Introduction

The unprecedented terrorist attack on the USA on 11 September 2001, popularly known as 9/11, evidently constitutes the great divide in the history of global terrorism. Its impact has changed the tone and temper of dominant terrorist activities. It has also transformed the perception of terrorism in our troubled times. Leading countries of the world, including important Muslim countries, now consider the major terrorist threats as emanating from transnational and national extremist groups swearing allegiance to misinterpreted and distorted teachings of Islam.

lives. It also signified the loss of the world that existed until the first autumn of the new Millennium.

By autumn 2001 the USA and its allies in the West found to their horror that Afghanistan under obscurantist Taliban rule had become the host of Al-Qaeda and its leader Osama-bin-Laden. The US-led coalition against global terrorism attacked Afghanistan in 2001 and dismantled the Taliban Government. Again in 2003, the US-led alliance launched a victorious onslaught on Saddam Hussein’s Iraq where it is still engaged in a combat that has not only killed more than 3000 US troops but is also costing the US some five and a half billion dollars every month.

The post-bipolar world is characterised by the triumphant march of the twin systems of pluralistic multiparty democracy and open market or market friendly economy. Many post-colonial states in Asia and Africa and post-bipolar states in Europe and Central Asia find it hard to practise those exacting ideals. Institutional infancy and weakness of their political and economic structures lead to social disorder and economic misery. Developed nations of the world, committed to the values of the open market system with its trust on competition, are not of much real help to these countries in trouble. It is, however, worth noting that during the mid- and late 1990s the West, under the firm leadership of the USA with a resolute President Bill Clinton at the helm, intervened effectively to put an end to cross-national and state terrorism in Bosnia and Kosovo in Yugoslavia. In these Central and Eastern European States, European Muslims were terrorised and persecuted by their neighbours within and outside their borders. So-called “ethnic cleansing” resulted in the brutal killing of numerous Muslims and the raping of thousands of Muslim women. The perpetrators of this mindless ethnic religious oppression were mostly Serbs. They drew support from the former dictator Milosovic who died while facing trial in the international court in The Hague.
At the time of the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo the
ternational community, including the United Nations, failed
to stop the terror and protect and save the persecuted and
terrorised, at least in the initial phase. The presence of the UN
troops did not help. It took a resolute USA under President
Clinton to save the situation by employing the effective force
of NATO to defeat the brute force of ethnic terrorism solidly
backed by Yugoslavia under Milosovic.

For nearly half a century there has been terrorism on a
large scale in the Middle East in course of the conflict caused
by the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. This conflict still
rages fiercely in the 21st century. Indeed, it has become even
more furious and explosive in the post-9/11 world.

What makes terrorism of the 11th September so special
and different from the terror that has haunted the world since
the beginning of humankind? There are several factors which
give a unique character to the new terrorism. At its inception
terrorism in its new phase launched itself with an attack on the
sole superpower by unconventional means. The death and
destruction, caused by domestic commercial airliners turned
into virtual bombs by the terrorists, was massive. Further, the
attacks struck the very heart and symbol not only of America
but also of the democratic world wedded to market-friendly
economy. The twin-towers of the World Trade Center
symbolised capitalism at its highest and purest. The Pentagon,
damaged only in part, is the symbol of the military prowess of
the only polar power of our times. The attack was also totally
unexpected. Aptly has it been observed by a British journalist:
"America felt like someone who has been mugged in broad
daylight in a safe street".

Before the dust and smoke of the unprecedented
devastation in New York and Washington settled, the world
was told that the heinous act was committed by a
transnational network called Al Qaeda led by the Saudi dissident Osama Bin Laden.

USA’s response to this new and unprecedented terror striking at its own heart was predictable. In a bid to root out the terrorists, it formed a coalition of states, including many Muslim states, against terror and launched an all-out aerial attack on Afghanistan on 7 October 2001. It also supported the forces, especially the Afghan Northern Alliance, opposed to Taliban rule to defeat the Taliban on the ground. By 7 December the removal of the Taliban regime was achieved with the fall of Kandahar to the opposition forces. Osama remained elusive. The first phase of the war against new terrorism described by US President George W. Bush as “the first war of the 21st Century” ended with the fall of the Taliban regime.

At present, the USA in particular and the West in general have one clear concern: to secure the ramparts of their hitherto stable and prosperous societies against the stateless onslaughts of international terrorists conducting their bloody campaign avowedly to establish a religious ideology to the exclusion of all others. Under President George W. Bush the US and its allies have one vital objective: to protect their defence and security at any cost. The strategies they follow are both military and non-military. Force is the prime component of this war against determined and suicidal but elusive enemies. Nevertheless, there are other components of the strategy. These are political, social, psychological and economic. Economic and political assistance is to be extended to those who unhesitatingly support and help the cause of the West and the USA. This cause, avowedly, is a noble one. It is a global striving to save pluralistic democracy, religious tolerance and universal human rights all over the world. It is no wonder that many predominantly Muslim states with democratic orientation and led by largely secular, western
educated ruling elites have become allies of the USA in the ensuing war against international terrorists.

The political component is only one dimension of the disorder brought forth by a globalized war the like of which the world has never seen before. The other dimensions are composed of economic uncertainties generated by political and social unrest worldwide. For illustration, such instability has caused the price of oil to skyrocket to an unprecedented US $70 a barrel (August 2005). Further, economic globalization and trade liberalization have not yet yielded positive benefits to many of the poorer nations.

The protracted globalized war against terrorism that is now being waged by the broad coalition of non-Muslim and Muslim states demands careful and skilled handling.

Cooperation between Britain and Bangladesh: The Backdrop

Western leaders, in particular President Bush of the USA and Prime Minister Blair of the U.K., have gone to great length to underscore that this war was not a “Crusade” against Islam and did not symbolise a “clash of civilizations”. Most Muslim nations also agree with this view and many of them are fellow fighters of the USA and the West in this new struggle. It will need great care and patience of the concerned leaders and their peoples to secure that terror is not only defeated on the surface but also at the roots. They will need to go deep into the basic causes that spawn, nurture and strengthen such terrorism. The lack of human rights, freedom, social justice and economic equity, from which people in many lands suffer, must be tackled at the very sources. Only then can a world transforming itself into a global village root out all forms of terrorism, including the variety that clearly emerged on 11 September 2001. It is against this backdrop that Britain and Bangladesh can effectively and meaningfully cooperate in countering terrorism.
Bangladesh: Potent frontier in the war against terrorists

The unique character of Bangladesh as a predominantly Muslim nation practising democracy and moderation makes it an appropriate arena for initiating enduring containment of the negative impacts of the expanding threat of terrorism. Apart from the predominantly Muslim character of its population, Bangladesh has two other major blessings. First, as part of the South Asian region bordering on Southeast Asia, it can act as a bridge between the peoples of South and Southeast and East Asia. In the second place, the experience of nearly two centuries of British colonial rule has made it a place where the Western civilization, the English language and the civilization and culture of South Asia blend in a lasting mix. All these contribute to the innate strength of the nation to play a positive role in helping the world in effectively countering terrorism based on religious extremism.

Admittedly, Bangladesh has its weaknesses and inadequacies. Its nationalism is yet to be adequately institutionalized. State institutions are confronted with various challenges. Governance is inadequate. Its problems are complicated by threats to law and order and politico-social stability from sporadic violence of avowedly 'Islamic' and extreme leftist underground armed groups. The situation, however, is not beyond control. The historic contents of Bangladesh's South Asian Muslim and western identity supply a great strength. If adequately cultivated, these characteristics can represent an immensely strong tide, against which religious and political extremism cannot hold their own.

Like the developing and less developed nations of the world, today Bangladesh needs to put its own house in order. This will enable it to competently meet the many faceted threats from an uncertain and unstable world faced with grave terrorist threats. The immediate need is to define clearly the
national interests and security of the country. That definition must be consensual. Political leaders need to work together to protect national security and interests to “make democracy real”.

Bangladesh did not emerge out of the wilderness of institution-less existence. The territory had experience of quality governance during centuries preceding British colonial-imperial rule. The people of the area had a rich heritage of competent local governments at the grass roots, such as the 'grams' (villages). These were built in the context of a society that encouraged and sustained toleration of diverse religious beliefs and customs. Again, from both the British colonial and post-colonial times, it had inherited an elaborate, transparent and well-organized system of justice, a fairly competent and well-trained public administration, a coping law and order machinery and legislatures that worked.

Over the years it has evolved a strong and articulate civil society, a bold and skilled media and the most active NGO system in the world. In addition, it has a homogeneous population with a millennium-old syncretic culture marked by community of language and heritage. It has also a remarkable record of religious and ethnic toleration unblemished through millennia. All this has been competently enshrined in the democratic and secular constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. The positive qualities and possessions of the Bangladesh society must be put to good use without further loss of time.

Bangladesh has been described as a frontline state in humankind’s war against its ancient enemies: poverty, hunger, malnourishment, illiteracy and superstition. It is more than that. On account of the homogeneous nature of its population in religious and cultural terms and its hitherto largely unbroken record of moderation and tolerance, Bangladesh is splendidly equipped with the potential of acting
as a harbinger of peace and understanding in our divided and war-torn world.

**Terrorism in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh has suffered in recent times from outbursts of extremist violence and terrorism, despite its historical and social dynamics that are loaded against any form of terrorism based on religious extremism. This new and undesirable phenomenon appeared in the country even before 9/11. The major early incidences were:

- On 6 March 1999, explosions at the Udichi’s (a secular independent cultural organization) cultural function in Jessore district left 10 people dead and over 100 injured.
- Same year on 8 October 8 people were killed and 30 others injured in a bomb blast at Ahmedia Masjid in Khulna. It was followed by another bomb blast at Alai Pak Darbarsharif - a center for congregation of followers of Sufi (mystic type of) Muslim holy men in Faridpur district, killing 4 people.
- On 20 January 2001, 7 people were killed in bomb blasts at the Communist Party Bangladesh rally at Paltan Maidan and nearby Awami League office at Bangabandhu Avenue, Dhaka.
- Two months later on 14 April 2001, the first day of Bengali New Year, 10 people were killed and some 50 wounded in bomb explosions at a cultural function at Ramna Park in Dhaka.
- On 3 June 2001, 10 more people were killed and 30 others injured in a bomb attack on a church at Baniarchang in Gopalganj district.
On 15 June 2001, a bomb attack on the Awami League (AL) office in Narayanganj district left 22 people dead and many more injured.

On 23 September 2001, 8 people were killed and over 100 injured in a bomb attack on an AL public meeting at Mollarhat in outlying Bagerhat district.

On 26 September 2001, 4 people were killed in a bomb blast near an AL rally in Sunamganj district.

All these pre- and post-9/11 terrorist attacks took place when the avowedly secular AL, the vanguard of Bangladesh’s liberation movement, was in power. The attacks were not claimed by any group. The government of the day suspected that misguided religious extremists were behind these violent incidences. Identification and rounding up of the culprits were not completed during the tenure of the AL government (1996-2001).

The activities of terrorist groups continued to gather strength after the four party alliance government led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) took office in October 2001 in the wake of a massive victory in the national elections. The major incidences were:

- On 28 September 2002 more than 100 people were injured in a series of blasts at a movie house and circus arena in outlying Satkhira district.

- On 6 December 2002, bomb blasts in four movie houses at Mymensingh district town killed 27 and injured more than 200.

- Seven people were killed and 20 others injured in a bomb blast at a fair in Tangail district on 17 January 2003.

- Three people were killed and the British High Commissioner in Bangladesh Mr. Anwar Choudhury was
among the 70 injured in a powerful bomb blast at Hazrat Shahjalal Shrine in Sylhet district on 21 May 2004.

- On 21 August 2004, grenade attacks on an AL rally in Dhaka left 22 people, including senior AL leader Mrs. Ivy Rahman, dead and over 100 injured. AL president Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped the attack.

- A major grenade attack on an AL rally in Habiganj district on 27 January 2005 left four people dead, including senior AL leader and former Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria.

- On 17 August 2005 nationwide bomb explosions at some 500 spots across 63 districts (out of existing 64) within a span of 30 minutes left 2 persons dead and several injured.

- On 14 November 2005 in the southern district of Jhalakati bomb attacks on a vehicle left 7 people dead including two judges of the district court.

- On 29 November 2005, first ever in Bangladesh suicide-bomber exploded himself at the courthouse of the Gazipur district killing himself along with seven others.

- On 29 November, 2005 on the court premises of the port city of Chittagong suicidal attacks on a police transport left 2 dead, including one policeman, and 20 injured.

Evidently, the nature and intensity of the incidences showed that the perpetrators of terrorist activities had become more organized and bold. The synchronized bombings in 63 out of 64 districts of the country on 17 August 2005 were claimed for the first time by an extremist group - Jamiatul Mujahdeen Bangladesh (JMB).

Following these, the society and government of Bangladesh became seriously concerned about the rise and expansion of terrorism based on religious extremism. Awareness led to strong nationwide resentment and
resistance. The civil society, vast majority of religious leaders who are moderate and tolerant, the mass media and NGOs cooperated fully with the government in condemning and building up resistance against the heinous acts committed by extremists distorting the precepts of Islam.

By March 2006 the security forces succeeded in rounding up the top leaders of the terrorist groups, including Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Siddiquul Islam alias Bangla Bhai of JMB.

For the time being it appears that the backbone of the more active extremist-terrorist groups has been broken and the threat contained. There is also broad agreement among national and international authorities and analysts that the terrorists in Bangladesh have no evident links with international extremists, such as the Al-Qaeda.

The question of foreign-linked funding is under investigation. There is no clear indication as yet of external patronage of the indigenous terrorists. Closer and more thorough enquiry is needed to reach a conclusion in this matter.

Bangladesh is certainly concerned about the possibility of expansion and intensification of extremist terrorism. These concerns are shared by the countries, friends and development partners of the West, including Britain. Bangladesh is the only large Islamic pocket in the eastern part of the South Asian subcontinent bordering on Southeast Asia. It stands between the western fringe of the subcontinent including Afghanistan and Pakistan, where Al-Qaeda has established its presence, and Indonesia and Malaysia to the East, where the Jamai Islamyia-backed terrorists are active. The increasing intensification of the activities of Muslim extremist groups in southern Thailand and south Philippines also add to the worries of Bangladesh. The apprehension that Bangladesh may be used as a linking ground or transit for the extremists
operating in neighbouring eastern and western regions creates greater worries for Bangladesh and its friends.

Another cause of concern relates to the economic weakness of this predominantly Muslim nation. Although the economy has been growing at a steady rate of more than 4 per cent of the GDP over the last three decades and a half and in the current year growth rate is projected at some 6.7%, the country still remains poor. The per capita income stands at an inadequate US 400 dollars. Nearly 50% of the people are victims of poverty. Many live on less than 2 dollars a day. The workforce is joined by two million every year. Unemployment and disguised unemployment remain very high. The number of unemployed is estimated to stand at more than 30 million in a population of 140 million. A considerable number of the educated youth, including especially those educated in the madrashas (Muslim religious education institutions), also remain unemployed or underemployed. Poverty and unemployment act as fertile breeding grounds of discontent. This is often exploited by extremist-terrorist leaders and organizations that find easy recruits among the dissatisfied youth. Another concern is the undesirable trisection of the education system in Bangladesh on account of historical and cultural reasons. The main stream is overwhelmingly dependent on the national language Bangla and has not until recent times equipped the students with knowledge in English adequate to compete in international job markets including those in ICT.

The English dominated stream, manifest in kindergartens and English medium schools and private universities, largely contributes to the making of a class with weak and inadequate knowledge of their own mother language Bangla and its rich literature. Further, the third stream composed of madrashas principally imparts religious education without building sound bases of knowledge and skills in either Bangla or
English and in modern science and technology. In consequence, the majority of the madrasha graduates are not equipped with education suitable for obtaining gainful employment in a globalizing world.

The students and graduates of the madrasha stream are, in origin and end, the most economically and socially disadvantaged in a nation which is largely ruled and dominated by western educated elites. Yet, the 250,000 mosques and more than 50,000 madrashas of various types form the sources of persons constituting the 'Muslim nucleus' in Bangladesh. Some 1.60 million madrasha students are denied opportunities of successfully competing in the modern job market. The madrashas themselves are not uniformed in their structures and resources.

Three main types of madrashas in Bangladesh are the Alia Madrasha, the Qawmi Madrasha and the Hafizia Madrasha.

**Alia Madrasha**

All Alia Madrashas are under the Bangladesh Alia Madrasha Education Board and controlled by the government of Bangladesh. There are about 24000 Alia Madrashas in Bangladesh. Beside teaching of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu languages these also impart lessons on Quran, Hadith, English, Mathematics, Science and Technology. Alia Madrashas mostly provide practical-oriented modern education. All categories of Alia madrashas are entitled to receive government aid if they fulfill prescribed conditions of the state authorities like the Bangladesh Madrasha Education Board and National University of Bangladesh.

**Qawmi Madrasha**

Qawmi madrashas follow the syllabus of Deoband Madrasha of Uttar Pradesh, India. They are largely outside the
control and monitoring by the Government. These madrashas initially teach the basic, elementary lessons of Islam and then move on to impart more comprehensive lessons in Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages according to their syllabus. Most of these madrashas are run by votaries of Sunni/Wahabi/Deoband ideology. There are about 15,000 Qawmi madrashas in the country and their yearly expenditure is around Taka 4.00 billion (US$ 59.00 million). Around 7,000 Qawmi Madrashas are controlled by non-government Qawmi Madrasha Education Board. The rest 8,000 Qawmi madrashas are controlled by the Tanbimul Madaris Dini-Al Qawmi Bangladesh, also called North Bengal Qawmi Madrasha Education Board and Chormonai Madrasha of Barisal. These institutions receive donations from individuals and groups as well as from Middle Eastern and other Muslim countries. There is a big gap between the general education and Qawmi madrasha education system, as the latter does not follow the government prescribed syllabus. As a result, their students remain virtually outside the orbit of modern education.

**Hafizia Madrasha**

Hafizia Madrasha provides training on memorizing the Holy Quran only. On completion of this task a student gets the title of "Quran-e-Hafiz". These are non-government madrasahs and the students usually come from very poor families. There are around 8,000 Hafizia madrashas in each Upazilla (sub-district) and are financed by various individuals and groups. The students of these institutions tend to have restricted vision and are denied the benefits of modern scientific education.

Bangladesh and its friends are concerned that the massive pool of religiously educated and oriented madrasha graduates and students may be exploited by the extremist terrorist elements and groups. Their poverty and isolation from the western-oriented and educated segments of the society
increase the possibilities of their falling prey to the designing terrorist organizations.

It should be noted, however, that Islamic revivalism, which may or may not necessarily lead to extremism and terrorism, is not the function of Muslim nucleus around mosques and madrashas in predominantly Muslim countries. As John Esposito, a reputed US scholar on Islam, asserts that the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism, which some in the West misperceived as fundamentalism, is a natural happening. Esposito observed in his book *The Islamic Threat – Myth or Reality* that post-imperial and post-colonial Muslim countries were led by the westernized minority elite who shared the western imposed concept that progress and modernization necessarily meant secularization. While the processes and institutions in these societies were secularized, the mind and culture of the majority was not. Moreover, the failure of the westernized ruling elite to deliver the goods in terms of substantially and meaningfully improving the quality of life of the masses led to disillusionment with the ways of the secularized elite and paved the path of the reassertion of Islam in the politics of these societies.

In these societies, Esposito said, Islam never really disappeared. "It is more correct to view Islamic revivalism as having led to higher profile of Islam in Muslim politics and society. Thus what had previously seemed to be an increasingly marginalized force in Muslim political life, reemerged in the seventies - often dramatically - as a vibrant sociopolitical reality."

While addressing the complex problems that may emanate from the Muslim nucleus one has to carefully note the general backdrop of Islamic resurgence as masterfully portrayed by Esposito.
The Concept of Human Security and Bangladesh

The new emerging concepts of development and security stress the extra-economic factors and ascribe a central role to human beings. People's security is emphasized and considered not only integral to but more important than state security. Thus, the UNDP Human Development Report 1994 forcefully argued: "... the concept of security has too long been interpreted narrowly ... Forgotten were the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives ... Human security can be said to have two main aspects. It means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities". The report identifies seven specific elements that comprise human security: 1) economic security, 2) food security, 3) health security, 4) environment security, 5) personal security, 6) community security and 7) political security.

There are echoes of this approach in the concept of security put forth by Japan and Canada and supported by Norway and the Netherlands. The Canadian view, succinctly articulated by former Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, defines security as "freedom from pervasive threats to people's right, their safety, or even their lives". Essentially, this means safety from both violent and non-violent threats. This concept lays equal emphasis on individual and state security. This approach also advocates political development and promotion of norms and institutions on a global scale to ensure comprehensive and meaningful security.

Again, the Commission on Human Security attempts to link state security and human security. It says, "Human security is concerned with safeguarding and expanding people's vital freedoms. It requires both shielding people from
acute threats and empowering people to take charge of their own lives.”

The new approach to security questions emphasizing the centrality of the human element is undoubtedly attractive for countries such as Bangladesh where existence is hostage to innumerable violent and non-violent threats to the security of the individuals. Poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and unemployment worsened by political disputes and rivalries between major political forces, institutional degeneration and lack of good governance constitute one major dimension of the security threat to people in such countries. The other dimension comprises of both external and internal threats to the polity.

**Synthesizing State and Human Security in Bangladesh**

The arguments of the advocates of human security-based policies for the defence of Bangladesh are forceful and eminently attractive. Nothing could be better for a nation-state in the situation of Bangladesh to be able to concentrate on investment in human development to ensure comprehensive security for the people. The question is whether and how far such a course is realistic. As already noted, Bangladesh is fighting its war for security on two fronts: The human and the political. The country’s underdevelopment in the political sphere coupled with the weakness and degeneration of its civilian institutions make it highly vulnerable to internal turmoil and external attacks, overt and covert. In such a situation a reasonably sized, modern and well-equipped defence force seems to be a necessity despite the costs involved.

Again, the globalized war against terrorism has made many developing countries, including predominantly Muslim Bangladesh, vulnerable to threats to their stability. The war
against terrorism tends to disperse and scatter Muslim terrorists all over the world. The anti-terrorist coalition’s massive and continuing attacks on suspected terrorist strongholds often cause collateral damage and tend to inflame the affected people and make them vulnerable to extremist thinking and action. All this makes global security relatively weak. In politically unstable and weak states, such as Bangladesh, the internal security situation tends to become even more fragile. Sound organized and well-equipped defence forces, to the extent they are available, offer some measure of strength.

There is no doubt that Bangladesh needs to attend immediately and meaningfully to the requirements of its people for food, health, education, shelter, and job security. But it also needs to ensure that there is internal peace and security and protection from overt or covert external attacks. The important thing is to strike the right balance. The task is not easy but it can be performed by a participatory process of formulating national policies and approaches towards the question of national defence and security. This process requires a comprehensive and open debate on security policies and approaches. The parliament, professional bodies, civil society organizations, NGOs, defence and security strategists within the military and outside, all need to actively participate in the debate to determine and decide the shape and content of Bangladesh’s defence and security policy and programmes.

Britain–Bangladesh Cooperation: The Effective and Promising Areas

On account of ties of history and historically determined linguistic and cultural links, Britain stands in a most advantageous position in extending effective cooperation to Bangladesh in countering terrorism. In the British perception (which it shares with other western allies including the USA)
Bangladesh, despite being an avowedly secular and moderate democracy in a predominantly Muslim society (nearly 88% of the population are Muslim), has the potential of becoming a theatre of terrorist operations of the extremists. The British concern also relates to the 300,000 strong expatriate Bangladeshi communities in the UK.

The apprehension that this may act as a source of 'home grown' extremist-terrorists in Britain is also a cause for British worry. The possibility of export of terrorist cells, through groups that travel to and from the UK to Bangladesh and Pakistan, gives reasons for further worry. The potential of "export" of terrorists from the ranks of Al-Qaeda and Jamyi Islamia constitutes additional cause of anxiety.

Such apprehension has not been proved true in case of Bangladeshis. However, in relation to other Muslims of South Asian origin this fear was translated into cruel and tragic reality when Britain experienced violent happenings on 7 July 2005. On that day four 'home grown' Muslim-British suicidal bombers caused massive explosions in the London underground transport system and a bus killing more than 50 and injuring 700. The bombers were educated, middle class Muslim-Britons with their origins in Pakistan. The authorities reported that these young men had travelled to Pakistan and received doctrinaire and other types of training in Pakistani madrashas. The Pakistani government has resolutely rejected these allegations.

Britain, after the passage of some two years since the unprecedented suicidal attacks, is still trying to understand and tackle the problem of "home grown" terrorists. It has intensified and expanded its intelligence and security networks to track potential terrorists and prevent further violent attacks.

Britain has also initiated steps to activate the vast majority of Muslim-Britons who are peace loving, moderate and
tolerant. It has also stepped up efforts to influence and counter the extremists through community action by moderate Muslims of Britain. Its own tragic experience of 7/7 and concern about further terrorist activities in Britain and against British interests elsewhere have imparted an urgent dimension to British engagement with countries, such as Bangladesh, in countering terror created and nurtured by religious extremists.

British engagement in Bangladesh's efforts to resist terrorism is based on political commitment and the acceptance of Bangladesh as a partner in the global war against terrorism. Britain is already helping Bangladesh in developing counter-terrorism mechanism in intelligence organizations, police and security forces. There is a desire to keep Bangladesh engaged on all intelligence sharing.

Britain is also aware of the significance of Bangladesh's geographical location as a virtual land bridge between South and Southeast Asia. It is conscious of the role Bangladesh can play for positive results in the context of the raging ethnic, cultural and religious insurgencies in neighbouring Sri Lanka, Northeastern states of India, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. Britain is also aware of the possibility of linkages in Bangladesh of extremist terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of India.

Scope of bilateral cooperation between Bangladesh and Britain includes extradition treaty, Memorandum of Understanding on Intelligence Sharing, support help poverty alleviation through micro-credit programmes, reform in Qawmi Madrashsas and educational grant.

The two vital specific areas in which Britain-Bangladesh cooperation can be most fruitful are:

1. Influencing Operations
2. Capacity Building
Influencing Operations

Influencing operations are constituted of well-planned and systematically implemented activities to use the positive force of the vast majority of moderate and peace-loving followers of Islam to counter the misinterpretation and distortion of basic Islamic teachings by extremist-terrorists. The idea is not only to mobilize the western educated and better-placed Muslim Bengalees but also to enlist the active and enlightened support of moderate Muslim religious leaders for resisting the deviants and distortionists. Among such religious opinion leaders are the Imams (prayer leaders) in the 250,000 mosques of Bangladesh. Also included are the thousands of teachers in the madrashas and holy men who are enlightened and not prisoners of extremist ideas. Leaders and members of peace-loving and tolerant Islamic organizations, including wherever possible those belonging to Islamic political parties, may be included in the groups mobilized for influencing operations.

The objective is to build a ‘Brave New Alliance’ of the religious community leaders and leading elements of western educated segment of the society to counter the falsehood and distortion of Islamic teachings propagated by the extremists. The idea is to secure the hearts and minds of devoted, peace-loving Muslims who are in a majority against the vitiating influence of extremists’ propaganda and motivation.

In Bangladesh such an effort has proved reasonably successful in the troubled southeastern Cox’s Bazar district which lies between the Bay of Bengal and Myanmar. An initiative by an independent group, organized under the banner of Islamic Information and Research Centre (IIRC), succeeded in a short time (from December 2004 to the end of 2005) in mobilizing religious leaders and teachers and leading elements of other streams to come together and build up
steady and consistent resistance against misinterpretation of Islam and spread of extremist-terrorism based on such distortions. An interesting and useful development here, in this conservative area, was the inclusion of those religious leaders, teachers and institutions reputed to be of the extremist variety. As a result of dialogues, seminars, orientations undertaken to project the essentially peaceful and tolerant nature and teachings of Islam, these extremists were transformed into moderates and became active allies and partners in the country’s struggle against extremist-terror.

The spread of women education in Bangladesh at a faster rate in recent years has strengthened the nation’s capacity to deal effectively with extremist-terror. The Cox’s Bazar initiative has fruitfully utilized the force of girl students of the madrashas to increase the effectiveness of the struggle against obscurantist terror. The Cox’s Bazar experience is contained in detail in the Annexure.

It is necessary and important to review the lessons learned in the Cox’s Bazar exercise. It may help Britain’s engagement in Bangladesh in countering terrorism. Further, replication, with required modification, may help Britain in tackling the problem of ‘home-grown’ terrorists by mobilizing and organizing Islamic religious teachers and leaders along with community leaders on the model of the Cox’s Bazar initiative.

The importance of mounting a successful exercise of similar nature among Muslim Britons was underscored by British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the eve of the anniversary of the tragic terrorist bombings of the London transport system on 7 July 2005. He asked the Muslims of Britain to more effectively mobilize the positive force of the vast majority of the moderates to help arrest the growth of terrorism in the country.
Capacity Building

A prospective and promising area of British engagement in Bangladesh is that of capacity building or more appropriately capacity enhancement of the public administration sector, particularly the law and order machinery and security forces. The recent terrorist activities and the possibility of enhancement and expansion of their scale have made the need of capacity enhancement of the concerned government arms a top priority. Bangladesh has succeeded initially in effectively controlling and containing the extremist terrorist threats posed by such militant organizations as the JMB. The top leaders, including commanders of the military arms of these organizations, have been arrested, tried and sentenced to death and various lengths of imprisonment, including life imprisonment. Those tasks have been performed satisfactorily by the security and intelligence agencies and the justice system of the country. They have had the help in general of intelligence sharing and training by friendly countries, such as Britain. The job so far, however, has been done by the concerned Bangladeshi organizations, including the police and the RAB themselves. In the context of possible continuing and increasing threats of extremist terrorism their capacities will need to be consistently and systematically enhanced. Britain, on account of its historic role as a former colonial power in laying the foundations of the structures of civil and police administration in this area, may and does continue to play an important and useful role.

On the broader plane, Britain can and is already assisting in the exercises to strengthen governance in Bangladesh. It has been playing a significant part in improvement of training of civil servants and security officials. These efforts need to be increased on the basis of mutual discussions and cooperative planning by the two countries. Good governance is not only a means of achieving greater stability and development, it is also essential for creating effective checks on extremist terror.
Specifically, Britain can help Bangladesh in achieving good governance through maintaining and strengthening a merit-based public service. It may assist the Ministry of Home of Bangladesh in strengthening a task force for ensuring efficient police administration.

Britain has also been helping improve the quality of public administration by assisting training institutes and training of trainers to enhance capacity across the board. These efforts need to continue and expand.

More focused areas of cooperation in helping Bangladesh counter terrorism may relate to:

- Assistance in developing counter terrorism mechanism within Bangladeshi intelligence organizations, police and the armed forces. Britain, along with other technologically developed nations committed to resisting extremist terror, is capable of and willing to participate in intelligence sharing with Bangladesh. Britain may consider signing Memorandum of Understanding with Bangladesh for continuous sharing of intelligence regarding terrorists' plans and activities. It may also help set up and run counter terrorism units, bureaus and entities in Bangladesh.

- Efficient communication and higher mobility of security forces are essential to successful control of and check on terrorism. The Bangladeshi police, RAB and other security forces need help in improving their communication facilities and mobility with greater number of faster motorized transports. Britain can assist in adequately responding to these urgent needs.

- Another area where British help may be useful and effective is development of forensic capabilities of the security forces.
On a broader canvas British assistance may play a pivotal role in helping Bangladesh organise regular courses on arms trafficking, human trafficking, drug trafficking, piracy, transnational crime, money laundering, etc.

Cooperation in enhancing capacity of the administration, including security forces, is certainly of importance in helping Bangladesh fight terror. Nevertheless, the most effective and enduring defence against extremist-terror lies in improving the quality of life of the people. Bangladesh, being a frontline state in humankind's war against its ancient enemies such as poverty, hunger, malnourishment and illiteracy, needs all the help possible to alleviate poverty through effective governance, management of the economy and education. The nation is trying its level best to perform these tasks. Government and NGOs are engaged in a massive effort for poverty alleviation and comprehensive socio-economic development. These need to be encouraged and helped to the greatest extent by development partners such as Britain.

British aid and assistance has been considerable in the poverty alleviation and development exercises of Bangladesh. Further, sustained help in strengthening these efforts through vibrant micro-credit and educational programmes will go a long way in creating a stable and progressive Bangladesh society capable of successfully countering all forms of terrorism, including those issuing from extremism that root themselves in the absence of hope.
Conclusion

Given the present day global circumstances, it is extremely important to motivate and influence people to follow the right path to prevent them from falling prey to extremism. In addition, to gather real time information about the activities of those who are trying to divert the people to achieve their negative objectives in the name of religion or any other ideology, an effective method is to involve different types of groups of the society in this process. In order to effectively perform these difficult though important tasks, it is required to further strengthen and expand the activities of such centers as the IIRC.
Notes:


4. *Ibid*.


Cox's Bazar
The Cox's Bazar district is situated in the southern region of Bangladesh perched on the Bay of Bengal. Located at a distance of 152 km south of Chittagong, the leading seaport of Bangladesh, this coastal area is prone to cyclones, tidal surges and recurrent natural disasters. The people of the district, as compared to those of the rest of Bangladesh, are conservative and extremely religious.

Perhaps this religious propensity of the population has given rise to a large number of mosques and madrashas in Cox's Bazar. In fact, there are about 250 madrashas in the district alone, including both Qawmi and Aleya. Due to the characteristics of the region, 'alems' (religious teachers) and religious leaders have significant influence here. In comparison to the conventional education system of the country, madrasha education is extremely backward relative to the mainstream. As a result, those involved in the madrashas education system tend to suffer from feelings of isolation and inadequacy. In most cases, they are alienated from the rest of society.

On account of the distance from mainstream society and the perception of discrimination, the madrashas faces manifold problems. In consequence, vested quarters lose no time in taking advantage of the circumstance to influence the impressionable minds of the young madrasha students. The media often carries stories equating madrashas with extremism and religious militancy. So, it is only natural that Cox's Bazaar too is identified as a breeding ground of such
extremists by different sections of the media. The main reason of selection of this site for an influencing operation was the concentration of madrashahs in the area. As madrashahs are the main source of basic and religious education for large number of pupils it is necessary that the madrasha teachers and students be properly instructed in true Islamic teachings. Unless they have an accurate and clear knowledge of Islam which unfortunately is often denied them, they find religion portrayed as incorrectly and given negative interpretation.

Taking the chances of the less/deviated education among the religious minded people of this area a vested corner always tried to use it as a breeding ground of extremism, by explaining the teachings of Islam in a highly distorted manner. This backdrop prompted the Islamic Information Research Centre (IIRC) to organize a participatory dialogue and number of visits in Cox's Bazar, particularly to observe and understand the ground reality regarding the madrashas there.

After exchanges of views with the ulema and religious leaders of the area, it was decided to hold a seminar on "Islam: Religion of Peace, Tolerance and Humanity". It was held on 20 December 2004 at Cox's Bazaar. Renowned Islamic thinkers and scholars of the country took part in the seminar. Teachers of 201 madrashas of Cox's Bazar town and various upazilas (sub district) of the district, known to be of extremist views, attended the daylong dialogue. Others who enthusiastically joined the dialogue were the Imams of the main mosques in Cox's Bazar town, local leaders of the Islamic parties and leading figures of civil society.

In the quest to propagate the true spirit of Islam in a modern and effective manner, it was thought essential to establish an institution that could carry out relevant activities to this end in an organized and efficient manner. A well-thought out module was later formulated for this purpose to ensure optimum effectiveness of such a centre.
Local Islamic leaders known to be of the extremist ilk were deliberately included in the 20 December 2004 seminar as their influence could be tapped for beneficial results. This proved to be a correct decision as these leaders were later instrumental in portraying Islam in its true form as a moderate and tolerate religion.

IIRC targeted those five madrasahs identified by a section of the media as dens of extremism and managed to bring them into its fold. With proper motivation, the Principals of those five madrasahs could successfully be turned around to become moderate religious persons. These five leading alems (religious teachers) played an important role in setting up IIRC and have been extending their cooperation to the centre till date. Due to their regular activities in this respect, the people now regard them as moderate and tolerant religious teachers.

On the basis of success of initial exercises IIRC was established and formally inaugurated on 20 June 2005. Over 300 renowned and respected persons, both national and local, attended the inauguration, including alems, madrasha teachers, political leaders, leaders of professional bodies, students and academics, media persons, intellectuals and officials of the local administration.

Objectives of IIRC

IIRC is working with the following objectives:

a. To propagate the true spirit of Islam.

b. Act as a platform to bring in both people having extreme views and also people with moderate outlook.

c. To promote elements of modern education such as English language, Computer studies etc, along with Islamic education.

d. To identify orthodox minded people and motivate them to understand and appreciate the real spirit of Islam.
e. To recruit effective persons to enlist as members of extremist groups/institutions so that they could influence and change the thinking of these groups.

f. To collect information on Islamic issues, documentation of information and finally dissemination.

Activities of IIRC

Following are the Major activities so far carried out by IIRC:

a. After the inauguration, a three-day Imam training workshop was held. Imams of 30 main mosques of the Cox's Bazar district attended the workshop held at the centre. Endeavours were made to ensure a 60:40 ratio of moderate and extremist elements in all these programmes as this would make it easier to exert influence.

b. From June till September 2005, IIRC has held a total of six workshops for the following groups:
   
   (1) Imams.
   (2) Madrasha Teachers
   (3) Senior Madrasha Students.
   (4) Hafez-e-Qur'an.
   (5) Qawmi and Aleya students.

c. A total of 180 (30x6) persons underwent training at these workshops. This training helped in influencing these persons away from extremism and imbibed in them a sense of moderation.

d. At the end of each workshop, the participants were awarded certificates and photographs of the programmes. They were asked to discuss the topics on their return with their friends and colleagues.

Forms were distributed for assessment, suggestions were invited and feedbacks recorded.
During the holy month of Ramadan (fasting) 2005, IIRC undertook extensive programmes. These were held from 15-25 October 2005. The main programmes were:

(1) Discussions and iftar programmes in four mosques.

(2) Distribution of Eid gifts, discussion, iftar and dinner at four orphanages.

(3) Distribution of Eid gifts, discussion, iftar and dinner in four large madrashas.

(4) Two largely attended seminars, discussion, iftar and dinners at IIRC.

(5) Large gathering of girl students at Ramu Madrasha, discussion, Eid gift distribution, iftar and dinner.

e. The rationale behind these programmes was to give a sense of importance to the madrasha students and to encourage them to be involved in all these activities.

f. IIRC will conduct continuous research on various aspects of Islam and the madrashas all over Bangladesh and outside as well.

g. It has a library with a good collection of books, journals and other publications of relevant nature but it needs to improve its collection. The institute has a limited audiovisual section to show films and documentaries on Islamic matters.

h. It has a network with other madrashas, Islamic thinkers and scholars.

i. The centre will also organize seminars, group discussions and other programmes to highlight Islamic values of peace and harmony by raising awareness among the people with special emphasis on madrashas on a regular basis.

j. The newsletter 'IIRC Barta' (bulletin) is published, containing news and information on the issues discussed
at the various workshops and training programmes. So far, seven issues of the 'Barta' have been published and have won high praise from all concerned. A total of 2000 copies of the newsletter were distributed free of charge to various mosques, madrashas and other institutions of Cox's bazaar.

**Topics of the Workshops and Training Programmes at IIRC**

Following are the topics so far covered in various workshops and motivational programmes:

a. Islam against Terrorism.
b. Islam: Religion of Peace and Harmony.
c. Islam for Peace.
d. Pluralism in Islam.
e. The Pacifism of Islam.
f. Islam and Patriotism.
g. Islam: Bangladesh Perspective.
h. Bangladesh: A Moderate Muslim Society.
i. Islam and Religious Harmony.
j. Islam on Education.
k. Islam and Modernity.
l. Islam and Science.
m. Gender Equality in Islam.
n. Human Rights in Islam.
o. Islam and Social Justice.
q. Role of Imams Against Terrorism.
r. Requirements of National Solidarity to Counter Terrorism.
Achievements of IIRC

- IIRC's target groups are the relatively younger persons among the alem community and senior madrasha students (both girls and boys). The institution has successfully reached these targets.

- IIRC set up direct contact with 30 madrashas of Cox's Bazaar town and various upazilas of the district. It has indirect contact with another 50 madrashas. Within 2006 it will be possible to draw all madrashas of the district into the IIRC network.

- Till date, 60 imams, 80 madrasha teachers, over 300 senior teachers and over 2000 students are actively in contact with IIRC. Their details have been recorded and stored at the IIRC office's data bank.

- Directly and indirectly over 10,000 religious-minded persons are involved in IIRC's programmes.

- Local alems, students, teachers and other members of the local elite regularly visits IIRC library to read and study.

- IIRC has played a tangible role in mobilizing public opinion against terrorism and militancy and creating social awareness against extremism. Now newspapers no longer carry reports of militant activities in Cox's Bazaar.

- The imams, madrasha teachers and students and alems who had been known as extremists, are now functioning in a progressive and open-minded manner. They are controlling themselves even where very sensitive issues are concerned, something which even a year ago couldn't be expected.

- The local alems and leaders were very vocal in their protest against the nationwide bombings of 17 August 2005 and the later bombings by JMB in other places. Their
awareness has thwarted JMB from setting up a stronghold in Cox's Bazaar.

- The local alems provide IIRC and the local administration with important information about militants.

- In a conservative district like Cox's Bazar, IIRC conducted a three day workshop for senior girl students of madrashas on 29-30 September and 1 October 2005. About 1000 female madrasha students participated there. Though the speakers at the rally were men, the madrasha board members and the parents had no objection. This was because IIRC had won their trust and confidence.

- Within a very short span of time, i.e. within six months IIRC managed to train active significant number of workers/volunteers in Cox's Bazar district. These totaled over 200 and all of them are madrasha teachers and students. They formed anti-terrorism committees in their respective areas.

- IIRC has so far trained 60 reputed imams. Through them, contact has been established with another 100 imams. The trained imams, in their Friday khutbas or sermons, now speak regularly against terrorism. These had been discussed at the IIRC workshops. Prior to the IIRC workshops, the khutbas at Cox's Bazar's mosques had never dealt with terrorism or actively promoted peace and tolerance. So, this was a significant and positive departure from traditional 'khutbas' that tend to promote extremism.

**Future Plan**

- To expand this programme in other areas of the country by establishing more centres like IIRC.

- Prepare speech for the Imams to deliver before khutba to make the masses aware about the true and modern thinking of Islam.
• Involve more widely accepted influential and moderate minded Islamic scholars with these programmes.

• Introduce scholarships/stipends for the meritorious madrasha students, Imams, and other influential devotees of Islam so that they can be utilized for these programmes in the future.

• Assisting radical/extremist madrashas or institutions for introducing and strengthening components of modern education including computer and English education, engineering, technical and vocational training.

• Increase the number of motivational programmes like seminar, symposium, workshop and trainings all over the country.

• Introduce motivational programmes for low income and mainstream educated young generation along with people educated in the madrashas.

• Enrich the collection of library of the centre and its audiovisual capabilities.