



PEACE
S U M M I T

TACKLING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND REFUGEE CHALLENGES
IN BANGLADESH

PEACE SUMMIT

MARCH, 2018

- OVERVIEW
- GROWING TRENDS OF FEMALE JIHADISM IN BANGLADESH
- GENDER PERSPECTIVE OF VE
- SOME INSIGHTS OF INDONESIA'S NATIONAL ACTION PLAN
- ROLE OF MEDIA TO PCVE
- REFLECTIONS

OVERVIEW

Bangladesh experienced a significant increase in terrorist activities in 2016. The Government of Bangladesh has articulated a zero-tolerance policy towards terrorism, made numerous arrests of terrorist suspects, and continued its counterterrorism cooperation with the international community. Both al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and ISIS claimed responsibility for a significant number of the attacks that took place in Bangladesh. Terrorist organizations used social media to spread their radical ideologies and solicit followers from Bangladesh. Bangladesh was featured in multiple publications, videos, and websites associated with ISIS and AQIS.

ISIS claimed responsibility for 18 attacks in Bangladesh in 2016, the most significant being the attack on July 1 on the Holey Artisan Bakery, an upscale restaurant in the diplomatic enclave frequented by the expatriate community. The five Bangladeshi attackers killed 20 hostages and two police officers using guns, explosives, and sharp weapons. The hostages were mostly foreigners, including nine Italians, seven Japanese, one U.S. citizen, one Indian, and two Bangladeshis.

On 11th March, 2018 Preneur Lab and EMK Center jointly hosted a Peace Summit at EMK Center exploring country's challenge and future direction to prevent and counter violent extremism. The speakers of the Summit discussed their thoughts and experiences regarding the counter violent extremism issues and how the digital landscape of CVE and counternarratives in Bangladesh looks like.

The Summit brought together 16 expert speakers and 32 participants from different countries to share experiences and ideas on how we can work together to counter violent extremism where Ms. Rakhshanda Rukham, Founder of Begum.co was the moderator of the Summit.

The Summit involved a series of roundtable discussions and video conferences to deep dive key issues and discuss insights-driven, innovative approaches to withstand violent extremism. It consisted of two sessions: Gender Perspective of VE and Role of Social Media in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. By sharing ideas and building powerful connections, a network was built to overcome the current situation of Bangladesh.

The civil society has a key role to play in regenerating peace in Bangladesh and finding positive approaches to face the present challenges. Some insights of the discussions are given below:

GROWING TRENDS OF FEMALE JIHADISM IN BANGLADESH

From the perspective of Bangladesh, there were several militant attacks took place in different areas of the country. After the attack of Holey Artisan, there were approx. 2 militant attacks and 16 militant dens have been found in total. Bangladeshi women being used as new means for executing these Islamic militant attacks. The extremists members, now, engaged their wives. They have been aiding their husbands' militant activities. Women participation can be seen frequently in VE acts. Bangladesh had witnessed its first female suicide bombing during a police raid at a militant hideout in Dhaka December, 2016. The Bangladesh Police discovered first female unit in Neo-JMB on July 21, 2016. On July 24, police and counterterrorism officials in Bangladesh detained four female operatives of the terror group from Masumpur, a town on the outskirts of Bangladesh's Rajshahi division. They were undergoing military training to carry out attacks in Bangladesh. The police also recovered crude bombs, explosive materials, and extremist literature from their possession.

Similarly, on August 16, four more female jihadists were apprehended from Dhaka. Likewise, seven female militants were held in September, some of whom were waiting for directives from the Neo-JMB high command to take part in fedayeen or suicide attacks. According to investigators, the top leadership of the Neo-JMB aims to recruit more females to manage its organizational activities. Given the rapid rise of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) in Bangladesh, the discovery of female jihadists is a significant development. The trend indicates deliberate efforts by the violent-extremist organizations to engage young women and girls as potential recruits.

GENDER PERSPECTIVE OF VE

Contrary to popular perceptions, terrorism in Bangladesh is no longer limited to the men. Women's roles in jihadism in Bangladesh have evolved from being wives of jihadists and raising their future generations to more prominent roles. For instance, they are increasingly participating in combat activities and facilitating the transmission of operational details. They are also leveraging social media to radicalize, mentor, and recruit other would-be female jihadists. Al-Qaeda confines the role women can play in jihadism. ISIS outwardly encourages and recruits women to take up arms against its enemies.



“Indonesia’s National Action Plan on the C-PVE tailored gender perspective in the pillar of radicalization, i.e. by developing it into in-prison deradicalization. We must make sure the attendance of women or female law enforcement officers in dealing with post women terrorist combat in prison.”

Irine H Gayatri
NAP consultant, UN Women Indonesia

Arguably, female jihadists offer operational advantages such as their ability to get closer to targets without being suspected. Women are usually considered as soft and physically weak and are subjected to relaxed security checks as security forces are generally dominated by males who cannot always conduct rigorous physical checks on females. Furthermore, as they do not have any conform to any profile that would trigger law enforcement alarms, their radicalization is less noticed by people in their social surroundings. At the strategic level, female attackers gain more publicity and media attention as they generate greater psychological impact on the adversary or the target audience.

The involvement of women in violent extremist movements has long existed. Nevertheless, it is often underestimated or neglected by the literature and policy makers. This has been mainly due to the misconception that violence is a feature attributed and carried out by men. Most recently, however, women are increasingly been recognized as actors of violence in conflicts, acting as perpetrators, sympathizers and combatants, either in favor or against violent extremist groups.



“People who are promoting VE are constantly changing their strategies, their approach, their mode and everything. Women are even being recruited by the VE group. Besides, women are also the part of peacemakers. So whenever we are talking about VE we have to make it gender responsive.”

Mayeeda Choudhury
Programme Specialist, UN Women Bangladesh

The socio-economic empowerment has been changing due to patriarchal structures, traditional or cultural norms that hamper women from exercising their rights and fully participating in the public and private spheres of their communities. Therefore, in these societies women tend to be marginalized in a number of domains, including in resource allocation, access to labor markets as well as education and political decision-making.



“When we talk about [terrorism] violence, we always think about male dominated perspective. However Violent Extremism is the area where women are not only victims rather in some cases we found them as active participants.”

Rumana Amin
Governance and CVE adviser, USAID Bangladesh

From the deep down of some case studies, women are not just victims and but also influencers. From the perspective of the society of Bangladesh, women are considered to work at home and bringing up their children. Thus these gaps are forming between men and women. Actually there are very less documentation and research on men and women and how men are engaging as like fathers, brothers, peers. Women are accused like this is their job to bring up their children carefully so that their children cannot be radicalized. Women should not be the only responsible one to bring up their children. It should be kept in mind that how these things are going to affect the whole society and how the rest of the society will deal with it.



“There is very little documentation or research around engaging men and how they can play a greater role in tackling VE. A lot of projects on PVE and CVE are focusing on women nowadays, since they are highly relevant in their roles in engaging with families. But it is also necessary to consider if this is again creating more gendered responsibility on women again to ensure the development of children into better adults. We have to

Tasaffy Hossain
Founder, Bonhishikha Unlearn Gender

Women are also subjected to sexual violence. The truth is this world is not only for men. The very dangerous dimension of violent extremism is those radicalized people are against of women education and their development. They bomb girls school and stop girls from going school. They dictate how women should be dressed. Because they feel challenged in women empowerment. So this is why women should participate in PCVE.



“There is a gap and misunderstanding in the society. There are no soft skill and hard skill training for madrasa girls. The teachers are also not well trained. They need more support from the civil society and Government. We can help these girls to combat VE.”

Musammat Badrunnesha
CEO, Empowerment and Human Development Society

Another point is, there are around 40,000 Madrasas in Bangladesh. Madrasa has one of the most challenging education systems. The terrorists groups misinterpreting the messages of Quran. Many of the students in Madrasa, only memorize the Quran, not even understanding the meaning of it. Most of the students rely on their teachers. If the teachers are not properly educated then they won't be able convey the right messages to the students. There are lack of well educated teachers. They mostly conduct the classes in memorizing system. So the government needs to engage more education leaders for developing their education system and needs to make a bridging link with the Madrasa education system. They need joint effort and collaboration to develop their teaching and learning system as in the quality of education.



“On VE issues women are not interested and active. Only 8% of women know about the risk factors of violent extremism.”

Kumrun Nahar
Project Coordinator, Tech for Peace, Preneur Lab

UN Women is working for the prevention of violent extremism and having women participating in the prevention. Women are the first victim when there is act of VE. As, women are being very sympathetic to these fundamentalist VE act, they feel like they are already left out and thus they are joining VE acts. In the future, people are predicting the rise of this number. Either the father or the husband can influence women to be a part of this. In many cases, religious practises gradually graduates a person in such a way that the person get convinced that this life on the earth is nothing. This is how this penetration is going around.

SOME INSIGHTS OF INDONESIA'S NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

Indonesia's National Action Plan (NAP) on human rights serves as a strong platform to eliminate and prevent violence against women. NAP contains 4 sections ① Prevention ② Deradicalization, ③ Rule of Law and ④ National and international cooperation. All pillars provide a platform for women's full participation to ensure all citizen work towards a peaceful and secure Indonesia. All 4 pillars need a gender responsive approach. For example, in the area of prevention, women in the communities have a unique ability to detect early warning signs of intolerance and violent extremism, listening to their voices is essential.

Gender perspectives are important in Indonesia's NAP of C-PVE. The global impacts of the terror not only subjected women as victims but also they are potentially become actors that can deliver peace. Women also prone to become perpetrators of VE. Therefore in the Indonesia's NAP of C-PVE, the prevention pillar put a program that address women as part of early warning system in the community. In Indonesia officially in 2016, there were 13 ex terrorist women in prison. And now they are receiving treatments also. According to Indonesia's NAP of PCVE, it included the pillar geneticalization. So in Indonesia because of the multi ethnic and multi cultural background the majority of the society disapprove the violent extremism or actions. In the pillar of prevention, women are the part of development in the early warning system in the community which is tailored from the women groups. The women and the community leaders also pay attention to the particular NAP for youth where youth is the backbone in countering narrative of violent extremism. In the pillar of prevention, the particular action plan conducted by women and also by youth. It is important to make sure the attendance of women or female law enforcement officers in dealing with post women terrorist combat in prison. Therefore women will not feel unsafe in telling stories etc. To other pillars of NAP radicalization prevention is also in the law enforcement and legislation empowering pillar. As a whole, the NAP is dependent on several principal which is explicitly stated in the document that presents human rights principal, gender equality principle, good governance principle where women facility has the first complementation document with 32 representative of Indonesian ministries. Another working group of women in violent extremism has work in grassroot for sometime which is also supported by donor communities like Australia.

ROLE OF MEDIA TO PCVE

With over 13.2 Million users using social websites, citizens of Bangladesh have turned to platforms like Facebook, Youtube and Twitter to live stream or share their lives in real time with the click of a button. Social media has made communication process more easier. With the power of internet and social media, citizen of Bangladesh can instantly share ideas and communicate with the world in a fraction of a second. Not only that, citizen embraced the virtual world with family pictures, videos and personal information. As a result, more and more people are utilizing the platforms to share photos and videos of criminal activity.



“Through the social media particularly through the Facebook we are becoming very narcissistic. The young people who have been radicalized and who have been involved in VE whether its men or women, they are already very much influenced by gender stereotypes in society from childhood about male domination, use of power and masculinity. To address VE, we have address deconstruct old values about masculinity, including the shift from the Islamic doctrines of Wahabism and move towards Sufism and the traditional secular values of people like Lalon Shah.”

ASIF MUNIER

Development Professional, Theatre Activist, Rights Activist

This live streaming or provoking videos of various crimes i.e (rapes, child exploitation, murder, violent extremism) shared hundreds of times before Facebook removed the post.

Nowadays, pretty much everyone carries a cell phone and all of those cell phones have cameras and video cameras on them and the ability to access social media platforms. That is why there has been an increasing amount of rate of crimes being live streamed out to the world. Nowadays, extremists are also thriving on social media. And the primary target of these actions are youth.



“Our entertainment Media is recently avoiding the true crisis of life to stay out of any controversy. This practice is giving a picture to the already socially alienated youth that life is totally fair and perfect. When these youth are facing reality and conflict in their real life, they became unable to handle it with a cool and thinking brain and exclusion and violence become the only solution. Portraying the conflicts of life in media in a realistic perspective may improve the capacity of the young generation the courage and capacity to accept and handle the conflict in a thoughtful and peaceful way with inclusion and tolerance.”

Sirajul Hossain
CEO, DNET

Extremist activists are very emotional. Whatever logic they have been given, they will come up with their emotional thoughts. It can be understood by going back to their earlier age and have to understand the social construction at their viewpoint. Media also avoids troublesome life of human being. Media can take this role like how to tackle it. Some medias are also publishing fake news in a very attractive and imitated way which is not really expected.



“Media can create impact both positively and negatively. Precisely when we are talking about PVE or CVE, there is a significant role of social media. Sometimes media try to create panic over the society which should be avoided.”

Shidhartho Goushami
Project Associate, UNDP



“Face-to-face social interaction is very important. It creates a safe space where the audience feels comfortable in sharing their perspectives and asking questions openly.”

Iman Badwan
Communication Officer, Hedayah Foundation (UAE)

In addition, when media comes to the discussion, everyone takes it in both positive and negative ways. Media doesn't mean only radio and television. It has different forms. This is a traditional kind of thing that people are really dependent on media. These days, the news get viral faster in social media rather than the newspaper or television. Media use those kind of news which will be popular to the audiences or the viewers. Nowadays, the way media is responding, sometimes it backfires.



“Content making and marketing should be prioritized to provide information to the vulnerable communities. It is apparent that the extremist organizations are using social media as a driver of extremist contents. Hence, we should use the same social media to provide Bangla Counter Narratives and use the blessings of latest technologies to provide user centric contents.”

Syed Naimul Hossain
Head of Innovation, Preneur Lab

VE groups conduct the organization and activation of their activities on social media, since it is an easy and free way of reaching members at large and over large areas. It is believed that 90% of terrorist activity on the internet is conducted on social media. VE may be explicitly organized and then activated through social media channels in a centralized way. For VE organizations to achieve these ends, social media monitoring is immensely needed. Social media is also used as a channel for circulating information, resources, and best practices for VE activities. Different VE groups use a wide and constantly evolving range of social media platforms and others open or closed channels to conduct their activities. A good number of CVE practitioners should ideally be aware and competent in using social media as well. Often these platforms are used in combination, as like recruitments identified on public social media platforms and invited to join private forums for instructions

NB: Some important blogs to know about how Facebook works for countering terrorism:

- 1) <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2017/06/how-we-counter-terrorism/>
- 2) <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2017/10/news-feed-fyi-new-test-to-provide-context-about-articles/>

REFLECTIONS

In the final discussion, the organizers concluded by focusing on what the future goals should be, to protect the nation. The discussion was very impactful as everyone shared individual notion about the most pressing issues of Bangladesh.



“Our society is not actually diverse, but divided. There is no interaction between these fragmented groups. The voice of the urban youth is very diverse, based on geography, education, and income status, and that needs to be bridged.”

MK Aaref
Director, EMK Center

The Peace Summit participants were mostly the people who work on related to this field to counter VE. It brought the organizations together for rebuilding a peaceful society to deal with violent extremism in Bangladesh. The organizers believe that this kind of events should be arranged again and again for involving everyone against violent extremism and for peace building.



Session Moderator

Rakhshanda Rukham
Founder, Begum.co

 **PRENEURLAB**

Preneur Lab is a technology for social good organisation, which aim to make technology aided solutions to combat social problems and create opportunities for young people, women and entrepreneurs. Preneur Lab CVE activities can be found in www.preneurlab.com/cve and www.peace.digital



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