

Radicalised abroad

5 students while studying at Monash University, Malaysia drawn into militancy by a Bangladeshi militant who fled home 5 years ago

RAFIUL ISLAM

Some Bangladeshi students, who got radicalised while studying at Monash University in Malaysia, were primarily brainwashed by a Bangladeshi man living there for at least five years, police said.

The man is believed to have started the process to radicalise them in late 2013. Police did not disclose his name but said he is a key militant who fled Bangladesh over five years ago.

In the beginning, he used to just visit the students on the campus.

But over the course of time, some of the youths

started to meet him to listen to his sermons in Kuala Lumpur, around 26-kilometre away from the university.

"At least once a month, they used to meet him in Kuala Lumpur," said an official of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, preferring anonymity.

The investigators came to know this by talking to some Bangladeshi students of the university and friends and family members of some radicalised youths.

The Daily Star too learnt about them after talking to several family members of some militants killed

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recently, and found names of five radicalised Bangladeshi youths who studied at the university.

One of the five was Nibras Islam. He was also among the militants killed in a commando operation launched to end the July 1 Gulshan café siege.

The militants butchered 20 hostages, mostly foreigners, by the time commandoes stormed the upscale eatery in the city's diplomatic zone.

The five Monash youths also include Tausif Hossain, who was killed along with "Neo JMB" coordinator Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury in a police raid in Narayanganj on August 27.

The three others -- Raiyan Minhaz, Salvi Ali and Shabab Masroor Salauddin -- are accused in a case filed with Shahbagh Police Station on February 9 under Anti-Terrorism Act. Nibras was also an accused in the case.

Police have identified some other students radicalised at Monash. Their names remain undisclosed as they were not accused in any cases, officials say.

Sanwar Hossain, additional deputy commissioner of DMP's counterterrorism unit, said police are investigating those being engaged in militancy during their stay abroad for study or job. "We have interrogated some of them."

THE CHANGE

Before being radicalised, the students were sports enthusiasts and had female friends. They used to hang around and have fun, said a DMP official.

But they began to change mostly from mid-2014 and started refraining from such activities, police said based on accounts of some Monash students.

"Instead of saying hi and hello, they now greeted us in Islamic ways," a police official quoted a friend of a radicalised youth as saying.

At one stage, they asked their friends and fellow students to avoid girlfriends and female classmates. Holding group meetings, they used to watch videos of Islamic State and al-Qaeda, officials say.

The radicals left Monash and came back to Bangladesh last year -- some completed study while some didn't. They then tried to radicalise friends and family members in Dhaka.

Police said the youths were part of "Neo JMB", an offshoot of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

"Neo JMB", which follows the ideologies of Islamic State, is far more dangerous than the mainstream JMB, investigators say.

However, it is not clear exactly when the youths joined the militant group.