



The Keraniganj Explosion: A Window into the Resurgence of Islamic State Bengal

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By Iftekharul Bashar

SYNOPSIS

An explosion at a religious school near Dhaka has revealed that the Islamic State in Bangladesh is now using education centres as secret bomb-making factories. The discovery of high-grade explosives shows that these militants have become much more technically skilled and are harder to track as they embed their operations within the fabric of everyday life. With the national elections in Bangladesh just weeks away, this incident highlights a clear and present danger to the country's stability.

COMMENTARY

On December 26, 2025, a [massive explosion](#) tore through the Ummul Qura International Madrassa (an Islamic educational institution) in South Keraniganj, located on the outskirts of the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka.

While the blast initially caused widespread panic among residents who feared a gas leak or an industrial accident, the subsequent investigation by counterterrorism units revealed a much more sinister reality. The madrassa was not merely a centre for religious instruction; it was a high-capacity manufacturing hub for [improvised explosive devices \(IEDs\)](#) under the charge of Sheikh Al Amin, the Dhaka Regional Commander of Islamic State Bengal (ISB), also known as the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (Tamim-Sarwar Group) or the Neo-JMB.

The blast [injured four people, including Al Amin's own wife and their three children](#). Despite the severity of their injuries, Al Amin's priority remained his own escape; he reportedly took his family to a hospital only to abandon them there.

Al Amin remains at large, and his trajectory highlights a dangerous pattern of recidivism that should have served as a warning. He had been [arrested twice](#) – in 2017 and in 2020 – and had been out on bail since 2023. His ability to repeatedly return to active militancy exposes critical gaps in the legal and rehabilitative framework for high-value militants in Bangladesh.

This exposure of the bomb-making hub comes at a critical juncture. With Bangladesh's parliamentary elections scheduled for February 12, 2026, security agencies are on high alert against attempts to derail the democratic process. The Keraniganj incident confirms that extremist elements are actively preparing "spectacular" attacks during the election period, aiming to create a climate of fear that could suppress voter turnout and undermine the legitimacy of the transition.

The group Al Amin belongs to is notorious for the 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attack, which killed 22 people in Dhaka's diplomatic zone. While previous counterterrorism efforts between 2016 and 2018 significantly degraded the group, the security landscape has shifted since the 2024 political transition. The current interim government has deprioritised counterterrorism, and recent mass bailouts for terrorist convicts have created a [permissive environment](#) that extremists are now exploiting. In this context, the Keraniganj explosion is a significant development, exposing a dangerous evolution in Bangladesh's militant activities just weeks before the parliamentary elections due to be held on February 12.

The Signal in the Noise: What the Blast Indicates

The Keraniganj incident serves as a stark indicator of the trends emerging in the country's security environment with serious portents for the wider region. It highlights a critical change in the lethality of Bangladeshi militant groups.

Recovery of a large stockpile of materials from the Keraniganj site indicates that the group was possibly producing IEDs with [Triacetone Triperoxide \(TATP\)](#), a hallmark of Islamic State-style global operations. While TATP has been [identified](#) as the "Neo-JMB" explosive of choice since as early as 2017, the indication of its reappearance in 2025 at such a high capacity is alarming. TATP is highly unstable and notoriously difficult for standard security scanners to detect.

Reports indicate that Sheikh Al Amin had stayed awake throughout the previous night [assembling](#) explosive devices. This suggests an operational environment of high tempo, where he was under significant pressure to meet a deadline. With the national elections just weeks away, the hastiness points to a broader strategy of "spectacular" attacks intended to disrupt the democratic process and to challenge the state's authority.

Exploiting the "Grey Zone"

Sheikh Al Amin made strategic use of "grey zone" locations, i.e., legitimate social fronts that provided cover for illicit activities. By serving as the director of a religious school, he apparently embedded a bomb-making capability within a public institution.

This strategy points to the exploitation of the security vacuum that emerged following the 2024 political transition in Bangladesh. In the aftermath of the previous government's collapse, law enforcement and intelligence agencies have faced a period of reorganisation and weakened oversight, which extremist groups have been quick to exploit.

The madrassa provided perfect logistical cover. The movement of [chemicals](#) needed to build the bomb – including approximately 400 litres of hydrogen peroxide, nitric oxide, and acetone recovered by police – could be easily disguised as cleaning agents. Furthermore, the presence of students meant that any police intervention would risk collateral damage, potentially causing a public backlash.

Al Amin's bomb-making operation was well calculated. He used the weekly Friday holiday to conduct the high-risk assembly work. Fortunately, this move limited casualties when the apparent premature blast occurred, but allowed him to operate undisturbed for days beforehand.

Reliance on the "Family Cell"

A notable feature of Al Amin's network is its family-based nature. Unlike most militant cells, which are susceptible to infiltration, Al Amin's unit was built on bonds of kinship. His wife, Asiya Begum, and his brother-in-law, Mufti Harun, were key figures active in managing the front and securing the madrassa. His wife even claimed the madrassa was their primary source of income, providing a financial shield for their activities.

This hybrid network is significantly harder to dismantle. When a cell is composed of family members, the "broken link" strategy used by intelligence agencies – persuading a low-level operative to turn informant – becomes nearly impossible. The family cell provides a self-sustaining ecosystem in which ideological commitment and personal survival are intertwined, enabling the group to operate stealthily.

Targeting the Elections

While the blast destroyed the Keraniganj hub, the state's most pressing concern is what was *not* found in the rubble. Intelligence suggests that before the explosion, Al Amin's network had already moved at least [85 improvised explosive devices \(IEDs\)](#) to safe houses across the country. The blast did not end the threat; it merely exposed its scale. This [threat is compounded](#) by the fact that over 1,300 weapons looted during the 2024 uprising remain unrecovered, providing a lethal arsenal that complements the ISB's high-velocity explosives as the February 12 polls approach.

The strategic intent behind these IEDs is clearly tied to the February 2026 elections. Investigative sources reveal that the cell planned to strike public gatherings and electoral processions to delegitimise the state, which they view as *Taghut* (idolatrous).

Furthermore, the [targeting of Hindu temples](#) to provoke communal unrest suggests a "chaos strategy" designed to demonstrate that the interim government in

Bangladesh cannot provide basic security for its citizens or religious minorities. By creating a climate of fear and instability, the ISB aims to undermine public trust in the democratic transition and present their radical ideology as the only stable alternative.

Financing Through *Al-Fa'i*

To sustain this high-tempo operational capacity, Al Amin's cell reverted to the Neo-JMB practice of *Al-Fa'i* – theological justification for robbery in the name of jihad. In 2025, Al Amin allegedly orchestrated a robbery against a multinational corporation, netting approximately US\$8,200.

These robberies make the cell less dependent on foreign transfers, which are easier for international intelligence agencies to track, and allow them to maintain a low-profile, "off-the-grid" existence. It is a return to the aggressive, violent methods used by the group during its peak in 2016.

Conclusion

The Keraniganj blast was an unexpected blow for the Islamic State network in Bangladesh, but it served as a sobering reminder to the Bangladeshi security apparatus; it proved that ISB is neither defeated nor dormant. Instead, ISB has adapted by going smaller, more technical, and more family-based. The escape of Sheikh Al Amin, an explosives expert with deep ties to both the "old guard" and new-wave militants, leaves a dangerous operative at large with the knowledge to rebuild.

As the February 12 elections in Bangladesh approach, the recovery of the missing IEDs and the neutralisation of the decentralised cells must be the government's absolute priority. The unintended explosion in Keraniganj was a lucky break. If the state fails to act quickly on the clear indicators it provided, such as the shift to high-velocity explosives, the use of social fronts and family-based networks, the threat from the extremist and terrorist groups will likely grow significantly.

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