

Bangladesh tackles terrorism best in region

Says 2019 Global Terrorism Index

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Bangladesh last year had 70 percent less deaths in terrorist attacks than the previous year, says a new global study.

Bangladesh is the most successful South Asian country in countering terrorism, it said.

The country was ranked 31 last year, while it was 25th the year before, according to the 2019 Global Terrorism Index published recently.

"Bangladesh had the largest improvement of any country in South Asia. It recorded 31 terrorist attacks and seven fatalities in 2018, a 70 percent reduction in deaths from the prior year," the index published by the Sydney-based Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) showed.

The report mentioned that five of the eight terrorist organisations that perpetrated the attacks in 2017 recorded no incidents in 2018, including the Islamic State in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh law enforcers deny the existence of IS in Bangladesh.

Afghanistan ranked the top position while Pakistan and India ranked five and seven respectively out of 138 countries, the report said.

It also mentioned that six out of seven South Asian countries improved on the 2018 Global Terrorist Index, with Bangladesh recording the largest improvement, followed by Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, India, and Bhutan.

"The situation is improving day by day due to the multifaceted approaches to counter violence extremism. People are now more aware and we are also very active. The government's zero tolerance policy against terrorism helps contain the situation," Monirul Islam, chief of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Afghanistan is the only country in the region to have dropped from the 2018 index, recording more attacks than the rest of the region combined.

The report said fatalities from terrorism in Afghanistan increased by 59 percent last year, from just over 4,650 to nearly 7,400. Taliban was allegedly responsible for at least 971 attacks that killed 6,100 people. At the start of 2018, the Taliban was active in 70 percent of Afghanistan's territory, it said.

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FLIRTING WITH DANGER ... High-voltage electric cables go through an under-construction building on BT Road in Chandpur town. The authorities say they will soon take action against the owner for constructing the building illegally and ignoring the risks. The photo was taken on Wednesday afternoon.

PHOTO: ALAM PALASH

Reaping benefit is a challenge

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from Murshidabad's Dhulian to Tripura's Sonamura via Rajshahi.

Officials hope this and other river routes would be operational soon.

PORT USE

The two countries signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) regarding the use of Chattogram and Mongla ports in 2015, after years of demand from India. Subsequently, the countries signed an agreement last year and a standard operating procedure (SoP) during Hasina's visit in October.

According to the SoP, goods that reach Chattogram and Mongla sea ports, will be carried by road, rail, and water ways to Agartala (Tripura) via Akhaura; Dawki (Meghalaya) via Tamabil; Sutarkandi (Assam) via Sheola, and Srimantpur (Tripura) via Bibirbazar.

The SoP covers waterways, roads and railways. It will allow the landlocked Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura states to access open sea trade routes through Chattogram and Mongla ports.

Under the 2015 river protocol, vessels were allowed to carry a maximum of 2,000 tonnes of cargo. But now larger ships would ply the waterways, increasing the trade volume and reducing logistic costs.

Tripura will be connected to Chattogram Port through the Feni Bridge over the Feni river in Sabroom town of South Tripura and Ramgarh in Khagrachhari. India is constructing the roads and railways to Sabroom as part of its massive development works in the northeast, according to Indian media.

Shipping ministry officials said a secretary-level meeting between the two countries next month will decide when to begin using the routes and what would be the fee for using the port.

INFRASTRUCTURE UNDER INDIAN LINE OF CREDIT

India has so far provided three lines

of credit (LoCs) worth \$7.5 billion, and majority of the money is meant to develop infrastructure needed for the connectivity through Bangladesh.

For example, Bangladesh is in the process of constructing a bay container terminal in Chittagong Port, further developing Mongla Port, and building four-lane highways for Ramgarh-Baruerhat, Cumilla-Brahmanbaria-Sarail, and Ashuganj river port-Sarail-Dharkhar-Akhaura land port routes.

Under the Indian LoCs, Bangladesh is also establishing an inland container river port in Ashuganj, doubling the rail lines from Khulna-Darshana Junction and upgrading the metre gauge lines to dual gauge lines from Parbatipur to Kaunia.

The government is also establishing Indian economic zones in Mongla, Bheramara and Mirsarai and an IT Special Economic Zone in Keraniganj. Implementation of a motor vehicle agreement among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal will further enhance trade and connectivity, with Bangladesh at its helm.

CAN DHAKA REAP THE BENEFIT? Dhaka may charge fees for the Indian goods shipped through Bangladesh and can increase its export volumes too, experts said.

Under the SoP, in Chattogram and Mongla ports, "Movement of cargo will be exempted from customs duties or any other taxes other than administrative operational fees and other charges prescribed by the inter-governmental committee for transit of goods."

Such fees and other charges shall be admissible as per the provision of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade unless parties agree to more favourable terms as part of a special trade agreement, reads the SoP.

Shipping ministry officials said a secretary-level meeting scheduled for next month will decide what charges will be set for using the ports and the routes. The meeting will decide whether the charges will be similar

to the fees applicable for the Kolkata-Ashuganj-Akhaura route or higher.

The officials said they are deciding how much Bangladesh may charge before the meeting next month. For port use, they are considering whether to impose ten types of charges.

Under the river protocol, Bangladesh charges Tk 277 for each tonne of freight. Of this, Tk 50 and Tk 34 are charged for security and anchoring at the jetty.

The commerce ministry had formed a core committee on fixing charges of transit and transshipment. Its proposal to charge at least Tk 1,058 for each tonne was not accepted by Bangladesh government.

Therefore, officials of both the countries later fixed the charges at Tk 277.

Mohammad Yunus, research director at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, who was a member of the committee, said, "If the recommendation is implemented, Bangladesh will benefit."

"We need to see what we are gaining because the infrastructure is being built with our money," he told The Daily Star.

Prime Minister's Economic Affairs Adviser Dr Mashiur Rahman, however, pointed out that the recommendations were not based on empirical studies.

Shipping ministry officials said local transport companies would benefit when the goods are transported through the country.

Economics Professor Selim Raihan of Dhaka University said the country's low ranking in ease of doing business should be improved drastically to attract foreign investment.

"If we cannot draw investments to the economic zones, other countries will use our roads, ports and other infrastructure to boost their exports while we will lose," he added.

The economic zones should be connected to the roads, rail and waterways that are being developed with the Indian credit, he observed.

11-POINT DEMAND

Water transport workers go on nationwide strike

STAR REPORT

Water transport workers have enforced a countrywide indefinite strike from midnight last night to press home their 11-point demand, including implementation of the pay scale of 2016.

The workers under the banner of Bangladesh Nounjan Sramik Federation (BNSF) organised a protest rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, said a press statement.

Speaking at the rally, BNSF leaders alleged that a vested quarter was trying to foil the workers' movement by intimidating them in many ways. Some workers came under attack from criminals in the last couple of months, they added.

The leaders received death threats from criminals who had attacked the organisation's central office recently. These incidents have extremely angered the workers, said the press statement.

Amid such a situation, the BNSF leaders announced the strike. Their demands include trial of the attackers; stopping extortion and robbery in

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What fishermen get from it?

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11 members.

Despite this claim, the organisation has not yet got the affiliation -- front or associate body -- of the ruling party.

Besides, the Matsyajibi League's website mentions the AL central office on the capital's Bangabandhu Avenue as the organisation's head office. However, a visit to the building revealed that there is no such Matsyajibi League office there.

In such a situation, the organisation is going to hold its 4th council at the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan today, with a hope of becoming an associate body of the AL.

The event is scheduled to be inaugurated by the party's General Secretary Obaidul Quader at 10:00am.

With the slogan "Oikya Karma Pragati", Matsyajibi League was founded in 2004 in a bid to unite the country's fishermen community. The organisation leaders claim fishermen, despite all their hard work, have always been the most deprived community in the country.

Sayedur Rahman and Abdul Basher were the organisation's first president and general secretary, despite having no links with fisheries.

Currently, Matsyajibi League is being led by Narayan Chandra Chanda and Sheikh Asgar Noskar. Narayan is a ruling party lawmaker from Khulna-5 and a former school teacher while Noskar owns a fishing ship.

Narayan got engaged in Matsyajibi League politics in 2016 when he was the fisheries and livestock minister, said sources in the organisation.

Currently, there are allegations that many Matsyajibi League leaders take bribes to influence government authorities so that they give leases of waterbodies to the people of their choice. The leaders also allegedly receive extortion money from fish markets across the country.

Sheikh Asgar Noskar, member secretary of the convening committee of Matsyajibi League, rejected the allegations.

He blamed it on three government-registered organisations -- Matsyajibi Samity, Matsyajibi Samabay Samity and Khudra Matsyajibi Samabay Samity.

Of the three, Matsyajibi Samabay Samity and Khudra Matsyajibi Samabay Samity are registered with the Department of Cooperatives.

Noskar, however, admitted that members of these three organisations are also ex-officio members of Matsyajibi League.

Contacted, a senior official of the Department of Fisheries told The Daily Star that when the ministry leases out any waterbody to any applicant, it consults with Matsyajibi Samity leaders about the applicant's identity. Only fishermen are allowed to take the waterbodies on lease, he said.

"We discuss with Matsyajibi Samity to scrutinise the identity of the applicant," said the official, wishing not to be named.

Meanwhile, talking about today's council, Noskar said they hoped the AL high-ups would make an announcement recognising his organisation as an associate body of the party.

Plan first made

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Judge Md Majibur Rahman acquitted one accused after finding him not guilty in the carnage that left 22 people, including 17 foreigners, dead in the capital's Gulshan on July 1, 2016.

The court mentioned Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury, a Canadian of Bangladeshi origin, as the mastermind and coordinator of the chilling siege.

In late 2015, the tribunal said, under the leadership of Tamim and top JMB leader Sarwar Jahan Manik, the neo-JMB started recruiting students of English medium schools, madrasas, government and private universities, imams, and youths from underprivileged families.

Sarwar was killed in an anti-militancy raid.

"With the help of modern technology, Tamim Chowdhury made youths interested in joining neo-JMB by showing them impressive documents on so-called... versions of jihad," read the verdict.

Everyone involved in the café attack had one common goal -- create panic among the public by killing foreigners to establish jihad and draw the attention of IS, it said.

So, the roles of the main planner, coordinator, attackers, and others involved cannot be regarded as bigger

or smaller than each other, the verdict said.

"By participating in the efforts of the Holey Artisan attack with a common intention, the accused seven and the attackers committed the same crime," it added.

The seven death-row convicts are -- Jahangir Hossain, Aslam Hossain Rash, Hadisur Rahman, Rakibul Hasan Regan, Md Abdus Sabur Khan, Shariful Islam Khaled and Mamunur Rashid Ripon.

Explaining the acquittal of Mizanur Rahman, the verdict said it was not found from the testimonies of any of the witnesses that he was the Boro Mizan mentioned by one of the convicts, Jahangir Hossain, in his confessional statement.

Jahangir in his statement said Chhoto Mizan had collected the bomb-making materials from Boro Mizan of India.

The verdict further said none of the co-accused had mentioned in their confessional statements that Mizanur Rahman knew about the attack or was involved with it.

Five young militants, who participated in the attack, were killed during a rescue operation by army commandoes.

Political rivalry

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Talking to journalists, Public Prosecutor Shafiqul Islam yesterday said six accused, including Kader, gave confessional statements before magistrates.

A total of 59 prosecution witnesses were examined in the case. The trial began on April 8 last year and ended on October 31 this year.

Citing the verdict, Shafiqul said it was a pre-planned murder.

Expressing satisfaction over the verdict, Liton's wife Khurshid Jahan Smrity said, "We want prompt implementation of the verdict. Kader Khan was a political rival of my husband and he had planned to eliminate his rival."

Fahmida, plaintiff of the case, said she expected that the lower court's verdict

would be upheld by higher courts.

Kader's lawyer Advocate Abdul Hamid said his client "became a victim of the situation" and he would file an appeal with the higher court against the verdict.

Police had picked up Kader from his house in Bogura town on February 21, 2017.

Two days later, law enforcers filed a separate case against him under the Arms Act after recovering a pistol, a magazine and ammunition stashed under a mango tree at his Sundarganj home.

A Gaibandha court on June 11 this year awarded Kader with life term imprisonment for possessing the firearm and an additional 15 years for possessing ammunition.

Ex-OC Moazzem sentenced to 8 years in jail

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Moazzem was also fined Tk 10 lakh, defaulting on which would add a further seven months to his prison sentence. The family of the victim shall get the fine as compensation, the tribunal said in his judgment.

The court found the OC guilty under sections 26 and 29 of the Digital Security Act which deal with filming someone without consent and circulating a video of someone on social media without their permission.

It handed the maximum punishment allowed under the offences; five years for filming madrasa student Nusrat without her consent and three years for circulating the clip.

The sentences will be served concurrently.

The judge observed that Moazzem committed the crime while holding a very responsible office as an OC. On the other hand, Nusrat was only 18 at the time of the crime.

Furthermore, the offences were committed when the girl went to the accused's office seeking legal help against sexual assault, allegedly committed upon her by her principal and "subsequently while she was fighting for life in the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College & Hospital", the judge observed. Therefore, he should be given a severe punishment.

Soon after the verdict was given, the victim's younger brother Rasedul Hasan Raihan told journalists that they were satisfied and hoped the verdict would be upheld in the higher courts.

Moazzem's lawyer said they would appeal with the higher court against the judgement, adding that they did not get justice.

Barrister Syed Sayedul Haque Sumon and also the complainant of the case, expressed his satisfaction over the verdict and said the judgment had been a warning to all the OCs who thought themselves the "Zamindars of the police stations".

The judge said OC Moazzem admitted that he recorded Nusrat's statement for the sake of investigation, but he denied circulating it and said the clip was stolen from his phone.

The judge said the OC was a powerful person and no person would have the courage to copy anything from his cell phone without Moazzem's permission, the judgment added.

The judge said he had watched the video and saw Nusrat trying to cover her face with her veil, but the OC asked her to remove it as he continued filming her statement without her permission.

And the OC passed the video clip to Atiar Rahman Sajol and a deputy inspector of police, the judge cited in his verdict.

Nusrat, a student of Sonagazi Islamia Senior Fazil Madrasa in Feni, was set on fire on April 6 -- allegedly for refusing to withdraw a sexual assault case filed against the madrasa's principal Siraj Ud Doula.

After fighting for her life for five days, she died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on April 10.

The same day, Moazzem was withdrawn from his OC post, as Nusrat's family alleged that he was not cooperating with them. Moazzem was suspended on May 8 for his negligence in duty over Nusrat murder.

A video clip of the then Sonagazi OC asking Nusrat humiliating questions went viral on social media, drawing widespread criticism.

On April 15, Barrister Sumon filed the case against Moazzem under the Digital Security Act and the court directed the Police Bureau of Investigation to probe the matter and submit a report to it by April 30.

PBI found Moazzem's involvement with the incident and submitted the report on May 27. The court then issued an arrest warrant against him.

Later on June 16, police arrested Moazzem from near the High Court area when he went there seeking anticipatory bail in the case. On July 17, the tribunal framed charges against Moazzem in the case.

Special Public Prosecutor Nazrul Islam Shamim appeared for the state.

A Feni court on October 24 sentenced all the sixteen accused, including Siraj Ud Doula to death for killing Nusrat.

POOR NAVIGABILITY

15 cargo vessels stuck in 2 rivers

Movement hampered for four days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Fifteen loaded cargo vessels have remained stranded in the Padma and the Jamuna for at least four days due to poor navigability.

Officials of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) said the vessels got stuck as they defied orders.

BIWTA Assistant Director Sazzadur Rahman, also in-charge of Baghabari port, said, "We strictly ordered cargo vessels not to take over 6-foot load during the dry season [starts in November and stays until April]. However, most of the vessels carry between 10- and 12-foot loads."

Around 60-kilometre naval route from Aricha to Baghabari is vulnerable for vessel movement during the dry season, he added.

According to the BIWTA official, two to three dredging machines headed to rescue the stranded vessels and they would start their operations soon.

Each vessel that gets stuck needs between Tk 8,000 and Tk 10,000 to unload and reload its cargo, he said.

STAR WEEKEND

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week to dive deep into the fault lines of our state and society, to challenge our biases, to think more critically about the books, films, and art we experienced, and to promote political thought at a time when it is easier and safer to be apolitical. It has been a trusted companion to our readers, navigating them through the week that was. It has produced some of our best journalists and columnists and certainly some of our most memorable stories.

The world is transient and perhaps that is what makes it so exciting. To align ourselves with change, we are continuously evolving so we can serve our readers better in newer ways. A constant source of change in almost all aspects of our lives today, regardless of generational differences, is technology. In light of these changing times, it is imperative that we make informed choices and embrace the prospect of new ideas and innovations.

To serve our readers and help them navigate this technological landscape, we bring you **Toggle**. It is a drastic change from the norm that our Friday readers have been used to date - but rest assured, The Daily Star will keep putting its weight behind the thorough analysis, investigative reporting, and art and literature criticisms that Star Weekend has been known for all these years. Friday issues of our main paper will incorporate all these stories, elements and familiar writers for your serious reading.

To all our readers who've been with us throughout the years, thank you for all the love and support. You've all been wonderful. We look forward to being there for you and you being there for us as we embark upon a new adventure.

Thank you,
MAHFUZ ANAM
EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Hafizuddin

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The HC, however, ordered them to surrender to the trial court concerned within the time.

The bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain and Justice Md Riaz Uddin Khan came up with the orders after hearing two separate petitions filed by the BNP leaders seeking bail in the case.

The three other accused are BNP Standing Committee Members Mirza Abbsa and Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, and Legal Affairs Secretary Barrister Kayser Kamal.

The four accused appeared before the HC bench during the bail hearing.

Police filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station after two policemen were injured during a clash with a group of the BNP leaders and activists demonstrating at the Supreme Court premises for the release of their party chief Khaleda Zia.

Several vehicles were vandalised during the clash.

Advocate Khandker Mahub Hossain, Advocate Zainul Abedin, Barrister AM Mahub Uddin Khokon, Advocate Kamrul Islam Sahal and Barrister Ruhul Quddus Kazal appeared for the accused petitioners, while Deputy Attorney General Harunur Rashid represented the state.

Besides, Mokbul Hossain, former general secretary of Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Hawkers' Dal (Malibagh-Mouchak unit), was also granted bail hours after the law enforcers had arrested him.