



ASIA/BANGLADESH-Progress has been made in combating militant Islam

Dhaka (Agenzia Fides) - Bangladesh seems to be "on the road to recovery" from militant Islamism. According to a Report of the Asian think tank "South Asia Terrorism Portal," sent to Agenzia Fides, in 2011 there were no victims in the country due to the work of radical Islamist groups, compared to the 48 Islamic militants, four civilians and three policemen killed in 2010.

Also in 2011 the government arrested 576 militants belonging to various Islamic extremist groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami (Jei), Islami Chhatra Shibi (ICS), Jama'at-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Hut), and Hizb-ut-Towhid. The arrests were 958 in 2010.

Besides, in Bangladesh Islamic terrorists from India and Pakistan could be hiding and the government of Sheikh Hasina has handed over a large number of suspected militants to the Indian authorities. The government should be recognized for the effort to combat Islamic extremism in the country, note sources of Fides. Fr. Richard William Timm CSC, head of the Commission "Justice and Peace" of the Bishops of Bangladesh, agrees with this perception and, in a note sent to Fides, deems the Report "proper and acceptable". However, he stresses that some Islamic terrorist groups such as Jihad-ul-Horkat (HuJI) are presenting themselves on the political scene with new names, such as the Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) and as "Islam Pasand", preparing themselves for the forthcoming general elections.

On the other hand, the Parliament of Bangladesh, last June, chose to keep the status of Islam as a "state religion" (see Fides 22/06/2011). In response, thousands of protesters marched in the capital Dhaka against the adoption of an Islamic constitution on behalf of Parliament, chanting to the secular state. The government of Sheikh Hasina, after having publicly pledged to restore a secular ideology, was criticized for having "backtracked". But, as local sources of Fides note, the maintenance of the Islamic character of the Constitution seems motivated by political expediency: the government, was anxious to contain the protests by Islamist groups, after many extremists were arrested by the police. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 16/12/2011)