

FIGHTING TERROR

What Bangladesh needs to do

International terrorism expert Professor Rohan Gunaratna came under the spotlight after announcing in the just-concluded Regional Conference of Police Chiefs in Dhaka that the attack in Holey Artisan café was carried out by the Islamic State (IS) and not by the neo-JMB, which is what the Bangladesh police have been claiming till date. In a long interview, he explains to The Daily Star's M Abul Kalam Azad the logic behind his claim and how countries pay a high price for denying such facts.

How would you assess the current situation of religious extremism in Bangladesh?

Since the terrorist attack in Holey Artisan café on July 1 last year, the police counter-terrorism unit has done a remarkable job in dismantling the terror cell led by Tamim Chowdhury who was the IS leader in Bangladesh. But IS influence has spread widely in Bangladesh and terror threats have been persistent. Since 2004, some 3,000 Islamist radicals were imprisoned. If released without rehabilitation, they will get back into society to "infect" others with their extremist ideals and carry out attacks. It will take Bangladesh years to deradicalise and rehabilitate those who have already been infected with the radical ideology. More programmes should also be taken by society to prevent radicalisation in society. Although IS cells have been dismantled, there are other networks and it is important for the police counter-terrorism unit to continue its fight. If police do not constantly target

the world. The mentality and philosophy of the locals who carried out the Holey Artisan attack matched that of IS.

When IS mounted attacks in Bangladesh, killing Italian citizen Cesare Tavela in September 2015 and Japanese Kunio Hoshi the next month, I was asked by the Bangladesh government for my opinions about the killings. I clearly said that these attacks were mounted by IS, not by JMB. Back then, the Bangladesh government responded by saying that at the political level, leaders did not want to admit that IS is active in Bangladesh. At that point, I told them that the IS propaganda and news outlet, Amaq, has stated that the two attacks were conducted by its operatives. It was thus foolish on Bangladesh's part to not admit IS' presence here. The Holey Artisan attack was a big shock for Bangladesh but not for us. We alerted the government many times about the possibility of terrorist attacks. It is very important to assess the threat and educate and prepare the police, military and the intelligence agencies



Professor Rohan Gunaratna

Kunio were murdered, future attacks could have been prevented. Because of these denials, the radicals grew stronger, planned and prepared for attacks and executed them. Political leaders and governments should not

themselves have rallied against it. The Bengali culture is a natural antidote against extremism. But, unfortunately, the Holey Artisan attack had to take place. Before that, terrorists were able to carry out their heinous activities in the name of religion. After the attack, people were exposed to the true face of terrorism. I believe that the attack demonstrated the true brutality of terrorism and mobilised people against it. Thus, people need to be constantly mobilised, the counter-terrorism unit must be empowered, and of course, political direction is vital. If that can be done, then the threat of terrorism can be contained. But to eliminate terrorism, the government will have to do much more than that.

You are calling them IS operatives while Bangladeshi police term them home-grown radicals. What is the difference?

It is absolutely wrong to say that there is no IS presence or that the Holey Artisan attack was carried by home-grown terrorists. There is nothing "home-grown" about that attack. The attackers did not reflect anything home-grown. They received a foreign ideology from Iraq and Syria, and they were influenced to kill and die. JMB and Huji, B never killed foreigners, Christians, Buddhists and Hindus. The ideology of killing and dying for religion was brought here by Tamim Chowdhury, who is originally from Bangladesh but had links with Canada and Europe. He had direct contact with IS. Did the idea of killing people of other faiths and the Holey Artisan café attack come from within Bangladesh? The answer is no.

Radicalisation is taking place in different ways in society. What should Bangladesh do to check it?

A robust, wide-ranging counter-radicalisation programme should be launched targeting schools, universities, madrasas and youth organisations. Different ministries, social and cultural bodies, and the private sector must be involved with this. This way, we can counter terrorist propaganda and educate citizens with the right message. The government must invest more effort here.

While some awareness building initiatives have been taken to fight extremism, we are yet to see comprehensive de-radicalisation, disengagement and rehabilitation of extremists. Do you think this is a big drawback in the fight against the evil forces?

Bangladesh has about 3,000 radicals in prison who have to be de-radicalised and rehabilitated. One approach is to engage religious clerics. The other is educating the public through schools and engaging teachers in this task. Social and familial rehabilitation is also important to reconnect these radicals with their families, as radicals are often isolated from these bonds. Psychological rehabilitation and counselling to eliminate incitement, hatred, and intolerance towards other

religions and culture, and the use of creative arts within the Bengali culture should also be considered. Recreational rehabilitation through sports, vocational rehabilitation through the engagement of private sectors to give them jobs when they come out of prison, and after they are de-radicalised, would also be useful. Thus, a comprehensive strategy must be developed for de-radicalisation and rehabilitation.

Bangladesh was advised to introduce these measures a long time ago. But it has not started the programme yet. Community engagement too was started late. Bangladesh can build one of the world's best community engagement programmes because Bangladeshi people are creative; the government can reach out to the youth and get them involved in building harmony among people of all religions. For this, you need stronger leadership and a clear direction.

Many countries, including Singapore, have launched a comprehensive de-radicalising and rehabilitating programme. How successful have they been?

This programme has been developed in more than two dozen countries and has been considerably successful. However, rehabilitation alone is not enough as they can always be radicalised again. But it is the best tool to bring people back into the mainstream.

Extremists are now using the cyber world to motivate and recruit people. What should Bangladesh do on this front?

Governments worldwide are not really succeeding in fighting online propaganda and extremism. There are less than 100 counter-extremist websites while there are more than 20,000 extremist websites. This is something the government must focus on. It should engage NGOs, schools, universities, madrasas, educational institutions and youth organisations to fight the online wave of extremism. Young people under 20 spend over half their time in the cyber space. That's how IS was able to attract 30,000 youth fighter from all over the world to join their "cause" in Syria and Iraq.

IS is now losing ground in Iraq and Syria. Do you think the terror outfit will now weaken around the world?

al-Qaeda numbered to around 2,500 to 3,000 main operatives. After being dispersed from Pakistan and Afghanistan, this operatives spread across Asia, North Africa, parts of the Middle East and Europe, and then gradually launched their attacks. Eventually, al-Qaeda became a global terror network. Similarly, IS too will get dispersed from Iraq and Syria. To achieve a true global character, its members are going to do what al-Qaeda did. IS is going try to expand its influence to other countries, including Bangladesh. Every country, especially Muslim majority countries, must develop strategies to prevent them from succeeding in doing exactly that.



Army personnel secure the Holey Artisan Bakery in Gulshan on July 2, 2016. On July 1, militants attacked the eatery and brutally murdered 20 hostages, including foreigners.

the networks, the threat of terrorism will grow. I want to say that the terrorist threat has not diminished. It continues to grow because terrorists are being recruited through the internet. Bangladesh has done a lot to counter the ideology in the physical space. Now it also needs to counter the ideology that is infecting citizens through the internet. Bangladesh government should take that seriously and continue supporting the police and intelligence agencies to counter all networks.

Coming to the point of IS presence in Bangladesh. On what basis can you claim this?

The IS's strategy is not to send Arabs or foreigners to come and attack here, but to do it with local recruits. This is their strategy everywhere else around

accordingly. Identifying the threat is half the solution.

Bangladesh's denial of IS' existence is not unique. Many countries denied the existence of terrorist threats and have ultimately paid a heavy price for it. For example, when I alerted the Nepalese government that they were on the threshold of a Maoist insurgency, they reacted angrily. But later on, once my assumption was proven correct, they apologised. In the case of Myanmar, we made a prediction three years ago that the country was on the threshold of a Rohingya insurgency and, indeed, some attacks took place last year. Unfortunately, Bangladesh today, even after the Holey Artisan attack, refuses to acknowledge the presence of IS. I believe Bangladesh has more to gain by admitting the truth. Had Bangladesh admitted the truth after Tavela and

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bury their heads in the sand. Rather, they should identify the problem or the problem will get bigger.

Don't you think that fighting extremism effectively should be the ultimate goal, regardless of whether IS is active or not?

Bangladesh can be a model in delivering operational response against terror for three reasons. The first is that the Prime Minister herself has empowered the police, military and intelligence agencies to hunt for radical groups and dismantle them. Secondly, Bangladesh has created a specialised counter-terrorism unit to fight radicals and that's a big achievement. Lastly, Bangladesh is going to start engaging the community to counter extremism. But, more importantly, the Bangladeshi people are very peace-loving; they don't like extremism and terrorism and they

QUOTABLE Quote

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
AMERICAN POLITICIAN, DIPLOMAT, AND ACTIVIST

Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Velocity
- 6 Angel hair, e.g.
- 11 Electrician, at times
- 12 Fire remnants
- 13 They're up before dawn
- 15 Hydrocarbon suffix
- 16 Took the title
- 17 "— we there yet?"
- 18 Audio download
- 20 Operated
- 21 Pub pint
- 22 Church group
- 23 Convergent
- 26 Grows weary
- 27 Computer symbol
- 28 Shark feature
- 29 Devilfish

DOWN

- 1 Use a broom
- 2 Cabaret sight
- 3 Blundered
- 4 Twisty fish
- 5 Builder's material
- 6 Palette stuff
- 7 Cart puller
- 8 Oscar winner
- 30 Site of cheap seats
- 34 Rock's Brian
- 35 Sort
- 36 Music's Yoko
- 37 One slow to develop
- 40 Perfect
- 41 Fortright
- 42 Designer's asset
- 43 Wards (off)
- 9 Patio's kin
- 10 Gives approval
- 14 Romantic flower
- 19 James of "The Godfather"
- 22 Go under
- 23 Like a cabin at night
- 24 Ottawa anthem
- 25 Phoenix NHL team
- 26 Irritate
- 28 Plummet
- 30 Preacher's book
- 31 Like some numerals
- 32 Without break
- 33 Labors
- 38 Have dinner
- 39 Mine yield

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

M	A	C	A	W	D	I	N	S	
O	Z	A	W	I	D	A	H	O	
R	U	D	E	R	G	A	M	I	
E	R	E	S	K	I	R	S		
S	E	T	T	H	E	T	A	B	L
S	E	T	T	H	E	S	C	E	N
P	I	N	U	P	S	H	A	I	S
A	M	O	S	D	U	O			
C	A	D	E	S	P	V	I	N	
A	N	O	D	E	D	I	C	T	
L	I	N	E	D	C	U	T	E	
T	E	N	S	T	E	A	R	Y	

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

WHAT ARE YOU DOING STANDING OUT HERE, GENERAL?
I'M TRYING TO MAKE UP MY MIND.
GO OFF! NOT WALKER!
OFFICERS' CLUB

SHOULD I STAY OUT HERE AND GET SOAKED, OR GO IN THE BAR AND GET SLOSHED?

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

GO, DOOFUS, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO BE FOR HALLOWEEN?
I'M GOING AS MY FRIEND TRENT.
WE TRADED BASEBALL CAPS, SO HE'S GOING AS ME!
A BALL CAP IS NOT A COSTUME!
OBVIOUSLY, WE ALSO TRADED UNDERWEAR.
EWWW!!!