

## Countering terrorism

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### Ensuring peace and engaging change makers in Bangladesh (Part 1 of 2)

Terrorism is a great threat to democracy in today's world. It doesn't have a country, nationality or religion. All countries of the world are facing these challenges, and Bangladesh is no exception in that regard. Different terrorist groups, whose ultimate objectives are to destabilise existing social structures and stop growth, have recently attacked the peace loving people of this country.

Bangladesh is now a rolemodel to many countries, especially due to its remarkable progress during the era of Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). According to the Bangladesh Government MDG Progress Report 2015, it has met MDG targets like reducing headcount poverty and poverty gap ratio, reducing the prevalence of underweight children and attaining gender parity at primary and secondary education, among others.

#### So much to be proud of

According to World Development Indicators published in July 2015, Bangladesh is on its way to becoming a lower-middle income country, joining those with annual incomes ranging between \$1,046 to \$4,125. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the per capita income in Bangladesh rose from \$1,190 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013-14 to \$1,316 in FY 2014-2015. The current government had targeted to transform Bangladesh into a middle-income country under its "Vision 2021". In the classification committee meeting held on 17 June 2015, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) upgraded the overall country ratings for Bangladesh by one notch (category 5 from category 6) for the resilience of its economy and the high and stable growth for well over a decade, despite political upheaval and changes in external demand. This upgrade puts Bangladesh just behind India but ahead of other South Asian countries, such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar and Mongolia.

These global trends show that the country is heading towards a strong economy, with a firm place in the global system. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the 2015 Outlook Updated Report forecast that Bangladesh is headed in the right direction to secure 6.7% GDP growth in the 2015-16 fiscal year.

However, the heinous activities by various terrorist groups are creating an environment that will hinder the growth Bangladesh is enjoying. The government and the people of the country have shown 'zero tolerance' to terrorism. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that terrorism is taking different shapes, using

09/01/2017

Countering terrorism | Dhaka Tribune different technologies and taking advantage of the frequently changing dynamics of the modern world to brainwash innocent people. Bangladesh is no exception in that regard, though there is a big question about the direct presence of any international terrorist groups in Bangladesh. Without going into that debate, it is evident that our homegrown terrorist groups have somehow made linkages with those international terrorist groups, or are trying to cement themselves on the stage of international terrorism. This shift requires Bangladesh to rethink its existing counter terrorism mechanism.

#### **New reactions to an old problem**

While terrorism on this global scale and its impact on Bangladesh is more recent, terrorist activities themselves are not a sudden phenomenon. During the first half of the last decade, Bangladesh experienced a number of terrorist attacks, particularly in 2004 and 2005. The most significant of these was the August 21, 2004 grenade attack on an Awami League (AL) public meeting, which specifically targeted the AL leadership, including Sheikh Hasina, the then leader of the opposition. On August 17, 2005, around 500 bombs were exploded in 63 out of 64 districts, and the issue of terrorism in Bangladesh gained international attention.

The current government has made it clear, to our citizens and to the world community, that there is no place for terror. Different initiatives have received positive feedback, both at home and abroad. The initiatives to counter terrorist activities in the country include, but are not limited to forming a National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention, forming a National Committee for Intelligence Coordination, banning five major local extremist groups, and enactment of the Anti-Terrorism (amendment) Act 2013 in line with the UN's Action Plan on Counter Terrorism Strategy.

## **The heinous activities by various terrorist groups are creating an environment that will hinder the growth**

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So far, the success in combating terrorism in Bangladesh can be attributed to the efficient actions taken by different agencies, ministries and departments. The coordination mechanism within the government has become much better than before. The country has also strengthened its cooperation with other countries in the region, as well internationally. Traditionally, Bangladesh tends to follow the 'reactive approach' to counter-terrorism, where emphasis is given on examining the crime scene after a terrorist attack to find and arrest the militants responsible. While there is no doubt that the 'reactive and hard power' approaches using law enforcement agencies are vital to counter terrorist activities, the recent changing dynamics and shift in operational tactics of these terrorist groups or extremists also requires an emphasis on the proactive approach of counter-terrorism. Many current studies on security and terrorism suggest that a 'proactive people oriented' model, besides the 'reactive' and hard power' model, is necessary to eliminate the causes that are conducive to the spread of terrorism. This can be more effective in tackling this threat in the long run.

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