

Terror arrests



The radicalised Bangladeshis circulated among themselves videos of radical preachers as well as footage put out by supporters of terror groups like ISIS. The videos had clips taken in what appeared to be conflict zones, containing scenes of



firearms training and physical training for children. In the background are rousing Arabic recitations. PHOTOS: SCREENSHOTS FROM VIDEO

# Radicalisation of workers dates back to 2013

**Bangladeshi workers started a closed study group to discuss conflicts involving Muslims**

**Zakir Hussain**  
Deputy News Editor (Politics)

Between Nov 16 and Dec 1 last year, 26 members and another who nearly joined them were arrested under the Internal Security Act, Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said yesterday.

Ranging in age from 25 to 40, most had worked in Singapore between two and seven years.

These work permit holders were not concentrated in any particular construction company or work place, nor were they concentrated in a particular residential area.

But they met every week to discuss taking up arms, and even used the premises of a few local mosques located near where some of them were staying, the ministry said.

Singapore Muslim leaders believe they might have slipped under the radar because quite a number of

Bangladeshi workers gather at mosques, especially on weekends, to worship and do volunteer work. Language poses a significant barrier too: Most Bangladeshi Muslims worship together with other Muslims, but when it comes to discussing religious matters, they are more comfortable using their own language. This group of radicalised men appeared to have taken measures to be discreet about what they discussed.

They circulated headline material secretly among themselves. They also carefully targeted fellow Bangladeshis to grow their numbers.

Some even distributed leaflets calling for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, according to Bangladeshi workers interviewed who knew some of them.

Among themselves, they circulated videos of radical preachers as well as footage put out by supporters of terror groups like the Islamic



An excerpt from a document in Bengali that some of the group's members had, showing how to attack and kill someone quickly and quietly. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). These show clips of young children undergoing martial arts as well as firearms training in what appear to be conflict zones. In the background are rousing Arabic recitations, also common in videos put out by ISIS to instill fervour among viewers.

The ministry said the members of the group supported the ideology of armed jihad espoused by terror groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

They also had grievances against their government back home over its actions against some Bangladeshi Islamic groups and leaders. The Bangladesh government had clamped down on these groups and detained their leaders.

The members donated money to outfits linked to these groups. Some also supported the violent actions of extremists who killed Shiite Muslims because they considered them to be deviant.

So when this group of Bangladeshi nationals gathered every week, they encouraged members to return home and take up arms against their government.

It appears they went beyond just instilling fervour through videos. Some members had a soft copy document in Bengali that showed, through graphics, how they could attack a targeted victim and kill him quickly and quietly.

The ministry did not give details of how the group was detected, but many Singaporeans and Bangladeshis yesterday denounced these plans and were relieved they were found out before harm was done.

# 14 of the 26 deported men arrested on their return home

**Bangladesh conducting probe; 12 others released and being monitored by police**

**Nirmala Ganapathy**  
India Bureau Chief  
In New Delhi

Bangladesh has arrested 14 of the 26 men deported from Singapore on terror charges and released the remaining 12, who are being monitored by police.

The Singapore authorities had arrested the 26 men, most of them construction workers, after discovering that they were planning terror

attacks in their own country.

The 14 men were charged last month under the Anti-Terrorism Act after they returned to Bangladesh, Dhaka police officials said. Under the Act, the maximum punishment is the death sentence.

On Dec 27, they appeared in a Dhaka court, which ordered them to be detained in jail while investigations took place.

"The 14 are now in jail... investigations are going on. The rest have been released to their relatives under some conditions. They are being monitored," Dhaka Metropolitan Police spokesman Maruf Hossain Sarder told The Straits Times. "They don't have any previous record."

Police investigations showed that

the men were from different parts of Bangladesh and got to know each other while working in Singapore.

The men were part of a closed religious study group that had met discreetly every week since 2013, according to Singapore's Home Affairs Ministry.

Mr Mashrukar Rahman Khaled, a deputy commissioner with the Dhaka police, said the men were influenced by the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), also known as Ansar Bangla, an extremist organisation in Bangladesh.

The ABT has been accused of being behind a series of gruesome killings of atheist bloggers.

Bangladesh has seen a rise in extremist violence in recent years, marked by the high-profile murders

of four bloggers, one publisher and two foreign nationals over the past 12 months alone.

Analysts see the development as a cause for concern for Bangladesh in its fight to stamp out terror.

"How deeply they were committed and how they were in possession of whatever evidence was found by Singapore. This is a matter for investigators to come up with (answers)," said Mr Tariq Karim, a former Bangladeshi diplomat and a distinguished fellow with the Delhi-based Vivekananda International Foundation.

"Certainly this should be worrying for any country and any government."

gnirmala@sph.com.sg

WORRYING FOR ANY COUNTRY

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Mr Abdul Khaer Mohammed Mohsin (left), the editor of local Bengali newspaper Banglar Kantha, said he heard of "disappearing" workers last month. He ran a report in this month's issue (above) about Bangladeshi workers being deported for alleged extremist behaviour. ST PHOTO: NEO XIABIN

## Bangladeshi 'mostly peace-loving'

While condemning the actions of 27 compatriots arrested last year under the Internal Security Act, Bangladesh's High Commissioner to Singapore stressed that most Bangladeshis are peace-loving and law-abiding.

Speaking to The Straits Times at the funeral of a community leader at Anglia Mosque in Little India yesterday, High Commissioner Mahub Uz Zaman said the Singapore Government was "right in sending them back", referring to the radicalised individuals.

All but one of the 27 construction workers, who were planning to wage armed jihad in their home country, had been deported. The remaining one is serving a jail term for trying to leave Singapore illegally. He will also be deported after he serves his time.

Mr Zaman, who has been holding his post since 2012, confirmed that police in Dhaka are investigating the matter.

"The radicals were arrested once they landed," he said.

Currently, there are 160,000 Bangladeshi nationals in the Republic. Most work in construction but Mr Zaman did not provide specific figures. He said his embassy will continue to visit workers in their dormitories. "We will inform them that they are to follow the laws here and not get involved in illegal activities."

But he highlighted that the 27 are "not representative of the community". Mr Zaman stressed that Bangladeshis here belong to "a peace-loving community that follows the rules of the countries they are residing in", which has also contributed to society.

Construction worker Nurzaman, 32, said: "It's a very, very small group. Most of us don't agree with them. Our country is not (extremist)."

awcw@sph.com.sg

## How one worker learnt of friend's arrest

**Aw Cheng Wei**

One morning in November last year, a Bangladeshi construction worker here received a call from his friend's brother.

"I could barely make out what he was saying. He sounded very scared," said the worker, who gave his name only as Mahub.

After calming the man down, Mr Mahub learnt that a group of people had picked up his friend - Hossen Md Akram - from the shop-house in Desker Road where he was staying. No one knew who they were.

"I tried calling Akram but he did

not answer," said Mr Mahub, 28.

A week went by. Akram's brother, who was newly arrived in Singapore and also a construction worker, was getting frantic.

Frustrated, Mr Mahub lodged a report about his missing friend at a police station. That was when worry gave way to shock. A senior officer advised him to have a word with Akram's boss.

The boss said "Akram was caught by police but not the ones we always see", Mr Mahub said. He was also told that Akram would be sent back to Bangladesh.

He told Akram's brother what he had learnt. The man was relieved, but the saga was not over.

Last month, Mr Mahub found out that Akram had been arrested in Dhaka as soon as his flight landed in Bangladesh.

Akram's family was not allowed to meet him, and he is still in jail.

Yesterday, Akram, 32, was named as one of 27 Bangladeshi workers who had been arrested in Singapore between November and last month under the Internal Security Act.

They were planning terror attacks back home. All of them had their work permits cancelled and 26 have since been repatriated.

Mr Mahub still cannot get over the shock of learning that Akram had become radicalised.

The two men, who are from the same village in Bangladesh, came to Singapore six years ago.

He said he had no idea when radical thoughts took root in his friend's mind.

"Akram would go to the mosque on Sundays," he said.

Other Bangladeshi nationals told The Straits Times that they were aware of extremist groups back home, but did not expect to find them in "safe and secure" Singapore.

Mr Abdul Khaer Mohammed Mohsin, 53, editor of the Banglar Kantha, a Bengali newspaper here, said he had heard of "disappearing" workers last month.



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