

India faces terror from another front

By [Siddharth Srivastava](#)

Global Research, November 13, 2008

[Asia Times Online](#) 13 November 2008

Region: [Asia](#)
Theme: [Terrorism](#)

NEW DELHI – Deadly bombings in the remote northeastern state of Assam have confounded authorities with their unprecedented scope and complexity – opening what’s been described as a “sinister” front for jihadi terror in India.

The Assam strikes – most recently a string of blasts on October 30 that took 85 lives and left nearly 500 injured – have added a disturbing new angle to terrorism in India, a former high-ranking police official told Asia Times Online. Citing sophisticated weaponry and mysterious smuggling networks, he compared Assam’s embattled capital, Guwahati, to the war-torn Iraqi capital, Baghdad.

Unlike the relatively crude, locally assembled explosives used elsewhere in India – including strikes in Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Varanasi – the bombs used in Assam have raised concerns about the region’s porous borders as well as jihadi groups’ links with local militants, especially from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Security experts say that the car and motorcycle bombs – often laden with over 80 kilograms of RDX (rapid detonating explosive) – are beyond the capability of homegrown separatist outfits such as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) or the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB).

According to reports, the remote-controlled or timed bombs used in Assam were placed at carefully chosen targets such as crowded weekend markets to inflict maximum splinter damage to human lives in a small area. Most of the bombs were camouflaged in dustbins, food stalls or parked vehicles.

Northeast India is surrounded by Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and China. Except for Bhutan, India’s relations with the other neighbors have never been comfortable. The neighboring state of Tripura was also struck with serial bomb blasts last month that killed two and injured over 100. Two other regional states, Nagaland and Manipur, have endured years of bloody separatist movements and powerful militant elements remain entrenched.

Unlike India’s western frontiers with Pakistan, which have been effectively plugged by fencing and troop deployment of troops, border controls in the northeast are notoriously weak.

“Assam has a history of local population angst against illegal settlers from Bangladesh, resulting in a tussle over land and fears of demographic dilution,” D N S Shrivastava, former director general of police, who served in Assam for over two decades, told Asia Times Online. “This has contributed to the growth of extremist groups such as ULFA. However, these attacks are much more sinister.”

Terror on the borders

India's Home Ministry believes that the Bangladeshi jihadi outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HJI) is involved in the blasts in Assam, according to Indian media reports. The HJI is thought to maintain close ties to the Indian Mujahideen (IM), an indigenous terror group that has claimed responsibility for most of the recent bomb blasts across India.

The IM has been closely linked to the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba and with the banned Students Islamic Movement of India.

Investigators are also trying to forge linkages between the Assam blasts and others in the country. In May, serial blasts killed 80 people and injured 200 in the western Indian city of Jaipur, capital of the tourist state of Rajasthan. Serial explosions in Ahmedabad in Gujarat in July left more than 50 dead and over 200 injured. In September, five serial bomb blasts killed at least 25 and wounded more than 100 people in Delhi.

In Assam, the HJI is said to utilize its close connections with illegal immigrants from Bangladesh for new recruits, safehouses and logistical support.

The Indian Express has recently reported that federal security agencies intercepted a congratulatory message from Bangladesh a day after the Assam blasts that suggests the involvement of HJI. Officials in New Delhi have vowed to take the issue up with counterparts in Dhaka.

Assam's chief minister Tarun Gogoi has been quoted as saying, "Assam is the most vulnerable to terror attacks from Bangladeshi soil. A large number of terrorist groups there help our local outfits. There are militant outfits in Myanmar and Nepal, but Bangladesh remains our biggest threat."

Reports say that the government has identified 46 points along the border with Bangladesh that are being used as exit and entry points by the HJI.

"Border Security Force's Tripura frontier had received information in the first week of October that some 20 HJI cadres would sneak into Assam to carry out explosions with the help of local outfits such as ULFA," P K Mishra, inspector general of police in Assam and Meghalaya, has been quoted as saying.

Still, security officials say that given the scale and impact of the latest strikes, it is apparent that wider jihadi groups have capitalized on the established networks of local militants who would not have the wherewithal to carry such attacks on their own.

Unseen adversaries

Despite security officials' focus on the Bangladesh-based HJI, domestic and foreign media have speculated that armed groups in India's northeast may be receiving support from China by way of Myanmar.

Recently, Jane's Intelligence Review reported that China had replaced Cambodia and Thailand as the biggest source of weapons for insurgent groups in India's northeast, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. The report said the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a rebel group in Myanmar, acts as the conduit between Chinese arms manufacturers and insurgent groups.

Additionally, the Times of India recently reported that trade routes where China and Myanmar's borders meet are "fluid". In recent months, the report alleges, the Chinese have

managed to increase the flow of funds – and possibly arms – to northeast terrorist groups such as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and ULFA.

China, however, has strongly refuted any hand in the Assam blasts. “Such reports were groundless,” Jiang Yu, a Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, was quoted by Chinese news agency Xinhua. “The Chinese government always sticks to the principle of non-interference in other nations’ domestic affairs. We won’t support any anti-government groups in India,” Jiang said.

Observers say that New Delhi must refocus its attention on the northeast to prevent another round of lethal terror attacks which would worsen an already precarious situation.

Given the region’s reputation for smuggling, lawlessness and violence, this will not be an easy task.

Siddharth Srivastava is a New Delhi-based journalist. He can be reached at sidsri@yahoo.com

The original source of this article is [Asia Times Online](#)
Copyright © [Siddharth Srivastava](#), [Asia Times Online](#), 2008

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Siddharth Srivastava](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca