other detainees had the same problem.

But those detainees who promised to give large bribes to release them right away got the chance to contact their family members using the mobile phone belonging to a policeman. Many of the detainees called their families from the policeman’s mobile phone and their relatives came to the police station quickly and gave money to the police. Then police released those people. They said I could contact my parents if they were willing to come with money. But I told them I was from a poor family. My parents can’t give money to buy my release. I saw other detainees bribing the police with sums ranging from Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000.

On the night of February 14 and even the following two days, the police brought many other people to the police station as suspected Shibir men. So far as I can remember two students were brought on one night from their mess, who admitted to me privately that they were involved with Shibir politics. In the meantime, my father somehow came to know that I was in Mirpur police station, so he came to see me on the night of February 16. He gave a small amount of money to the policemen to allow him to see me. He brought me some food and clothes. He requested the police to release me but they refused, saying I was implicated in a case of violence by Jamaat-Shibir men.

The police also told my father that their hands were tied as they were doing everything according to instructions from high-ups of the government. But we know nothing about the “high-ups”. On February 17 I was produced before a Dhaka court along with 12 other people arrested as suspected “Shibir men”. The police asked the court to grant them remand to interrogate us. The court granted them three days remand for me. They again took me to the police station and I was there for three days. A police officer interrogated me and said, “Tell me the truth, are you a Shibir activist?” I said, “No.” I told them I am a garment worker and I have proof of that. They kept me in the lock-up for three days, didn’t ask anything else, and didn’t beat me up. The police gave us food three times a day.

After three days in police remand we were again produced before the same court and at that time the court sent me to jail as the police did not want to interrogate me further. I was sent to Dhaka Central jail. I was kept there for seven days and then I was sent to Kashimpur prison in Gazipur. I was in Kashimpur jail for one month and eight days. In total I was in jail for one and a half months. During this time I was produced before the court on several occasions.

My father somehow managed to find a lawyer to make representation in court to release me on bail. But the bail request was refused initially. But after one and a half months I was released as the lawyer.
obtained bail from the court. My father produced evidence to prove that I was a garment worker and a minor.

When I was taken to court on several occasions, the police kept us in the lock-up at the court premises with many other arrested people who were brought from different police stations to be produced before the court. I saw some Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir leaders getting round the security guys at the lock-up at the court premises to give packets of Biriyani to their arrested party men. Jamaat and Shibir leaders were maintaining a log of their arrested party members and which ones would be produced before the court on which date. Based on their log they distributed the food packets. Every time I was in the court’s custody I saw security men distributing packets of Biriyani among the Jamaat-Shibir men there.

The security personnel received a list of recipients along with the food parcels given to them by Jamaat-Shibir leaders. I saw them distributing more than 100 packets of Biriyani along with bottles of drinking water, every time I was taken there. If I were a Shibir man, I would have received Biriyani packets from them. But they never gave me a single packet of Biriyani. Rather, on the very first day in court custody, when I showed interest in having a Biriyani packet, the distributors told me not to touch these packets as these were only for Jamaat and Shibir men. When I was in Kashimpur jail, I was in a cell with people accused of murder and robbery. There were some Jamaat and Shibir men there too. I spoke to a few of them. They told me they were involved with Shibir. I asked them why do they do this politics? They told me, "They are on the path of Allah. It does not matter if they lose their life." Some of them also told me that their parents were also involved with Jamaat politics. I came to know from them that their leaders visited them in jail frequently and brought them some food, giving each of the party members in jail Tk 1,000 per month. If I were a Shibir activist I would have received this money from them but I did not get anything.

Now I need to appear before the court at regular intervals. It’s an unbearable harassment for me and my poor family. I have returned to work at the same garment factory. But there is still a false case against me as a suspected Shibir leader. I want to be freed from this false case forever but we do not have money to spend to fight this case and to pay lawyers.