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Siamul Huq Rabbany is a skilled and self motivated Political Governance professional with more than 8 years of experience. Adept at providing advices on policy issues, analyzing political situations, conduct political economy analysis, strategic planning, negotiation, governance assessment framework development besides management, resource mobilization, monitoring and quality reporting expertise. Well versed and capable of discussing critical issues with the highest levels in both governance and government systems and academia maintaining professional settings again conserving open and comfortable discussion.



Introduction:

Terrorism is a great threat to democracy in today's world. It threatens democracy, development, economic and human growth and ultimately, peace. Terrorism doesn't have a country or religion. Rather, it goes across the boundaries of religion and nationality. All countries in today's world are facing challenges to counter terrorism. Bangladesh is no exception in that regard.

The country "Bangladesh" became independent through a massive bloodshed in 1971 with an ultimate goal to restore democracy, equity, prosperity and a peaceful society for all citizens of the country. Different terrorist groups, whose ultimate objectives are to destabilize the coherent social structure existing in Bangladesh and to stop the growth of the country, have recently attacked the peace-loving people of the country.

Bangladesh in today's world is name of a role model to many countries. The country has made remarkable progress during the era of MDGs. According to the Bangladeshi Government MDG Progress Report 2015, it has met MDG targets like reducing headcount poverty and poverty gap ratio, reducing the prevalence of underweight children, attaining gender

parity at primary and secondary education, among others. The report also highlights where the country need more attention. These includes hunger-poverty reduction and employment generation, increases in primary school completion and adult literacy rates, ensuring quality education at all levels. ¹

According to a World Development Indicators published in July 2015 showed that the country has moved up to a lower-middle income country - by joining those with annual incomes ranging between \$1,046 to \$4,125. Per Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the per capita income in Bangladesh rose from \$1,190 in 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 by its economy and the high and stable growth for well over a decade despite political upheaval and external demand. This upgrade puts Bangladesh just behind India but ahead of other South Asian Countries i.e. Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar and Mongolia.

However, the heinous activities by various terrorist groups are creating an environment to hinder the growth the country has made in last years with hard work and dedication. Bangladesh has recently graduated to the status of a lower middle-income country and intends to continue the current growth pace to achieve further. Foreign development cooperation, readymade garments and remittance have a great contribution to this achievement. The recent terrorist attacks in Bangladesh have killed citizens from countries including Japan, Italy and India. All are important partners of Bangladesh's development. Japan is the largest bilateral donor for Bangladesh. In 2015, the country disbursed USD366 million as foreign aid.

Italy, it is one of the important export destinations for Bangladeshi products, particularly readymade garments. In 2015, Bangladesh exported goods worth USD 1,170 million, of which USD 1,070 million constituted of apparels. Italy is also a source of remittance for Bangladesh. On the other hand, India's aid disbursement amounted to about USD 93 million, while exports from Bangladesh to India were worth USD 542 million in 2015.

The recent increase of terrorist threats is taken very seriously by the diplomatic community and foreign development partners. Some of them have given their officials the option to send their families to their respective countries, and many have already started to move their families out of Dhaka. Some are considering continuing their operation through regional offices, such as Delhi or Bangkok, which shows a lack of confidence on the security situation of the country. If Bangladesh becomes vulnerable to this violent nature of terrorist activities, it will have a severe impact on our stability, economic growth and most importantly it will destroy the peace.

The government and the people of the country have shown 'zero tolerance' to terrorism. Nevertheless, it is no doubt that terrorism is taking different shapes and frequently changing dynamics in today's world using different technologies and ways to motivate innocent people towards extreme radicalization. There is a political debate about direct presence of any international terrorist groups in Bangladesh. However, it is no doubt and supported by strong evidence that there are local terrorist organizations that have made linkages with international terrorist groups or upheld ideologies of other international terrorist organizations. For an example Ansar Al Islam, a pro Al Qaeda outfit, who wants to launch al-Qaeda in Bangladesh (AQIB) like Al-Qaeda in Indian Sub-Continent (AQIS). In addition, it is also evident that some individuals have also made connections with international terrorist groups. For an example pro IS group that is led by a Bangladeshi-Canadian, also known as Shaykh Abu Ibrahim Al-Hanif, according to Dabiq.

This is a new phenomenon in Bangladesh that requires the country to rethink about its existing counter terrorism mechanism and how best this mechanism can be sustainable, so that, with ill intention no group can motivate innocent, hardworking and peace loving citizens of the country.

Terrorism and Bangladesh:

Violent extremism has no space in Bangladesh, this has made clear several times to the citizen and to the world community by the current government. With strong commitment and different initiatives taken by the government the country has received many positive feedbacks from both home and abroad.

The violent extremism is not a sudden

phenomenon in this country. During the first half of the last decade, Bangladesh experienced several extremist violent activities. A series of attacks were mounted, particularly in 2004 and 2005; 21st August 2004 grenade attack on an Awami League public meeting, which specifically targeted their leadership, including Sheikh Hasina, the then Leader of the Opposition, on 17th August 2005, around 500 bombs were detonated in 63 out of 64 districts, and the issue of violent extremism in Bangladesh gained international attention.

We can see a firm rising tide of terrorist attacks in Bangladesh in recent years. Extremist groups have killed more than 30 individuals in Bangladesh since 2013. Since September of last year, an Italian aid worker and Japanese citizen were shot and killed by assailants, LGTBQ activists, and religious minorities have been targeted, including a Shiia cleric and Hindu priest. Jamaat-ul Mujahideen (JMB), an organization that is affiliated with ISIS, is alleged to be behind these attacks. ISIS has indeed claimed responsibility for many of these attacks, including the recent attack on Holy Artisan. At the same time, machete-yielding assailants have also killed several prominent atheist bloggers. These murders have been claimed by Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), which is linked to al-Qaeda. ABT also circulated a "hit list" of 84 bloggers in 2013; nine of these bloggers have since been killed. These attacks have had a distressing effect on moderate political voices, leading some to stop posting or even leave the country.

These groups likely operate on separate tracks, and are actually probably tacitly competing with one another for influence and recruits in the region. Up until Holy Artisan attack on July 2016, their attacks have been relatively unsophisticated, typically involving one or a couple of attackers armed with machetes.

The attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery which killed a number of foreigners including 9 Italians, 7 Japanese and 1 Indians, showed that terrorism in Bangladesh entered into a new phase, where attacks were becoming more sophisticated and highly coordi-

nated than in the past. This is of course worrisome for Bangladesh.

The current government has taken several initiatives to counter these terrorist acts in the country. In 2009, Bangladesh for the first time enacted legislation to combat terrorism, the Anti Terrorism Act 2009. The Act was amended in 2013 (Anti Terrorism Act 2013) to bring this legislation in line with the UN's Action Plan on Counter Terrorism Strategy and other resolutions. The broad language of the legislation provides several mechanisms by which Bangladesh can implement UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2178, which requires nations to address the foreign terrorist fighter threat. In 2011, the government formulated the "National Counter Terrorism Strategy". In August 2011, Bangladesh acceded to the Palermo Convention Against Transnational Organized Crimes.

Bangladesh also has enacted number of laws for preventing financing of terrorism and violent extremism, including the Money Laundering Prevention Act 2012 and the Mutual Legal Assistance Act 2012. In July 2013, Bangladesh secured membership of Egmont Group and became a member of the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering. In February 2014, owing to Bangladesh's successes, the Financial Action Task Force (an inter-state organization comprising 34 developed countries and two regional organizations) removed Bangladesh's name from their "grey list".

The success in combating terrorism in Bangladesh can be attributed by the efficient actions taken by different agencies, ministries or departments. The coordination mechanism within the government has become much better than before. To better coordinate efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism, the government in 2009 formed a 17-member "National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention", headed by the Minister for Home Affairs and comprising of representation from relevant ministries and security agencies. The government also formed an eight-member "National Committee for Intelligence Coordination,"

with the Prime Minister as the Chairperson, to coordinate between law enforcement and intelligence services about terrorism and violent extremism.

Since 2009, the government has banned five extremist outfits, namely, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HUJI-B), Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT), Shahadat-e-Al Hikma and Ansarul-lah Bangladesh Team (ABT). Apart from these known local groups, all terrorist groups designated as such by the UN Security Council Committee have also been banned.

In December 2015, Bangladesh formed a 600-member police unit specializing in combating terrorism and violent extremism. The "Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime" unit has been formed to combat terrorism, cyber crimes, terrorism financing and mobile banking related crimes. Bangladesh has performed much better than many South Asian countries in the 2016 anti-money laundering or terrorist financing index published in the first week of August 2016. The Basel Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Index, published by the Switzerland based Basel Institute on Governance (Basel Institute), ranked Bangladesh 54th in the world with a score of 6.4. In South Asia, only India is in a better position than Bangladesh with a score of 5.69.

Bangladesh is party to various counterterrorism protocols under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and is bringing the country's counterterrorism efforts in line with the four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Counter terrorism in Bangladesh:

Traditionally countries follow 'reactive approach' to counterterrorism, where much emphasizes are given to examine the crime scene after a terrorist attack to find and arrest the militants responsible for the attack. There is no doubt that the 'reactive and hard power' approaches using law enforcement agencies are vital to counter terrorist activities, however, the recent changing dynamics and shift in operational tactics of

these terrorist groups or extremists also brings importance to the proactive approach of counterterrorism. Many current studies on security and terrorism suggests that a 'proactive people oriented' model besides the 'reactive' and 'hard power' model to eliminate the causes that are conducive to the spread of terrorism can be more effective in tackling this threat in the long run. These studies emphasize more on engaging citizens in various counter terrorism activities and aware them to build resilience to radicalization.

We experience a shift in terrorist activities to make it more of a global in nature than national and also new strategies using social media and modern technology to operate, recruit and utilize the recruited. This new dynamics of terrorist threats also requires new strategies in the efforts to fight or counter them. This effort should include elements i. e. protection and promotion of standards of human rights, engage citizens to enhance their understanding of direct impact of terrorism on their lives and build resiliency to shape conducive environment that protect societies from being radicalized.

On the other hand it is also important to maintain a balance between factors of 'Who' and 'How'. So far we have been focusing on the 'Who' factor, but the time has come to study, examine and understand the 'How' factor. The people oriented model where citizens are engaged with discussions regarding process of violent radicalization can help to identify and examine social factors that promote situations when radicalization become violent. At the same time society has the potential to stop this radicalization process but they needs to be driven to the right directions and engaging them with de-radicalization activities can enhance people's capacity to fight radicalization elements within societies. This is not only important to understand how things happen but also important to understand how to stop or prevent growth of conducive environment under which such terrorist or extremist activities happen. To win the war against terrorism comprehensively, elements that are conducive to the spread of violent ideologies

must be identified and eliminated and engaging citizens as part of counter terrorism efforts can sustain this process for the long run.

The country saw a phenomenal rise in militancy in 2015 when the number of accused militant was the highest after 2005. The police record shows 597 persons were sued for terror links in 2015. Though from 2006 the government was able to curb extremist activities through various effective actions, mainly through the hard power approach by using law enforcement agencies. But the trend shows that militants have been growing in silence in Bangladesh. Recently the country has seen 2 new radical Islamist ideologies in Bangladesh that have build strong networks across the country and internationally and remained relatively unnoticed until 2015. One of these two groups (Ansar Al Islam) is mostly follow the ideologies of Al-Qaeda while another ideology is influenced by the IS. These groups are highly educated, efficient and according to the intelligence report these groups are maintaining close links with international terrorist organizations through their own made communication software. This indicates that, only concentrating effort using law enforcement agencies without identifying and examining factors that are helping these groups to grow in silence may only bring short term success in preventing violent extremism. Nevertheless, this doesn't undermine the role of law enforcement agencies and their contribution so far in fighting terrorism in Bangladesh.

The Holey Artisan attack in 2016 has brought a new dynamic to the extremist activities in Bangladesh as well as raised serious concern and many questions. The way the attack was operated and people involved with it has raised many questions to the traditional way of countering terrorism in Bangladesh. According to media and law enforcement report all six gunmen who were killed during rescue operation were local, well educated from prestigious schools and universities and from well-known and rich families of the country. Only one suspect was from madrasa background from eastern part of the country. In Bangladesh, these well-educated youths from

rich families were never even considered to be brutally violent to operate such attacks. This, however, showed motivational capacity and tactics of terrorist groups in Bangladesh to induce young citizens with modern and secular educational and family background to coordinate and execute a well-planned attack in the secured diplomatic enclaves and kill 20 hostages, mostly foreigners. In past only people from madrasa background were thought to be engaged with terrorist attacks. However, this Holy Artisan attack revealed the importance to examine and identify both push and pull factors that are supporting terrorist to motivate these well-educated and modern youth of the country.

There is no doubt that the traditional reactive and hard power approach is necessary to counter terrorism, nevertheless, the empowerment and engagement of citizen is also necessary and probably very important and most effective when the extremist groups changes their tactics particularly by using online tools and able to motivate people who were never thought to be motivated for such purpose. One of the main purposes of any extremist group is to raise the sense of insecurity among the citizen. The Holey Artisan attack though was handled very carefully by the law enforcement agency and military, increased the sense of insecurity among the citizens of the country. These citizens now need to be motivated to enforce de-radicalization process within societies and reduce the sense of insecurity.

Youth and extremist ideologies in Bangladesh:

It is evident that terrorists and extremists have shown a great adaptability to their survivals. They have also changed their strategies, operational tactics to increase the number of activists or supporters. However, one thing is common even within the changing dynamics. The extremists or terrorists are targeting meritorious young citizens of the country. Of course, there is a shift from madrasa to English medium schools to public, private universities and to universities abroad but they are all young citizens of

the country who are considered as future leaders.

With the changing global dynamics, the terrorists globally also changing their operational tactics and the use of modern technology are also increasing to continue their operations. Countries around the globe have started investing a lot to increase their intelligence capacity to fight and to stop terrorism to grow in their countries. This is also equally applicable to terrorist groups; they are also investing to increase their tactical capacity, which requires people from different quality and capacities. These days' terrorist organizations do not only need gunmen to fight battle but they need modern expertise that includes expertise in making bomb, expertise in using technologies and making different communication systems, they also need expertise in foreign languages, good planners to effectively execute their plan and more. This dynamic is making meritorious young citizens of the country vulnerable to violent extremism.

In Bangladesh although the traditional reactive and hard power approaches have shown great success, the shift in strategies and operational tactics increased the importance to rethink the strategy to root out extreme radicalization and terrorism from the society. The long-term solution to radicalization and terrorism lies in counter-radicalization efforts that takes a wide range of measures to educate the citizens and increase awareness about extremist ideologies particularly among the youth regardless of their social status, culture or education.

Mainstream religions or political parties never nurture terrorism. But still terrorism or terrorist groups grow in countries. Sometimes conducive environment grows in country that helps terrorism to raises. The conducive environment can grow for various reasons, for example social or economic exclusion, lack of economic opportunities, too much politicization etc.. The way to sustainably prevent such environment is to engage citizen, aware them capacitate them and motivate them towards de-radicalization process and the Young citizen of the country with huge potential to bring positive behavioral

changes can play a great role in this regard. About one third of Bangladesh's populations are young, engaging them in developing counter radicalization ideologies would be the best effective options for Bangladesh.

Like any other country in the world, young people are the most important social force in Bangladesh formulates energetic and dynamic sections of the society. They have important role to play in social development and formulating the society's current and future conditions. Youth force is the means through which the country replenishes its values and culture.

The terrorist or extremist groups wants to take advantage of this force. Young people who join terrorist groups are not always motivated by economic, social, cultural, religious and psychological reasons rather it is the terrorist groups who know better how to manipulate social, economic, cultural, religious, and psychological issues and use them as a source of propaganda.

Leaving families and the country behind and joining terrorist groups in other countries knowing this a suicidal action shows the capacity of terrorist groups to not only change the young people's attitude and behaviors through their ideologies but at the same time they penetrate in their perception world and make them not to think anything other than the organization/group's own targets and ideas.

Only bringing youths in a day long campaign against terrorism, or giving them lectures or only developing counter narratives is not going to solve the problem in a long run unless youths are constructively engage as change makers and empowered through proper education and trainings to motivate people and bring real changes to the future of the country. The country needs a long-term people oriented strategy where citizens are engaged, empowered and guided to counter radicalization, extremism or terrorism within the society.

Violent extremism and human rights:

We should not forget the issue of human rights while talking about counter terrorism. The human cost of violent extremism has been felt globally. Violent Extremism has a direct impact on human lives and rights beside its ability to destabilize government, undermine civil society, jeopardize peace and security and threaten social and economic development as stated above.

The importance of protecting human rights in creating effective counter violent extremism measures cannot be minimized. Significantly, failure to comply with international law and human rights norms may result in promotion of extremism as lack of respect for others rights make individuals feel excluded which makes them very vulnerable towards radicalization. The use of discriminatory and stigmatizing measures affect the rights of entire communities, and may lead to further marginalization and possibly radicalization within those communities.

Violent extremism is a curse to human rights. Modern human rights standards are rooted in four simple values: freedom from want; freedom from fear; freedom of belief; and freedom of expression. These freedoms form the core principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which sets out the fundamental elements of international human rights accepted by United Nations member states and elaborated in many subsequent human rights treaties. The UDHR is accepted as “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.”

The link between the guarantee of human rights and protection from violent extremism cannot be over emphasized. Combating and ultimately overcoming violent extremism will not succeed if the means to secure that society are not consistent with human rights standards.

Counter violent extremism measures need to embrace human rights standards to ensure their implementation does not undermine their very purpose, which is to protect and maintain a society where individual's opinions are respected. What is

certain is that human rights are not an optional extra or luxury to any counter extremism strategy; human rights must be at the core of that strategy.

Thus, fulfilling the purpose of counter violent extremism measures can only be successful in the long run when human rights are promoted and protected. At the same time, countering violent extremism poses grave challenges to the protection and promotion of human rights. As part of state's duty to protect individuals within its jurisdiction, all measures taken to combat violent extremism must themselves also comply with state obligations under international law, in particular - international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law.

Countering extremism or terrorism engaging youth for promoting and empowering them in protecting human rights would bring an enormous change within community and build resilience to sudden terrorist attacks.

Conclusion:

Bangladesh is a country full of potentials. Despite strong political differences, lack of strong governance mechanism the country is moving upwards, the economy is growing fast. The progress the country has made during MDG era is remarkable the result of which is graduation to a lower middle-income country. The country has also made a great contribution in shaping the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the challenge is to continue this pace of growth to become a middle-income country and not to fall in the category of those countries that got stuck in the middle-income trap.

Violent extremism and terrorism, if it continues to grow, will destroy the existing growth momentum and the consequences will be almost impossible for the country to tackle. The country is passing through a transition time and has yet to ensure a proper governance mechanism with effective, efficient and strong institutions, which make the country vulnerable to extreme shocks like terrorism. It will stop the inflow of readymade garment orders, which is

the backbone of the economy, development funds will further shrink, foreign workers may leave the country and its international image will be damaged.

It is time the country needs to consider its effort to sustainable counter terrorism. While law enforcement agencies will continue its duties to fight against terrorism, it is also important to engage citizens and bring them on board to various discussions about social factors and motivations for both the radicalization and de-radicalization process. Youth, while mostly vulnerable to terrorism are also the most powerful tool the country has that can be utilized to bring social awareness through massive positive movements. Youth as the change agent and next-leaders of future should get opportunities to discuss the future of the country with policy makers and make contributions in shaping its overall outcome.

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