

Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?

Hiranmay Karlekar

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In recent years, Bangladesh has experienced an alarming rise in Islamist fundamentalism. The world began to take serious notice of this after the grenade attack on the Awami League's rally in Dhaka on August 21, 2004 almost succeeded in killing off the entire top leadership of the party. This book shows that terrorist acts such as this are part of a systematic attempt to destroy Bangladesh's secular and democratic political parties, as well as its vibrant intellectual and cultural life, and to convert the country into a hardline Islamic one. The author further argues that the headquarters of Islamic terrorism is shifting from Afghanistan to Bangladesh, which he describes as a 'soft' state with an ineffective government and police force, and which Islamist groups, with their organized and well-armed cadres, can easily dominate. Islamists are being systematically placed in key positions in government, and an Islamist state within a state is being built for the ultimate takeover of Bangladesh as the base for Islamist-including Al Qaeda and Taliban-operations in South and Southeast Asia. This lucid, hard-hitting and well-documented book analyzes in detail the circumstances-historical, social, cultural and political-which account for the rise of violent Islamist fundamentalism in Bangladesh, a country known for its cultural plurality and religious tolerance. The author also discusses the chances of halting the process, through a determined and well-strategized effort by those committed to keeping Bangladesh a moderate and tolerant modern Islamic nation.

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