

## **Mumbai attacks and Bangladesh**

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After 62 hours of shooting and carnage, the terror attack that brought the heart of Mumbai to a standstill ended as Indian commandos killed the last gunman on 29<sup>th</sup> November..

The Mumbai attacks on 26<sup>th</sup> November surpassed all other attacks in their intensity, scale, coordination and execution. The attacks occurred in ten places one after another including in three posh hotels.

26/11 is India's 9/11. Some say when terrorists targeted the luxury hotels, they were attacking symbol of wealth and privilege of India's global ties and power. Luxury hotels were transformed from a calm travel destination to a place of terror and death.

The terrorists attempted to disrupt the frenzy rhythm of daily life in Mumbai, the financial and film capital, populated by 14 million people. It is a port from where majority volume of exports and imports is conducted.

Large industrial companies, such as, Reliance, Tata and a raft of state-owned firms like Air India and State Bank of India have headquarters in the city.

*What impact on Bangladesh?*

A sense of insecurity in the region has been created by the Mumbai attacks because it may spill over in any country in South Asia including Bangladesh.

The war on terrorism is a shadowy war or a war of "hide and seek". They are non-state actors that are elusive. The principal problem of terrorism is that they have a global reach, estimated to be in 60 countries.. The terrorists are groups, without countries or uniforms and may lie low for years before they act.

There is a qualitative difference between terrorists of 60s and those of 90s. Modern terrorist groups have been recruiting members with expertise in fields such as communication, computer programming and engineering. They also recruit biologists, chemists and physicists as well to make weapons. The Mumbai attacks demonstrate the operational capabilities of terrorists and their choice

Bangladesh has open and porous border with India and terrorists may easily sneak into Bangladesh to create havoc in the lives of our people. Bangladesh has been a victim of terrorism in the past.

In the country, terrorists are ideological groups with political ambitions. They may include extreme leftwing members and Islamic militants. They have established connections with criminal gangs, foreign extremists, and smuggling network. They have easy access to lethal arms and weapons and sources of funds are difficult to trace.

According to a report, in Bangladesh 1027 organised criminal gangs exist and 12 outlawed groups-some of them consist of extreme militants to strike fear and terror among people.

One of the first manifestations of terrorism appear to be a deadly attack on August 21, 2004 by extremist groups on an Awami League rally in Dhaka that was addressed by its chief Sheikh Hasina, a former Prime Minister. Sheikh Hasina had narrowly escaped in this attack but was wounded. Many of her party colleagues however were not so lucky and lost their lives.

In August 2005, more than 300 explosions took place simultaneously in 50 cities and towns across the country including the capital Dhaka. At least two people have been killed and 50 others injured in a series of small bomb blasts across Bangladesh. An outlawed Islamic group, Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh, reportedly carried out the attacks. Six JMB kingpins including its leader Shaikh Abdur Rahman were put on trial and later hanged on March 29 2007.

The Islamists of Bangladesh had suffered a jolt when the six top leaders of JMB were executed. Reports say this execution has not fully uprooted the terror outfit. The large cadre base created by these executed leaders is reportedly still intact. These cadres are now trying to regroup under the second rung leadership.

In May 2007, several small bombs exploded at three railway stations in the country. It is reported bombs went off at stations in the capital, Dhaka, the northern city of Sylhet and the south-east port of Chittagong, causing panic but leaving just one person with minor injuries. Railway officials said leaflets and an inscribed metal plate, likely to be linked to the bombings, were found at two of the stations.

There are media reports that the sleeping cells of terrorists are active in different shapes and forms in many places within Bangladesh. Reportedly some of these groups are also trying to send their volunteers to places like Afghanistan for training. This strategy of sleeping cells has made the job of law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh more difficult.

Against the background of Mumbai blasts, Bangladesh government may have to closely monitor the border movement of people, smuggling of illegal weapons and unauthorized entry of people. Furthermore the authorities may alert their agencies how terrorists are financed and by whom.

One of the most important aspects of counter-terrorism is the capacity building of agencies to identify the infrastructure, and survival network of extremist organizations. Mass awareness of impact of terrorism, media participation and a partnership between authorities and people need to be established.

Strict vigilance of people seems to be the answer of counter-terrorism because terrorists live within the community. The best source of intelligence on terrorist cells has tended to come from within localities and neighbourhoods.

The deadly Mumbai attack has underscored the need for vigilance for people and government on the surreptitious nature of activities of extremists in the country to prevent terrorist attacks. More importantly many analysts say that terror feeds on poverty.

The President of the 56th General Assembly Dr. Hang Seung Soo (elected in September 2001) in 2002 quoting the Mexican poet Octavio Paz said rich nations could no longer afford to be “islands of abundance in an ocean of poverty”. The consequences he said would be the poorest nations becoming the “the breeding ground for violence”.

Some may not agree with this proposition of Dr. Hang but the bottom line is that global security is inextricably linked with the health of the global economy. The root causes is argued to lie in deprivation and poverty. Right policies, good governance and participatory democracy may reduce the chance of terrorism in our country.