The question of terrorism in Bangladesh for a variety of reasons has become highly controversial and has impacted harshly on Bangladesh’s image abroad. This image has been shaped from the very onset of the government’s 5-year tenure by the prism of 9/11/2001 which profiled Bangladesh as one of the terror-risk states, among 26 Muslim countries, so identified. A variety of reasons, some self-serving, have painted, indeed tainted, Bangladesh in a glaringly negative light. To understand Bangladesh’s fight against terrorism, it is important to review the evolving scenario in Bangladesh within the framework shaped by this criticism. This will be on three planes: international, regional and domestic. This criticism is a vital backdrop to the challenges Bangladesh faces in tackling terrorism.

I. THE EMERGING SCENARIO OF TERRORISM IN BANGLADESH

A. The International Plane

On the international plane, triggered by 9/11/2001, an orchestrated media campaign sought to project Bangladesh as a militant Islamist state, steeped in fundamentalism and bent
on churning out radicals in the mould of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The alleged objective was to establish Islamic rule in Bangladesh.

Bruce Lintner’s articles “Cocoon of Terror” (Far Eastern Economic Review of April 2002), “Bangladesh: Breeding Ground for Muslim Terror” and “Religious Extremism and Nationalism in Bangladesh” (19 August 2002) set the stage. Madrassas were singled out as the spawning ground for radical militant Islamists. It was asserted that some tens of thousands of Madrassas exist in Bangladesh, many of which are led by veterans of the “Jihad” against the Soviets in Afghanistan. (Congressional Research Service: “Terrorisms in South Asia”, 9 August 2004).

Books such as Zachary Abuza’s Militant Islam in South East Asia (Published 2003) and Rohan Gunaratna’s Inside Al Qaeda (published 2003), inter alia, established the alleged connection between Bangladesh and Al Qaeda and the recruitment of Myanmarese Muslims (Rohingyas) to fight in Afghanistan, Kashmir and Chechnya. It was alleged that an Al Qaeda affiliate called Harkat-ul Jihad-al Islam (HuJI) was founded by Osama Bin Laden’s associate, one Fazlul Rahman, who had joined Bin Laden’s World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders in 1998.

This was followed by a spate of articles that sought to cash in on the “milk cow”, of what was recognized as a vitriolic human-interest story filled with enough spice, to make reporters salivate in the quest for journalistic awards. Alex Perry in his article “Deadly Cargo” described in dramatic detail how 150 hooded and bearded Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters fled Afghanistan in December 2001 aboard the M.V. Mecca to disappear into the mist in Bangladesh. Southern Bangladesh, in the wake of the Bali bombings, was described as a “haven” for Jihadis from all nations. Twenty six miles of tunnels were claimed to be the repository of a huge arsenal of weapons, black money and rabid Islamist fighters.
A Channel IV journalist and photographer in tow entered Bangladesh in October 2002 with false documents to film a documentary to be aired in December 2002, projecting the rise of militant Islam in Bangladesh. The text was pre-scripted. All they sought was to superimpose visual images of bearded “Zealots” (Allah’s party) to conform to the text.

Stories about alleged Bangladeshi involvement in terrorist incidents began to grow exponentially, especially in our neighbouring country, including the most recent Mumbai bombings. The pattern was replicated in each case. The bogey of potential terrorist involvement was raised and publicized. The subsequent disclaimer was neither seen nor heard. Thus, it was reported that French intelligence led to the arrest of 16 Bangladeshis on 4 December 2003 in Bolivia for allegedly planning to hijack a plane to attack the United States. They were later released for “lack of evidence”. Similarly, eleven Bangladeshis were arrested in Saudi Arabia on 14 August 2003 on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack. The accusations have not led to indictments but have created an aura of suspicion and mistrust.

Eliza Griswold, in an article in the New York Times magazine in January 2005 entitled the “Next Islamist Revolution”, projected the role of Bangla Bhai (Siddiquil Islam) leading “awakened Muslim masses to try an Islamist revolution in several provinces of Bangladesh bordering India”. Griswold asserted, *inter alia*, that “thuggery and violence were a constant feature of Bangladesh’s political life accompanied by political and religious feuds”; that military leaders in Bangladesh seeking legitimacy moved away from the principle of secularism to a return to Islam”; that the political breach between the two main parties was filled by religious parties (Jammat-e-Islam and the Islamic Oikya Jote (IOJ)) and that Bangla Bhai was linked to outside elements, including Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Griswold’s
conclusions touch on some elements of the truth but not the sum of it.

Meanwhile, a spate of articles sought to negate the record of governance in Bangladesh. Aravind Adiga, writing in *Times* magazine in two articles separated by five months, bracketed Bangladesh in a devastating indictment of failure. On 12 April 2004, in an article entitled "State of Disgrace", he pinpointed three elements: (i) Law and order sliding into an anarchy; (ii) corruption operating within a structured hierarchy of a medieval feudal system; and (iii) a brand of intolerant Islam that was spreading. He concluded by saying that this had pushed Bangladesh into being the "most dysfunctional state in South Asia".

In a follow-up article on 6 September 2004 entitled "A democracy shaken", Adiga highlighted the following elements: - (i) Islamist terrorists are operating with the tacit support of the government; (ii) communalist, bigoted and anti-democratic forces are rife; and (iii) confrontationist politics in Bangladesh has entered un-chartered political territory. This article was written in the wake of a series of grenade attack incidents, including the attack on the Opposition leader’s rally on 21 August 2004.

These articles reflect a heady mix of hype and hoopla. They represent part of the truth but not the whole truth. They are rife with potential and possibility, exaggeration and interpretation, half-truths and innuendo. They are tailored to conform to pre-fixed notions. Unfortunately, these have become the hallmarks of Bangladesh’s ties to terrorism. The reality is all too often ignored.

They have sparked, however, a series of questions that need to be probed both in the context of terrorism and the socio-economic setting of Bangladesh. Some of the specifics include the following:
Are the BNP leadership and its coalition linked to extremist groups?

Is the rise of “pro-Islamic” militancy due to a climate of impunity resulting from the alliance with religious parties?

Is militancy linked to the Qawmi Madrassa’s?

Who are the Jihadi groups in Bangladesh fighting against?

Are militant groups in Bangladesh linked to international networks like Al Qaeda?

What is the source of funding of Madrassas and NGOs alleged to be fundamentalists?

Has Bangladesh entered into a mode of denial of the real extent of the Islamist terrorist menace?

B. The Regional Plane

Terrorism has had a profound impact on inter-state relations in South Asia, raising the quotient of mistrust and suspicion. It has been the single most important factor for the sharp deterioration of Indo-Pakistan ties. Accusations of cross-border terrorism and state terrorism continue to constrain moves towards constructive engagement. In the East, terrorism in the guise of separatist insurgents has become a major bone of contention between India and Bangladesh. The “Maoist” insurgency in Nepal has had repercussions on India-Nepal relations. The terrorist acts of the LTTE have also introduced an element of uncertainty in South Asia where cross-spillovers of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities continue to bedevil relations.

In Bangladesh, surrounded as it is by India, the focus remains spotlighted on its largest neighbour in terms of extremely sensitive security issues. The context is best illustrated by elements that appear in the Indian media, some
of which appear to have the tacit support of the Indian government. These include the following:

1. That South Asian countries themselves have spawned, encouraged, aided and abetted terrorism in neighboring countries making border areas the familiar scene for terrorists including sanctuary (base camps), training and financial support.

2. That Bangladesh intelligence agencies have joined hands with the Pakistan ISI to stoke ethnic insurgency and separatism in the vulnerable North East with the goal of keeping India internally engaged.

3. That Bangladesh is gradually turning into an intolerant monolithic Islamic State with the support of the Jamaat-e-Islam and religious parties at home and Al-Qaeda abroad and that the current ruling party has turned a blind eye (created a climate of impunity) for rising Islamic militancy in the country.

4. That in Bangladesh there were over 50,000 Islamic extremists belonging to more than 40 militant groups, receiving military style training in 50 camps all over Bangladesh. Madrassas were mushrooming nation-wide from the 64,000 that existed in 1999. Only 7,122 of these were government-funded. In recent years also a multitude of radical Islamic Organizations have sprung up funded by Islamic charities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (Hiranmay Karlekar, "The New Afghanistan"). Karlekar stated that he was not suggesting a Taliban style takeover of power in Bangladesh but rather that the country risks being used as a base for various indigenous and international terrorist groups because it is "a soft state with ineffective governance and an inefficient police force".
5. That sophisticated arms and ammunition from Southeast Asia are being channeled through Bangladesh, with the logistic support of intelligence agencies, to separatist rebels in North-East India (ULFA, NDFB, ATTF, NLTF, etc). Many of these rebels have taken refuge in Bangladesh and are directing operations from bases there.

6. That Bangladesh has turned a deaf ear to requests to expatriate rebel leaders and continues to deny the presence of Indian insurgent groups or to dismantle their camps.

7. On account of India’s geographic proximity to Bangladesh and the alleged presence of 20 million Bangladesh immigrants in the border states of India, the rise of Islamic terrorism is considered to pose a serious threat to India’s long-term security and territorial integrity. It is held that some of the separatist/insurgent groups in Assam have joined an Islamic umbrella organization geared to establishing a transnational Islamic State in the region, with Bangladesh at its core.

8. Dire forecasts are being made of the rise of a third Islamic state in the sub-continent through a silent demographic invasion of immigrants comprising parts of Assam, West Bengal and Bihar. This illegal infiltration is well on the way of being realized (Mr. Arun Shourie, former Disinvestment Minister of the BJP government).

C. Domestic Plane

Both military and political factors impact heavily on the domestic plane.

I. Military Factors

On the military front four elements need to be assessed:
a. The illicit flow of small arms into South Asia.
b. The dynamics of the turmoil in North East India that has sucked Bangladesh into it vortex.
c. The composition, costs, origins and destination of sophisticated weapons unearthed in Bangladesh.
d. The incidence of bomb blasts and grenade attacks manifest in Bangladesh over almost seven years.

(a) The illicit flow of arms into South Asia

Sources of small arms in South Asia are well known. These include:

(*) National production

Ordinance factories in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (to a much smaller extent and now ceased) produce a variety of small arms including assault rifles, grenades, mortars and land mines. Majority of illicit small arms are acquired through imports on technology transfers. However, loot of police stations, skirmishes with anti-state elements, thefts, etc. have all released arms.

(*) Cold War pipelines

The most important source of illicit small arms was the Afghanistan War (1979-88) in the wake of the Soviet invasion in December 1979. Induction of arms was due to two main reasons: (1) deliberate leakage or siphoning from the pipeline created by the Americans (Only 30% reached the front line) and (2) the Afghan Mujahideen gained huge stocks from the Soviet army through capture or defection. The arsenal mainly of Eastern European origin includes AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades, Stinger missile, plastic explosives, etc. Much of the weaponry was diverted eastwards into the sub-continent and
found its way into the possession of anarchist groups, insurgents, separatist and dissident groups.

(*) Surplus Stockpiles

The end of the Cold War saw a glut in the availability and supply of small arms. Cuts in defense expenditure in Eastern Europe, competition among major producers of conventional arms, and aggressive sales drives made arms available at very low prices.

(*) Black Market

Arms bazaars are rife with a vast array of miscellaneous weapons released from shooting wars in the vicinity of South Asia e.g. Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq, etc. Nexus between drugs, arms and gold smuggling is well established. Increasing demand, ease of mobility in transporting arms, porous borders have all contributed to their spread in South Asia. Linkages and networks being established between militants, insurgents, anarchists, drugs and arms dealers and profiteers are an ominous trend.

All areas, which are in the grip of turmoil, insurrection and instability, have as common factor increased supply of weapons. Induction of arms, however, is not the cause of conflicts. They can only heighten its adverse impact.

Until very recently, up to the late 1990s, availability of arms in Bangladesh to non-state elements was restricted to standard non-automatic weapons e.g. 303 rifles, cut-guns, pistols, revolvers, shot-guns and locally made pipe-guns. No plastic explosives have ever been used in Bangladesh. More sophisticated weapons began to infiltrate to underground groups in India along with spectacular bombing attacks on trains, courthrooms, etc.
(b) The Turmoil in North-East India

For almost 6 decades the seven sisters in North East India were wracked by lingering separatist movements and ethnic violence. What has kept the insurgency simmering have been several factors:

(*) The unremitting desire to expel Bengali speaking farmers who settled in this region from other parts of India and allegedly from Bangladesh.

(*) An extremely well-organized network for smuggling arms.

(*) There are a large number of insurgent groups that fragment and then join together making it difficult for security forces to target them.

(*) A shifting political leadership leading to inconsistent policies.

The push for military solutions has not been successful despite continuous army/paramilitary operations. The impact of these operations reflects a familiar pattern - a lull followed by resumption of activities, collection of monies, purchases of arms and ammunition and a resumption of guerrilla attacks before disbanding. Sometimes these are accompanied by violent bombing attacks on oil-installation, courtrooms, bridges and trains. The failure on the part of armed forces, law enforcing agencies and intelligence apparatus has led to targeting Bangladesh as the cause. Repeated allegations of giving sanctuary, training, and financial and military support divert attention from India’s abject failure.

Bangladesh’s repeated denials of involvement stem from several facts. (i) Bangladesh is not the cause of the conflict in North East India and cannot benefit from it in any way territorially or otherwise. Peace on the borders is as important a prerogative for Bangladesh as it is for India. (ii) India’s accusations assume a contradictory paradox. The tribal
insurgents/separatists are agitating because of their opposition to the farmers/settlers who are alleged to be Bangladeshi immigrants. Why then should Bangladesh side with the insurgents and not the settlers?

(c) The sudden influx of sophisticated weaponry in Bangladesh

In recent years the traditional pattern in the composition of arms hauls in Bangladesh has been disrupted. A series of arms hauls from 2003 onwards saw an increasing sophistication in the lethality of weapons. These now began to include AK-47s anti-tank rifles, sub-machine guns, rocket launchers, grenades, etc. The single largest arms haul, in April 2004, saw the seizure of ten truck loads of modern and sophisticated weapons from a jetty in the Chittagong port. These were transported to Bangladesh by a cargo ship and a trawler reportedly from southern Thailand. This haul followed discovery of arms in Bogra (2003), in Dhaka (Kuril) and in the Hill districts of Chittagong. These trends continued in 2005 and 2006 with large caches of weapons unearthed.

Speculation has been rife as to the origin and destination of the arms. The separatists in North East India, the LTTE in Sri Lanka, the tribal insurgents in Myanmar ( Karens, kachins, Rohingyas) and militant groups in Bangladesh have all been identified as possible recipients. However, concrete evidence is yet to surface despite painstaking efforts being undertaken by the government. Some factors need to be understood. The size and sophistication of the arsenal and huge costs involved seem to rule out local militants and insurgent groups. Guerrillas are involved in low-intensity conflicts with hit and run tactics. Sophisticated automatic weapons, rocket propelled and anti-tank grenades and close support rifles are not their forte.
(d) Incidence of bomb blasts in Bangladesh

The incidence of bomb blasts over the past 7 years has certain important characteristics. First, they were all metallic bombs or chemical explosives (power gels etc.) No plastic explosives such as CR 4, Semtex, etc. were used. Second, they seemed to be targeted at (a) cultural functions (b) religious institutions, be they Hindu, Christian or Muslim, (c) Cinema halls, and (d) Awami League or leftist rallies. Third, in 2004 bombs gave way to the use of grenades. These grenades were of two kinds, using either pellets (to wound) or shrapnel (to decimate). In 2005 the nature of explosives changed from metallic to chemical explosive and the aim was to create shock and destabilization rather than to kill or maim. It was only after the 17 August 2005 bomb blasts that some concrete evidence was garnered leading to the identification of those responsible. Prior to that the nation remained clueless as to the perpetrators of the bomb blasts and accusations were widespread against political parties, intelligence agencies, outside powers, militants and criminals with no direct evidence whatsoever. Probes and judicial enquiries alike led to nowhere.

II. POLITICAL FACTORS

Confrontationist politics between the two major parties by weakening governance, especially law and order, has certainly created a climate conducive to the encroachment of criminal terrorism, violence and militancy.

III. ACTION UNDERTAKEN BY GOVERNMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERROR NATIONALLY

It is against the above backdrop that we must assess the rise of militancy and terrorism in Bangladesh and place it in its proper perspective. It is true that the immediate reaction was
to go into the denial mode as both the government and people resented and rejected (a) the profiling of Bangladesh as a terror-risk country (b) equating it with Al Qaeda and Talibanism (c) pillorying it as a “Jihadi” state or one that would provide a refuge for outside militants as well as a platform for launching attacks against other states.

The majority of people in Bangladesh feel that militancy and fundamentalism is alien to the country and counter to the ethos of the people who espouse moderation and tolerance. It was also widely believed that the criminals and terrorists in Bangladesh conveniently exploited the name of Islam for carrying out their age-old pursuit of extortion, toll-collection, protectionism and associated rackets. Most people feel that these acts were being carried out by a fringe element minority. It was only when the incidence of simultaneous country-wide bomb blasts took place on 17 August 2005 that hard evidence began to surface regarding the locus and extent of terrorism in Bangladesh. The Prime Minister put it simply as lack of information. “We did not know they were there. Only after the 17 August Bomb blast we knew”. (Interview with Alex Perry on 10 March 2006). It is now clearly emerging that the nucleus of these criminal and destabilizing activities is concentrated almost exclusively in the JMB and JMJB cadres. Both groups had already been banned.

As mentioned earlier, the incidence of bomb blasts, grenade attacks and induction of sophisticated weapons in Bangladesh, which had surfaced periodically, were a subject matter of intense speculation with very little light regarding perpetrators or their motives. Suspicions were directed indiscriminately at political parties, intelligence agencies at home and abroad, at neighboring countries and a wide variety of actors with little fact or evidence. Today, the focus is much more precise. There is deep-rooted anger across the entire spectrum of Bangladesh society including the religious
nucleus at this effort to distort the true teaching and meaning of Islam and to besmirch the image of the country.

Prime Minister Spearheads Action

The Prime Minister herself issued a clarion call that "Bangladesh abjures religious extremism and does not and will not support any kind of militancy. In the wake of the outright condemnation of the people against all acts of violence carried by militants and extremists, the Prime Minister unambiguously asserted the government decision to root out these militants and their networks. She has virtually issued a public warrant calling on the people to rise up against the extremists, to identify them and to inform law enforcing agencies of their presence. Bounties have been placed on all known leaders. The Prime Minister has repeatedly called on all political parties and professional bodies to sit together and address what she categorized as a "national problem". She also called on the Opposition parties to return to parliament and discuss problems for electoral reform as well as to address the terrorist issue. She has called for the passage of tough laws to punish the perpetrators whom she has dubbed repeatedly as "enemies of Islam, democracy, development, humanity, the people and the country".

The government recognized that the fight against terrorism is a multi-faceted one, to be waged at many levels and to be sustained over a long period of time. Its commitment is unwavering.

Short-term Measures

In the short-term, the government has stepped up a concerted programme to improve law and order and to target terrorism specifically. Focused projects were undertaken to reform the police force, to promote capacity building and to
recruit new personnel. Special cells were set up to monitor sensational cases. Speedy trial laws and accompanying tribunals helped dispose justice quickly in heinous crimes. Parliament by law established the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). This came in the wake of a massive 86-day campaign in 2002 which saw a combined army, civilian and para-military drive called Operation "Clean Heart" to clamp down on terrorism and curb economic crimes. Operation Clean Heart was followed by Operation "Spider Web".

Law enforcement action was reinforced to unearth those responsible for bomb blasts, grenade attacks and the induction of sophisticated weapons into Bangladesh. The government was determined to root out terrorists, extremists and militants whatever be their source, hue or political backing and to use all the means at its disposal including scrutiny of financial accounts.

It was as a result of these cumulative steps and the breakthrough achieved following the pursuit, interrogation, charge-sheeting and prosecution of criminals involved in the 17 August 2005 bomb blasts that important evidence surfaced regarding the extent and focus of terrorism in Bangladesh. The already banned Harkatul Jihad (HuJI), the Jamiatul Mujahideen (JMB) and the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) cadres have now clearly emerged as the nucleus of criminal and destabilizing activities.

Questions remain as to whether there are possible links between domestic and international militants. Allegations continue to be made that religious militants in Bangladesh were imbued by the spirit of "Jihad" that emanated after the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. It was, indeed, held that the word "Jihad" was made popular by the United States to rid Afghanistan of the Soviet "heathens". The word "Jihad" was claimed to have been as much revered and vaunted at that time as it is despised now. It is wrong to assume that
Afghanistan’s experience can be replicated in Bangladesh. Links to Al-Qaeda have never been established.

Allegations have been made of links to HuJI that in turn was supposed to be connected to the International Front of Osama Bin Laden. HuJI Bangladesh, a so-called off-shoot of Harkat-ul Ansar (Pakistan) and HuJI (Pakistan), is claimed to have been operative in the country since 1992. It was said to have assumed the name JMB in 2003 after HuJI was listed as a terrorist outfit internationally. The Government of Bangladesh banned HuJI B in October 2005. Links between the HuJI B and JMB and JMJB have yet to be established. Thus, links between domestic and international militants in Bangladesh, while they cannot be ruled out, have remained basically in the realm of speculation.

Meanwhile, through combing operations and a concentrated dragnet, the government’s counter-terrorism crackdown met with tangible success on two counts. It disrupted the command chain. All seven Revolutionary Council (Shura) members are now under arrest. Second, a huge stock of explosives including chemicals, detonating devices, power gel, etc. have been unearthed. Thus, a major manifestation of the terror network stands exposed and steps are being taken to complete the process. Twenty two persons, through due process of law, have already been convicted and given the death penalty. Other cases are being pushed through speedy Tribunals.

“One of the unique phenomena of the terror menace manifest in Bangladesh was the incidence of suicide bombings directed at specific targets - individuals, administrative offices, and law courts. Suicide bombings have never happened in Bangladesh. To counter this dire manifestation a multifaceted campaign was undertaken to uproot suicide bombers. The first step was to identify who they were - mostly young madrassa students from poor, rural family backgrounds. The misguided
youths followed what they were taught to be their religious duty to regard their own lives as less important compared to the next eternal life. They were indoctrinated into thinking that martyrdom is rewarded in the afterlife despite the fact that the Quran condemns suicide. The multifaceted campaign to counter this evil practice involved countrywide demonstration, protest rallies, motivational campaigns and attempts to launch dialogue with all political parties.

A hard look was directed at evolving long-term measures to combat terrorism. The government agrees with the Bush doctrine that the “fight against terrorism is fundamentally about the triumph of freedom, tolerance and democracy over ignorance, fear and extremism”. Among measures being envisaged are the following:

* Concentration on poverty reduction through employment creation, targeted safety-net programmes, social sector expenditures, especially in education, and priority to growth-oriented sectors.

* Shoring up democracy, human rights and the rule of law and promoting moderation and tolerance.

* A nation-wide drive has been launched to motivate and educate people that the destructive path preached by extremists is contrary to the tenets of Islam. Islam indeed abjures any form of religious extremism, does not harbour militancy and rejects the “Jihad” context. The religious nucleus in Bangladesh has been activated with their own spontaneous support. Religious leaders, Imams, madrassa administrators and teachers have in one voice expressed solidarity with the government to isolate and fight the militants.

It is important to flag here that eminent Islamic scholars, the world over, have rejected Osama Bin Laden’s call for “Jihad” against the Americans. Individually and separately,
they have made their stand unequivocal. Main elements include:

* Islam respects the sacredness of life and rejects any express statement or tacit insinuation that Muslims should harm innocent people.

* Using the concept of Jihad to justify harming the innocent is contrary to the letter and spirit of Islam. Any violence that springs from this misguided interpretation is condemned.

* The explanation of the Arabic term “Jihad” is misunderstood in non-Muslim countries. In its literal sense the term “Jihad” means “Struggle” and has three dimensions – internal, societal and combative.

* The internal dimension of Jihad concerns the struggle against the evil inclinations of the self that obstructs attainment of virtues such as justice, mercy, generosity and gentleness.

* The societal sense of Jihad involves the struggle against social injustice and efforts to create a community based on charity, respect and equality.

* In its combative aspect, the concept of Jihad can be invoked only for self-defence against aggression or to fight oppression and the struggle must be waged in a way that preserves the lives of the innocent and avoids harm to the environment.

* “Hijacking planes, terrorizing innocent people and shedding blood constitute a form of injustice that cannot be tolerated by Islam which views them as gross crimes and sinful acts”. (Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia – Shaikh Abdul Aziz Al Shaikh)

* In Islam there is no place for terrorism or extremism. The Quran says “La ekra ha fiddin” meaning there is no
coercion in Islam. Even the sense of vengeance has been divorced from Islam.

(v) Any long-term task to combat terrorism requires an honest appraisal of the causes of extremism and the limitations of existing policy.

(vi) It is recognized that actions will be most effective if it has widespread support from all political parties and civil society. It is in this context that the Prime Minister has assiduously pursued and encouraged a process of dialogue with all concerned. It is also evident that an essential step is to create a durable social framework to fight terrorism.

(vii) Five priorities are being currently pursued

(1) Breaking the ideological motivation of the terrorists,
(2) Blocking their financial supply,
(3) Closing sources of explosives,
(4) Rounding up the terrorists and bringing them to justice, and
(5) Putting in place effective counter-terrorism Units.

(viii) A vital long-term priority is to identify the financiers and patrons of militancy i.e. those who have fuelled funding. Focus is being placed on local financiers, high profile politicians, NGOs, Managers of Banks, etc. Probe teams have been established by the Home Ministry and the Central Bank in this regard.

(ix) Tough laws with provision of death sentence for patrons of militancy are to be enacted soon. The draft of an Anti-Terrorist Act is being considered by a Cabinet Committee. This invokes speedy punishment to patrons and financers of terrorism. All cases are to be tried by Special Tribunal.
(x) Government is also set to enact tough laws to check money laundering. The draft of a Proposed Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Act 2005 to stop sending illegal money to Bangladesh is under consideration. The Act provides for a financial crime investigation and prevention office and allows the government to take foreign assistance to root out crimes. The law drafted by the Bangladesh Bank defines terrorist acts and provides harsh punishment. Government has decided also to form a financial intelligence unit to combat financial crimes and financing of terrorism. U.S. experts from the Treasury Department are assisting Bangladesh in detecting routing sources and channels of funds to the militants. They will orient and illustrate to a select group of police, judicial and custom officers and Bank officials as to how the US Financial Crimes Enforcement Network operates to safeguard US financial systems.

Internationally, Bangladesh has condemned acts of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations irrespective of motives, perpetrators and victims. We believe it poses a threat to international peace and security and is a violation of human rights. Bangladesh is thus a willing and committed partner in the international coalition against terror. We are party to all UN Conventions on terrorism as well as regional conventions such as SAARC and OIC and additional protocols on the Financing of terrorism.

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon. It has always been present in every country as a form of low intensity conflict. What is different today is that it has assumed new and diabolical ways to kill and injure people and destabilize governments through spectacular damage. Up until now, there was an ambivalent attitude regarding terrorism. It was
someone else’s problem. After 9/11, the need has grown for a universal fight against terrorism. It has shattered collective conscience. The fall-out has been a chain reaction of suspicion.

There continues to remain uncertainty over what acts constitute terrorism and who can or should be described as a terrorist. No one definition serves the purpose. One factor remains a common platform and that is that armed attacks against civilians must be regarded as acts of terror and the perpetrators as terrorists. We are, however, aware that terrorism has no consistent profile and that it has many variables reflecting the complexity of human society. Perhaps the best way of approaching the issue of definition is to underline what terrorism is not. We must, as the Prime Minister said, “reject stereotyping the associating of any religion with terrorism”. She went on to assert at the OIC Extraordinary Summit in Makka in 2005, “a terrorist was a terrorist whatever his background, religion, nationality or hue and must be dealt with accordingly”. It is thus to be emphasized that terrorism has no connection to any one religion or any particular region of the world.

A factor of key importance is to dispassionately identify and address the root causes of terrorism rather than only the symptoms of this phenomenon; poverty, exclusion and injustice are some of the key elements.

Among key measures in the international fight against terrorism the following are flagged:

* Efforts must be based on sound strategy to combat international terrorism. This must be a multi-pronged approach and should not rely on military options alone.
* Deep-rooted political and economic problems that lie at the heart of terrorism must be addressed.
* The fight against terrorism calls for the promotion of dialogue, understanding and harmony among different
nations and peoples with different beliefs and creeds. As the Prime Minister of Bangladesh has underlined, "Self-defeating prejudices will not help us."

* We must work towards the early conclusion of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism under UN auspices to formulate a joint, organized response to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

* We must work towards an internationally agreed definition of terrorism and terrorist acts.