

TERROR GROUPS ARE RECRUITING ENGINEER-TERRORISTS

US National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence opines that terrorists will conduct AI-powered cyberattacks and pair AI software with commercially available drones to create ‘smart weapons’.



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The recent issue of “Voice of Khorasan”, the Islamic State’s mouthpiece in Afghanistan and surrounding regions, had a story about Abu Bakr Al Hindi, “who was born in Kerala in a Christian family”. The Keralite figured in an IS (Islamic State) document titled “Know Your Martyrs”, which stated that Abu Bakr Al-Hindi was a Christian, who converted to Islam while working in the Gulf. According to the paper, he is the first Indian “Is-tishhadi” (suicide bomber) to be killed in the African continent. He was drawn to Islam and was recruited to the IS after hearing the lectures of Anwar al-Awlaki, the dreaded terrorist executed in a US drone strike in 2011. Abu Bakr Al-Hindi received military training in Sirte after arriving in Libya. In one of the suicide-terror strikes in which he participated, he is supposed to have attained martyrdom.

In March 2022, the Islam-

ic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) featured another engineering student from Kerala identified only by his assumed name, Najeeb Al Hindi, a 23-year-old MTech engineering student from Kerala. The article provided no other information on Najeeb, nor did it specify when he died or the circumstances surrounding his demise.

Another student, identified as Mir Anas Ali from Ambur in Tamil Nadu, who was studying third year engineering in a private engineering college, was arrested in Thirupathur for allegedly having contacts with terror outfit ISIS and planning a terror attack. He was arrested after a nationwide search in 29 locations was conducted by several intelligence units.

The United Nations warned in its 2020 Terrorism Report that there were a substantial number of ISIS terrorists in the Indian state of Kerala, stating that the ISIL Indian affiliate (Hind Wilayah), which was declared on 10 May 2019, has around 200 members. The report also mentions about Karnataka state as another source for recruitment by terror groups.

A National Investigation Agency charge-sheet filed in July 2020 in connection with the murder of Special Sub Inspector Wilson of the Tamil Nadu Police, revealed a strong association

between IS terrorists active and growing in the state, and the strong involvement of Kerala-based terror outfits.

Syed Muhammad Arshyan Haider, an electronics engineering graduate from the Aligarh Muslim University, whose family home is in Ranchi, was recruited by cleric Abdul Rehman Ali Khan, given a job in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, but ended up using his skills in an Islamic State team that designed suicide drones and short-range missiles that revolutionized the arsenals of terrorist groups. Since 2017, Haider, now 38, has been imprisoned in Turkey for his involvement in terrorist activities, but not many details have emerged about his life. It was during his stay in Saudi Arabia that he met his wife, ethnic-Chechen Belgian national, Alina Haider, and the couple later had a daughter.

Cleric Abdul Rehman Ali Khan was also interacting with Bangalore-based doctor Sabeel Ahmad, who had been deported to India from the UK after serving time in jail for concealing information about a terror plot in which his brother Kafeel Ahmed, an aeronautical engineer, had carried out a suicide attack on Glasgow airport in 2007.

The drones designed by Haider and his team re-



Damage caused by explosions as a result of a drone attack at the Jammu airbase, in Jammu on 27 June 2021. ANI

portedly operated upwards of 100 sorties a month, as the battle to recapture Mosul raged in 2017, targeting the Syrian Defence Force’s ammunitions supplies and logistics lines. Fifteen to sixteen strikes were being carried out in a single day. His close associate in this activity was a Pakistani national, Nihal Jaweed, a petrochemicals engineer.

In June 2021, terrorists used two drones to attack the Indian Air Force base in Jammu. The bomb blasts occurred in the premises of the technical area of the Jammu airbase. This was the first drone attack on an

Indian defence establishment.

Ahmed Murtaza, an IIT Mumbai chemical engineer, was involved in attacking two police constables, with a sickle at Gorakhnath temple in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, in April 2022.

The arrest of Ejaz Ahmed alias Taufique Raza, the emir of the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB), in August 2019, followed a tip-off from the Intelligence Bureau. A joint team of the Bihar Police and West Bengal Special Task Force (STF) nabbed him in Gaya. Ahmed, a chemical engineer, has been closely

associated with the JMB since 2008. He set up terror modules in Bengal and even set up modules in Bihar, Karnataka, and Kerala. He had mainly targeted migrant labour in these places and roped several of them into the modules.

On 25 March 2020, a group of IS bombers attacked a gurudwara—Har Rai Sahib—in Kabul, killing 25 Sikhs. The IS claimed that one of the terrorists responsible for the blast was Abu Khalid Al-Hindi. IS magazine, *Al Naba*, on 26 March published Al-Hindi’s photograph with a Type 56 assault rifle and making

the typical Tawhid one-finger salute.

On 27 March (Friday) 2020, India’s National Investigation Agency (NIA) said that Al-Hindi was Muhammad Muhsin, an engineering student from Thrikkarippur in Kerala’s Kasaragod district. However, intelligence sources discovered that Muhsin was killed in a drone attack in Afghanistan’s Khorasan province. Then he was identified to have hailed from Edappal in Malappuram district in Kerala.

Why is it that so many engineers are getting lured into joining terror organizations? Mohammed Atta, the 9/11 hijacker, was an architectural engineer. Two of the three founders of Lashkar e-Tayyaba, the Pakistani terrorist group, were professors at the University of Engineering and Technology in Lahore. Hezbollah, the Lebanese terrorist group, is full of engineers. Jihad al-Binaa, one of its branches, had more than 2,000 engineers.

The US National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence in its report of March 2021, opines that terrorists will conduct AI-powered cyberattacks and pair AI software with commercially available drones to create “smart weapons”. To be able to defend against AI-enabled threats, would need ubiquitous AI capabil-

ities and new warfighting paradigms. A joint report prepared by United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and the United Nations Counter Terrorism Center (UNCCT) in its report, titled, “Algorithms and Terrorism: The Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence for Terrorist Purposes”, has highlighted the potential risk of AI falling into the hands of terrorists.

As on January 2022, India has 3,500 engineering colleges, and 3,400 polytechnics, from where lakhs of students graduate every year. A large number of successful candidates are unable to secure proper employment, and can become an easy prey for foreign terrorist organizations and their affiliates operating in India. Many Western nations maintain discreet data about students, both, domestic and foreign, enrolling for sensitive educational programs. In India, we do not have such a system, because of which enforcement agencies are in the dark about citizens switching allegiance to foreign terror groups. This is a major lacunae that needs to be addressed immediately.

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