**Al Qaeda in India**

**Terrorism and insurgency are the unending battles India has been fighting since Independence.**

**In the** [**first part**](http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/apr/03spec)**of his analysis on terrorism, B Raman discussed its causes, the distinctions between religious and non-religious terrorist groups and their sources of funding and their sanctuaries.**

**Today, he explains how most Indian Muslims have refused to fall prey to the gambits of Pakistan-backed terrorist organisations.**

Pakistan has been the main source of arms, ammunition and training for religious terrorist groups which operated in the Punjab in the past and for those which are operating presently in J&K and other parts of India. The training is given by the ISI, either directly or through religious fundamentalist and pan-Islamic jihadi organisations, in various makeshift camps located in PoK, the Northern Areas (Gilgit and Baltistan) and the North-West Frontier Province.

Before September 11, 2001, the ISI had located the training camps of the Pakistani jihadi organisations, which are members of the IIF, in Afghan territory, but have since shifted them to PoK and the Northern Areas. Five Pakistani jihadi organisations are members of bin Laden's IIF -- HUM, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. The first four operate in India. LEJ, which is an anti-Shia organisation, operates only in Pakistan.

Under US pressure, President Musharraf has banned the activities of LET, JEM and LEJ in Sindh, Punjab, the NWFP and Balochistan, but not in PoK, the Northern Areas and the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas. The activities of HUM and HUJI, which are closest to Pakistan's military-intelligence establishment, have not been banned anywhere.

In a recent judgement against some Pakistani doctors accused of providing sanctuaries and medical assistance to Al Qaeda members, the Pakistani supreme court pointed out that the Pakistan government has not, till now, declared Al Qaeda a terrorist organisation and banned its activities in Pakistan as required under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

**The role of Pakistani mercenaries**

Between 1989 and 1993, terrorism in J&K was mainly due to the activities of indigenous Kashmiri organisations. When they were unable to succeed, the ISI started infiltrating trained jihadi cadres of the Pakistani pan-Islamic organisations, who had fought against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan in the 1980s, into J&K for beefing up indigenous organisations. Since 1999, the Pakistani jihadi organisations have taken over the leadership of the anti-government of India movement and have been operating in Indian territory under the guise of Kashmiris.

As already mentioned above, out of the 46 suicide terrorist attacks reported since 1999, 44 have been by Pakistanis belonging to these jihadi organisations. The principal leaders of these organisations are Pakistani Punjabis and the majority of their cadres are Pakistani nationals.

These Pakistani jihadi organisations project J&K as the gateway to India and say that, after 'liberating' J&K from the control of the Hindus, they will 'liberate' the Muslims in other parts of India and set up two more independent 'homelands' for Muslims -- one in north India and the other in south India. As part of this long-term aim, they have been setting up clandestine cells in other parts of India and have launched some major operations such as the attack inside the Red Fort in New Delhi in January 2001, the attack on the Indian Parliament in December, 2001, and the attack on Hindu worshippers in a temple in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, in September 2002.

There have also been a number of terrorist incidents in other parts of India such as the attack on the security guards outside the US consulate in Kolkata in January 2002, the four explosions in Mumbai in 2002-03 -- the latest on March 13, 2003, killed 12 innocent train passengers -- and the explosion in a Hindu religious place in Hyderabad last year.

**The role of Al Qaeda in India**

Till now, Al Qaeda's Arab members have not operated in Indian territory. Some Arabs were arrested in J&K during counter-terrorism operations, but they were members of Pakistani pan-Islamic jihadi organisations and not of Al Qaeda as such. However, HUM, HUJI, LET and JEM, the Pakistani jihadi organisations which are members of bin Laden's IIF along with Al Qaeda and the Taliban, have been responsible for most of the religious terrorist incidents in J&K and other places in India.

**The impact of Bin Laden & Al Qaeda on the Indian Muslim community**

India has a little over 140 million Muslims -- the second largest Muslim community in the world after Indonesia. Only a very small section of the community has taken to terrorism due to various grievances and instigation by the ISI and Pakistan's religious, fundamentalist and jihadi organisations.

The overwhelming majority of Indian Muslims are loyal, law-abiding citizens. They have not allowed their anger against the Indian government or the Hindus for any reason to drive them into the arms of terrorist organisations. India has the most modern, peaceful and forward-looking Muslim community in the world.

If one keeps J&K aside, the following factors are significant:

During the 1980s, over 6,000 Muslims from different parts of the world went to Afghanistan to join the Afghan Mujahideen groups in their fight against the Soviet troops. Not a single Indian Muslim joined them.

There are hundreds of Muslims from various parts of the world undergoing jihad training in Pakistan's various madrasas. But there are no reports of any Indian Muslims studying there.

bin Laden's IIF has 13 member-organisations from different parts of the world -- five of them are from Pakistan. Not a single Indian Muslim organisation -- not even from J&K -- has joined the IIF.

When the US started its air strikes on Al Qaeda and the Taliban training camps in Afghan territory on October 7, 2001, there were demonstrations by Muslims in many parts of the world. There was hardly any demonstration in India.

After the US-led coalition started its war on terrorism in Afghanistan, hundreds of Muslims from many countries went to Pakistan and Afghanistan to join the Taliban and Al Qaeda in their fight against the coalition troops. There were no Indian Muslims among them.

At its detention centres at Gauntanamo Bay in Cuba, Diego Garcia and Bagran in Afghanistan, the US has been interrogating hundreds of Muslims from different countries caught helping Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. There is not a single Indian Muslim amongst them.

As many foreign Muslims, if not more, come to India for higher education as they go to Pakistan. Those studying in Pakistan go back to their countries as terrorists, narcotics smugglers or other law-breakers. There was only one instance of a Palestinian, who studied in India, taking to terrorism after he returned to his country in 1992. Foreign Muslim students studying in India go back to their countries as constructive citizens --bureaucrats, academics, IT experts, etc. President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, who is the toast of the world today for his courage, vision and modern outlook, is a product of the Indian education system.

These factors show bin Laden and his Al Qaeda have had little impact on the Muslim community in India. The Indian Muslims, including the aggrieved sections of the Kashmiris, have kept away from them. The attempts of the Pakistani pan-Islamic jihadi organisations to rally the support of the Indian Muslims in the name of bin Laden have, thus far, been unsuccessful.

**India's domestic counter-terrorism policies**

India's counter-terrorism policies are based on the following principles:

A genuine and well-functioning democracy, good governance, responsiveness to public grievances, effective policing and economic development are the best antidotes to terrorism.

India has not allowed the intimidatory violence of terrorism to come in the way of the electoral process. In the 1990s, elections were held in Punjab at the height of terrorist violence. Elections were held in J&K in September last year despite instructions from the ISI to the Pakistani jihadis to disrupt the process. Foreign diplomatic missions in New Delhi were encouraged to send their observers to the state to satisfy themselves that the elections were free and fair. All of them have certified this. Elections to the Nagaland assembly were held last month.

The government has not allowed terrorists to disrupt the economic development of the affected areas. Even at the height of terrorism, Punjab continued to be the granary of India, producing a record wheat crop year after year. In J&K, the fall in revenue due to a decline in foreign tourists arrival is being sought to be remedied by encouraging greater domestic tourism.

In the 1990s, when terrorists prevented the holding of examinations in Srinagar, the government flew the students to Jammu at its cost to take the examination.

When they prevented businessmen from the rest of India from going to the valley to purchase their requirements of handicrafts and dry fruits, the government flew the vendors to New Delhi to enable them to dispose of their stocks.

The government has announced many packages for the economic development of the affected areas and has been trying to implement them despite the terrorist violence.

The government has refused any kind of concessions to terrorists resorting to intimidation tactics such as hijacking, hostage-taking, etc.

The government has refused to hold talks with terrorists until they give up violence, but began to search for a political solution through talks once the terrorists give up violence.

In the 1970s, a large section of the Naga hostiles and the Mizo National Front gave up violence and entered into talks with the government, which led to a political solution. But the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, led by Isaac Swu and T Muivah, has been holding on without reaching an agreement. It has, however, been observing a cease-fire for the last two years and holding talks with the government.

The government is maintaining an open mind to suggestions coming from all sections of J&K for improving the political and administrative set-up. It has recently appointed former home secretary N N Vohra to enter into a dialogue with all the elected representatives of the state on their demand for greater autonomy.

**India's external counter-terrorism policies**

India has been the victim of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism since the 1950s. In those years, Pakistan's ISI had supported the insurgent/terrorist groups in India's northeast region and provided them sanctuaries, training, arms and ammunition in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of the then East Pakistan. India's anxiety to stop this played an important role in its assistance to the people of East Pakistan to liberate themselves.

Since 1980, the ISI has been providing sanctuaries, training, arms and ammunition in Pakistan to religious terrorist groups operating in Punjab, J&K and other parts of India. It is also infiltrating the mercenaries of the Pakistani pan-Islamic jihadi organisations into India to promote cross-border terrorism.

India has taken up this issue with the US since 1992 and wants Pakistan declared a State sponsor of international terrorism under US laws and have punitive action taken against it. In 1993, the Clinton administration placed Pakistan on a watch list of suspected State sponsors of international terrorism for six months and forced Nawaz Sharif, who was then in power, to sack Lieutenant General Javed Nasir, then ISI's director-general, and other senior officers. This did not have any effect on the use of terrorism by the ISI.

Since 9/11, Pakistan's military-intelligence establishment has been collaborating with the US in taking action against Al Qaeda elements posing a threat to US nationals and interests. But it has not taken any action against cross-border terrorism directed against India and to destroy terrorist infrastructure in PoK and the Northern Areas.

After the attack by terrorists belonging to LET and JEM on the Indian Parliament in December 2001, India mobilised and deployed its Army on the border in response to public pressure for action against the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistani territory. In response to appeals from the US, UK and other friendly governments, India refrained from action against Pakistan. Under US pressure, Pakistan banned LET and JEM, but not HUJI and HUM, and arrested some of their leaders and cadres. They have since been released.

US officials themselves admit Pakistan has not implemented its assurances to the US that it would put a stop to cross-border terrorism in J&K. Despite this, the US is reluctant to act against Pakistan because of its cooperation in assisting the US in neutralising Al Qaeda elements who have taken shelter in Pakistan.

India has made it clear that there will be no question of any talks with Pakistan on the normalisation of bilateral relations till it stops cross-border terrorism, winds up the terrorist infrastructure in its territory and gives up the use of terrorism as a weapon against India.

India has also been greatly concerned over the use of Bangladesh territory by religious and non-religious terrorists operating against India. The non-religious terrorist groups continue to enjoy sanctuaries in the CHT. Of the religious terrorist organisations, HUJI has an active branch in Bangladesh. Some Al Qaeda elements, who escaped into Pakistan from Afghanistan, have found their way into Bangladesh, where they have been given shelter by HUJI.

There is active complicity between the ISI and its counterpart in Dhaka in this matter. The Bangladesh authorities have not been co-operating with India in taking effective action against the large-scale illegal immigration into India. However, keeping in view the otherwise good relations with Bangladesh, India has been trying to have these problems sorted out bilaterally at the political and diplomatic levels. But the progress so far has been disappointing.