Human Security and Extremism in Bangladesh: Synergy and Conflict

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Introduction

In contemporary Bangladesh, the concept of security is understood in a much broader and comprehensive sense to include both traditional and non-traditional threats and risks. The interface between the two is now a reality that the country’s security community cannot dispense with. While the concerns falling within the traditional security domain are well defined, the non-traditional dimension of security includes such a vast array of issues and challenges that the very task of cataloguing them sometimes becomes a daunting one for many. If properly catalogued, all such non-traditional issues would be found to have adverse security implications more for the individuals of a state than for the state itself. In other words, many non-traditional issues now come under the rubric of human security often referred to as ‘people centered security’ or ‘security with a human face’. As a result, human security goes beyond concerns about the security of nation-states and their borders to encompass interrelated issues such as food crisis, health crisis, environmental degradation, extremism of all sorts, illegal migration, trafficking in women and children and a host of other issues that give rise to insecurity in people’s lives and ultimately threaten socio-economic development, political stability and the security of nation-states. While attempts at conceptualization and theorization of human security continues to remain in vogue, two of its key and important premises, i.e., ‘freedom from want’ and ‘freedom from fear’ are universally accepted by now.
In case of Bangladesh, among the myriad human security challenges, extremism is one, although its forms and manifestations are different from the ones as observed in other South Asian countries. It is relevant to mention that extremism should not be viewed narrowly as acts of terrorism only. Its scope could be widened to include violence caused due to communal strife, ethnic unrest, religious extremism, separatist movement or even politics. From a human security perspective, all such acts continue to generate fear among the general masses to the extent that sometimes their very survival or existence comes under question. Today, the ‘fear factor’ in symbiosis with the ‘want factor’ of a vast majority of the people of Bangladesh goes to depict the country’s human security scenario in a very negative way.

However, extremism in Bangladesh has a synergetic effect as well. While conflicts and violence have been observed in many spheres of national life, they have at the same time forced many actors (governmental and non-governmental), private bodies, members of the civil society, intelligentsia, armed forces and other security related forces to ensure sustained peace in the country through eradication of poverty, progress, development, dissemination of proper education, establishment of human rights, empowerment of women etc. Needless to state, lack of economic, social and cultural rights make people turn towards extremism as a means to define a position in life, express dissatisfaction and find a way out of the desperate situation in which they live.

In view of the above, the paper seeks to study, barring ‘Introduction’ and ‘Conclusion’, the following themes in three successive sections. The first section titled ‘Human Security and Extremism: Few Theoretical Reflections’ purports to throw few theoretical reflections on the two concepts and establish a relationship between the two. The second section under the caption ‘Extremism in Bangladesh: An Overview’ deals with
the general scenario of violence in Bangladesh, in particular those arising from the structural faults and weaknesses in the country’s society. The third section titled ‘Extremism and Synergy: The Case of Bangladesh’ is an attempt to depict the synergetic effect of extremism on many spheres of the country’s national life to ensure sustained peace in the country.

The paper is based on empirical and analytical understanding of various facts, events and occurrences with respect to human security and extremism in Bangladesh. Research materials from books, journals, newspapers, electronic media etc. constitute the research documents of the author.

Human Security and Extremism: Few Theoretical Reflections

Human security and extremism are two different concepts lying at two ends of the spectrum. Whereas the former aims at human welfare, the latter obliterates it. The relationship between the two is inverse or negative, meaning that an increase in one leads to a decrease in the other. This inverse proportionality inevitably prompts one to closely examine the relevant human security issues that can be increased in order to decrease extremism whatever in any society.

It should be mentioned that the concept of human security is a theme on which the research is still en route. Various political scientists, sociologists, economists, military thinkers and strategists, environmentalists and the like across the globe are trying to study it from different angles and viewpoints, all with the purpose of better conceptualizing the term. Aside from the academic attempts at conceptualization and theorization of the human security concept, efforts are also underway to map out its operational modalities and make it relevant to various national and regional situations. By now volumes of literature
exist on the theme. All existing ideas and viewpoints with respect to human security unequivocally indicate that the concept has emerged out of the paradigmatic shift from traditional security to a comprehensive one. While the former relates to an excessive state-centric notion of territorial security from military-defense angle, the latter includes within its fold a wide range of issues related to the wellbeing and safety of the people. Towards this end, human security, in comprehensive sense, includes protection of human being not only from traditional military threats but also from a variety of economic, social, ethnic, epidemiological and environmental threats. A plethora of definitions with respect to human security can be cited to show how the concept is being broadened day by day to include a variety of issues that many feel should come within the province of human security. The paper, however, does not intend to deal with them other than focusing on the definition as given by Mahbub-ul-Haq in the widely known United Nations Development Program’s *Human Development Report of 1994* where he defines human security as: (a) safety from chronic threats to humans such as hunger, diseases and repression and (b) protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in people’s lives – whether in jobs, homes or communities. In other words, the key premises of human security are ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’. There is no gainsaying that while attempts at conceptualization and theorization of human security continues to remain in vogue, the two above stated premises of human security are universally accepted by now. This rationalizes the adoption of Haq’s definition in the paper.

If it is accepted that human security can be a new approach towards solving the old problem of extremism, then one must know what extremism is and what its different facets are. The concept, therefore, needs little clarification for the purpose of the paper. The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*
describes extremism as ‘political, religious etc. ideas or actions that are extreme and not normal, reasonable or acceptable to most people’. In other words, extremism is a term used to describe the actions or ideologies of individuals or groups outside the perceived political center of a society; or otherwise claimed to violate common standards of ethics and reciprocity. It is typically used in reference to political and social ideologies seen as irrational, counterproductive, unjustifiable or otherwise unacceptable to a civil society. It can also be described as a ‘political theory favouring immoderate, uncompromising policies’.

Given the fact that the term ‘extremism’ is invariably or almost invariably used in a derogatory sense or that it is almost always exonymic rather than autonymic, few thoughts as alluded to above may not appear to be extreme in nature as many would like to believe. For example, protests, demonstration or street marches in Myanmar for a change in the political center of the society controlled by the repressive military junta can not probably be termed as extremist activities. From a human security perspective, it is the people’s right to freedom of speech and expression exercised for establishing democracy in a country for which the popular support is almost ubiquitous. However, to the military junta and those who support it, any act of protest against the regime in Myanmar would be an extremist act. In a similar vein, support for democracy in an archaic and monarchical political system as exists in Saudi Arabia is likely to be termed by the regime and its allies, in particular the US and its allies, as radical or extremist in nature. Also, the believers in certain political and social ideologies, i.e., communism or socialism are termed as radicals or extremists by many despite the fact that the advocates of such ideologies aim to secure economic welfare of individuals. Contrary to the belief of many, Hindutva, as adhered to by the BJP party in India, may not be
extremist in nature as it is a philosophy like communism or socialism founded and developed from ancient times in India for securing the all round happiness of all individuals on Indian cultural and spiritual ethos. A Muslim who believes in Islam is not an extremist as was mischievously propagated by the US mass-media in post 9/11 period. The propaganda even went to the extent of labeling the very 'religion of Islam' with extremism and terrorism. In contemporary world, there is also a global misconception that tends to think of extremism and terrorism as interchangeable terms. In post 9/11 period, this confusion between extremism and terrorism has barred the combatants of the 'war against terrorism' from implementing a global policy of appropriate response strategies. Thus, a distinction should be made between different types of extremism and terrorism. It is true that all terrorists are extremists but not all extremists are terrorists. Between them there is a broad highway that often encourages terrorism, and if not carefully monitored, in time extremism can be easily transformed into terrorism.\(^4\)

The above discussion is a pointer to the fact that the interpretation of the term 'extremism' being a victim of bias, prejudice and value judgment, warrants a careful assessment of what is extremism or what it is not. Extremism is not a standalone characteristic. It may better be represented as being in a spectrum which may include violence of different types, conflicts (both high and low intensity) and acts of terrorism. The entire spectrum of extremism, in effect, fits into the\(\textit{conflict triangle}\) as espoused by Johan Galtung which is as follows:

- **Direct violence** (overt): direct attack, massacre and destruction.
- **Structural violence** (indirect violence): death, risk or vulnerability of/to death, destabilization etc. caused by an unjust structure.
Cultural violence: linked up with structural violence, cultural violence takes place mainly for reasons as to how perceptions, attributions, judgments and ideas of ‘self and other’ take place in a society.

The three sides of Galtung triangle can be related to one another. For example, state collapse that arises mainly due to structural weaknesses (collapse of state institutions and governance) leads ultimately to a conflict that may cause gruesome massacre (ethnic cleansing), general banditry and chaos.

It should be noted that violence which is associated with extremism may find its manifestation in acts like, insurgency or separatist/secessionist movement, social/political/communal/ethnic/inter-caste/linguistic/sectarian dispute, civil war, armed ideological struggles, revolution, state collapse and terrorism. Such conflicts are mostly internal in nature, and the actors, in most cases, are the governments, rebel groups, armed forces, paramilitary forces, criminal organizations, splintered terrorist groups, civilians etc. However, many of such disputes may attain regional or international dimension, i.e., insurgency movement, international terrorism, state collapse etc. Violence, therefore, stands out to be the main criterion to judge which activities are extremist and which are not. In this sense, the peaceful advocates of democracy in Myanmar may turn out to be extremists if they resort to violence, i.e., killing, pillage, threat of use of force etc. for restoration of democracy. In a similar fashion, Hindutva loses its raison d’être in case of violence as was associated with the Babri Masjid case in Uttar Pradesh and the communal carnage in Gujrat. A Muslim who believes in establishing Muslim Ummah through violent means is to be termed as an extremist.

The relevant question now is what factors lead to the occurrence of extremist activities? In effect, extremism
emerges out of such a complex mêlée of factors like underdevelopment, economic insecurity, political insecurity, ideology, ethnicity, environmental degradation etc. that there arises the problem of causation in proper identification of the factors that generate it. Michael E. Brown, while studying internal conflicts, identifies certain factors that, in most cases, generate violent internal conflicts. According to him, the primary factors for internal conflicts are structural in nature like weak states, intra-state security concerns and ethnic geography. His allusion to political factors includes discriminatory political institutions, exclusionary national ideologies, inter-group politics and elite politics. He then identifies three broad economic and social factors as potential sources of internal conflict like economic problems, discriminatory economic systems and the trials and tribulations of economic development and modernization. Finally, Michael identifies two cultural and perceptual factors as sources of internal conflict. The first is the cultural discrimination against minorities and the second factor has to do with group histories and group perceptions of themselves and others.

A close scrutiny of the above mentioned factors would reveal that it is due to the decline in human security that extremism finds its place. Five of the seven vital human security areas as envisaged in the Human Development Report of the UN (1994) are clearly reflected in Michael’s observation. They are: (1) Economic security or the ability of the people to provide for themselves through securing a basic income. Population growth, unemployment and illiteracy to name but a few factors, can prevent people from having equal opportunities. In addition to contributing to community tension, these factors can play an important role in the radicalization process, leading disenfranchised groups to resort to violent acts; (2) Political security or the relationship between the state and its populace; (3) Community security or the relationship
between people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds; (4) Personal security or protection from crime and interpersonal violence and (5) Environmental security or the relationship between nature and human beings. This includes the threat of global warming and the prediction that together with lack of food security, lack of environmental security will in the future result in conflicts based on changes in the environment. It should be mentioned that in Michael’s identification of the causes of internal conflict, environment as a cause does not figure prominently, he, however, makes indirect allusion to it when he remarks, “Problems are blamed on forces of nature or on conflict itself rather than on the decisions and acts of men and governments.”

Extremism in Bangladesh: An Overview

The extremism syndrome in Bangladesh ranges from violent and low intensity conflicts to those of structural and cultural ones thereby conforming, at least, theoretically to the ‘conflict triangle’ as espoused by Johan Galtung. Violent conflicts which are characterized by threats, coercion and destructive attacks have been less experienced by Bangladesh at the international level, in other words, from across the borders, whereas the same experience has been more profound at the domestic level in case of intra-state conflict circumscribed around the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) issue in Bangladesh. Somewhat less intense in nature, violence was also exercised by the Sharbahara (the have-nots) in the early and late seventies. Meanwhile, a number of stresses and strains in the domestic scene caused by fault-lines in the country’s political, economic, social, cultural, environmental spheres, have resulted in violence of both structural and cultural ones at different points of time. In this respect, terrorism enters the scene in a very conspicuous manner. Finally, Bangladesh-
experienced violence from the spill-over effect of extremist activities in her neighbourhood. This section of the paper would delve into such critical issues.

The extremism scenario in Bangladesh as outlined above can be organized in terms of four categories:

i. Extremism inherited from the past
ii. Extremism of episodic nature
iii. Extremism in newer form
iv. Extremism resulting from the external environment

The paper seeks to discuss the above mentioned forms of extremism in a manner as brief as possible from a human security perspective.

i. Extremism Inherited from the Past: In this category, the Sharbahara movement and the CHT problem find their place respectively. Influenced by the Naxalite movement in Indian state of West Bengal, the Sharbahara (have-nots) movement started in south-western part of the then East Pakistan. The leadership in this respect was in the hands of the extreme left political parties that sought political, social and economic transformation of the society, in other words, a class-less society against the capitalist one. Prevalent mostly in the early and late seventies, most of the extremists belonging to the movement worked underground. Although the objective of the movement was not extremist in nature, but the methods for realizing the objective were violent like killing, forceful collection of tolls from the farmers, robbery, and dacoity, and looting the police stations etc. The movement eventually subsided leaving its few elements in the southern part of Bangladesh. The sharbahara group is still active in areas like Sirajganj, Bogra, Pabna, Rajshahi and Khulna districts.
Next is the extremism associated with the ethnic insurgency in CHT in Bangladesh. The country inherited the problem from Pakistan at its independence in 1971. However, during Pakistan period, the movement did not attain the dimension of an insurgency. Though there were signs of grievances and disenchantment of the inhabitants of CHT with the authority. Volumes have been written on the issue in various journals and books including a paper at Uppsala University. Essentially an intra-state conflict between the tribal inhabitants of CHT and the government of Bangladesh, the insurgency in CHT can be viewed as a ‘factional conflict or a struggle for autonomy, secession or control’. The conflict can also be regarded as an identity/secession charged with a threat to the territorial integrity of Bangladesh. In essence, the CHT separatism in Bangladesh is explained by the problem of national integration as the successive governments have adopted the assimilationist method in integrating the hill people. In doing so, the tribal people were deprived of many rights and privileges needed to ensure human security, in particular economic and community rights. Socially and politically also, the tribal people remained marginalized and non-empowered. Some of the threats to human security as unleashed by the CHT insurgency are loss of life (both civilian and military), displacement of people internally, migration of tribal people to India, economic breakdown in the region, chaos and instability in the area.

The methods that the Bangladesh government adopted to contain the conflict ranged from military operation to negotiation for political settlement. Finally, the CHT Peace Accord was signed in December 1997 between the government of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana-Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) that represented the hill people. Although, in the beginning, the accord appeared like a fragile peace, vigorous peace-building efforts are now underway to meet the
demands of the hill people as per the accord. In this connection, the role of UNDP is of great significance.

ii. Extremism of Episodic Nature: In this category, extremism would imply various forms of violence that Bangladesh has witnessed since its independence. As this category is episodic in nature, the nature of the dangers and risk involved in it remains unpredictable, and this keeps the general masses constantly worried about their life and security. The reasons for such violence in Bangladesh are: (i) intense factionalism based on personal rivalries, disruptive politics, undemocratic practices within the party, and the failure to fulfill the economic aspirations of the people, (ii) widespread corruption and inefficiency of government machinery, persistent poverty and unemployment, (iii) easy access to small arms made possible by illegal trafficking (iv) inefficient law enforcing agencies and their partisanship and (v) criminalization of politics.

In the violence list, political violence would figure first. Small skirmishes between rival political factions, mass agitations and protests have been important elements of the political process in Bangladesh. In terms of their frequency of occurrence, intensity, and the levels of violence with which they have been associated, it can be safely said that these took place in both the tenures of the past democratically elected governments and those of autocratic regimes. In certain instances, open armed confrontations between groups accompanied such agitations and protests. Then it is hartal that enters the list. The phenomenon is again inherited from the past when street riot, hartal, satyagraha, boycott, and gherao etc. involving violence and instigating retaliatory violence from the state developed during the colonial era. C H Peiris terms this type of violence as ‘conflict based on associational identities’. In his opinion, “these forms of mass action have
featured, albeit at various levels of prominence, in the politics of all modern nation states including those of South Asia. From a comparative viewpoint, however, their impact on the polity appears to have been more pronounced in Bangladesh than in other countries of the region.” Peiris’s observation is, perhaps, not an incorrect one when one finds how like many other countries in the world, street protest through diverse forms is an accepted mechanism in the politics of Bangladesh as a pressure tactics. Public demonstrations, marches and labour strikes are widely used as means of political expression in Bangladesh. However, unlike most other countries, hartal or strike coupled with violent protest is used here frequently as a regular political agenda. Next is political killings and bomb attacks. One of the most alarming trends of the recent confrontational political agitation is bomb blasts and grenade throwing in opposition meetings. Sniping at the opponents with crackers during hartal hours exposes people from all walks of life to virtual death threat. Campus violence has also been a public concern and a cause for national anxiety since 1973. It may be mentioned that in Bangladesh, all the major political parties and most political leaders maintain armed cadres who are supplied by student fronts and factions. Invariably, the armed cadres have their protectors or 'godfathers' who have the power and influence in the administration to shield them away from the law. As a result, in spite of many punitive laws enacted by governments from time to time, no government has been able to restore peace in the campus. Among the less horrifying acts of campus violence is occupation of halls by force by a particular student party or group, with the objective of either ousting rival residents from their seats or forcing other genuine residents to share their seats with their associates. The non-political students are sometimes compelled by the political students to join party processions and movements under threat and force. The female students are not as well immune from
campus violence as they are the occasional victims of rape, kidnapping, eve teasing and the like. Next to foment violence in Bangladesh is extortion/illegal toll collection/rent seeking (*Chandabaji*). It is a form of exacting money through force and terror. It thrives in all areas although most of the incidents of extortion take place in industrial/commercial areas, construction sites or any place where people can be coerced. It has become a problem to start a business or construction work in any site without paying toll to the illegal collectors. Refusal of payments results in loss of life or a constant threat to both life and property.

In Bangladesh, violence against women is also noticed in the domestic spheres of their lives. The reasons for domestic violence can be explained by the deep-rooted attitudes regarding socially and culturally prescribed roles, responsibilities and traits of men and women. Next is violence in elections - both national and local. Perhaps, it will not be an exaggeration to state that the election years have been routinely characterized by political violence except in the last election held in December 2008. In recent times, industrial violence has also become a regular phenomenon in few industrial centers of the country. Such violence finds its manifestation in general rampage, destroying cars, blocking roads, intimidating perceived adversaries and looting. Although, industrial violence originates from the labour-owner conflict over wage, working hours and other issues, it at the same time demonstrates misgovernance not only in the political life but also in the commercial and business life of the nation. Finally, arbitrary arrest/detention and police violence draws one’s attention. The police arrests and detains people arbitrarily without warrants, or specific complaints being filed against them and denies access to counsel and family members. Torture by the police is also a widespread problem in Bangladesh. ‘The torture techniques employed in Bangladesh,
whether of longstanding practice or of more recent origin, are brutal. Methods documented by Human Rights and other human rights organizations include burning with acid, hammering of nails, drilling of holes in legs with electric drills, electric shocks, beating on legs with iron rods, beating with batons on backs after sprinkling sand on them, ice torture, finger piercing, and mock executions'.

iii. Extremism in Newer Form: Terrorism associated with violence has entered the extremism scenario of Bangladesh in recent times, although, its manifestation was noticeable in the activities of the insurgents in CHT and earlier in Sharbahara movement. Terrorism that Bangladesh is currently plagued with is viewed by the majority as 'Islamic terrorism'. Several reasons explain the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism in Bangladesh. They are a failure in democratic process and presence of acrimonious politics, gross misgovernance, growing economic inequalities and rampant corruption, non-uniformity in education system, ideology and illusion, rise of Islamic parties, ineffective law enforcement and intelligence agencies, implications of 'Global War on Terrorism', and trafficking of small arms through Bangladesh. The ostensible aim of the movement is to establish an Islamic State in Bangladesh on the basis of Shariah (laws for the Muslims as enshrined in the Holy Quran). It is being spearheaded by two Islamic groups, i.e., Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Jamaatul Mujahdeen Bangladesh (JMB), the latter taking the lead. A wave of bomb blasts including suicide bombings in recent times have been the expressions of their voice.

iv. Extremism resulting from the External Environment: Use of Bangladesh territories by insurgents from the North Eastern (NE) areas of India and outlaws like Rohingya refugees from Myanmar create violence with immense security
implications for Bangladesh. In particular, psychological violence is launched against the country when Indian authority and the media complain about Bangladesh's complicity in its NE insurgency problem—an allegation that Bangladesh strongly disapproves. Skirmishes along the Bangladesh-India border have increased in recent years for reasons like intrusion, abduction, forcible harvesting, shooting and killing.18

All forms of violence as mentioned above have direct bearing on human security in so far as violence destroys lives and livelihood, breeds perennial insecurity, fear and terror, all with profound negative impact on human development and welfare. In such a scenario, social instability takes a permanent shape with the potentials to create fissures and tensions in the society. A society where 'break up of law and order' reigns ultimately lead to a collapse of the government machinery and hence the total collapse of the state itself. A glimpse into the events just before 1/11 (2007) shows that electoral violence, which was not properly managed, ultimately led to anarchy and political instability to the extent that Bangladesh as a nation felt insecure not only at the human security level, but at the national security level too.

Finally, it should be mentioned that in Bangladesh, where human security remains at the apex of the current national security debate, any attempt to de-link it from the ocean or, in other words, any rejection of its marine dimension would bear serious consequences for its people. While the critical human security issues in the land are well known, the marine matrix of the country is as well not immune from it. Three of the oceanic zones of Bangladesh (coastal zone, exposed coastal zone and maritime zone) represent different types of problems, all of which need special attention from the human security perspective. Briefly, the problems are: threat to traditional means of livelihood, abysmal poverty, poor level of services, coastal pollution, natural hazards of oceanic origin, absence of
political organizations, ineffective law enforcing agencies, lack of employment opportunities, discrimination against women, piracy, illegal fishing and poaching, smuggling, and trafficking in arms, drugs, women and children etc. Impacts of such problems are loss of life and property, kidnapping, threat to physical security, loss of resources, and degradation in law and order situation.  

Extremism and Synergy: The Case of Bangladesh

It has been observed how various risks and dangers arising out of Bangladesh’s political, economic, social, environmental weaknesses are currently charged with the potentials to generate violence in the society with repercussion on societal peace and harmony. This is what Galtung called structural violence which may not necessarily be direct or physical violence. As the author remarks, “Violence can have many faces and that evil can exist in many subtle and evil ways. Structural violence is violence that does not hurt or kill through fists or guns or nuclear bombs, but through social structures that produce poverty, death and enormous suffering. Structural violence may be political, repressive, economic and exploitative, it occurs when the social order directly or indirectly causes human suffering and death”. Drawing from Bronfenbrenner, one can suggest that structural violence is shelled within three systems, the socio-political (the macro-system), the socio-environmental (the meso-system, and the psychological (the micro-system). The mechanisms by which structural violence operates are, therefore, found in the state and its institutions. In other words, they are the result of state’s malfunctioning in certain important spheres, i.e., political, economic, socio-cultural and psychological, and finally environmental. There is, therefore, the need to bring structural changes in Bangladesh.
While extremism grows out of want and makes people live in fear and insecurity, nonetheless, it has a constructive side also. The loss in life and property due to various extremist activities compels the state authority and its people, along with the other non-state actors, to seek creative problem-solving methods and approaches. In other words, synergetic effects of extremism propel many actors, i.e., governmental, non-governmental (local and international), inter-governmental agencies, private bodies, members of the civil society, intelligentsia, armed forces and other security related forces to ensure sustained peace in the country. Towards this end, human security approach to address the root causes of extremism is accepted as the most proactive approach rather than a state-centric approach which is reactive in nature.

As mentioned earlier, human security is a multi-layered approach for addressing the insecurities of the individuals. Problems are to be identified at the level they occur and there is the need for recognition of the problems and capacities and resources for resolving them. Human security approach is an embodiment of three principles, which are not normative, but realizable like inclusion, participation and empowerment. These principles make human security the responsibility of all. Identification of human insecurities and advocacy for rights need to be carried out at the individual, community and civil society level. At the national level, the authority needs to have a strategic vision about the overall human development, and prioritize actions and plans accordingly. Regional bodies need to control conflicts and all extremist activities and provide a framework of mutual cooperation – both political and economic. A direct linkage between the national level and the international community or via regional bodies is required for technical, financial and policy support. A partnership between all the stated levels, community/national /regional involving engagement of international organization for support is now
considered indispensable in case of human security approach. The synergy concept which stipulates that under certain conditions 'the whole can be more effective than the sum of the parts' is, therefore, applicable in case of human security approach. The level wise interaction is a pointer to the fact.

The majority of the Bangladeshis perceive both 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear' issues as having the largest impact on their daily security. In particular, the poor section of the society, long disillusioned by economic, social and political deprivation has now become a force to challenge, often with violence, not only the state authority but also every social norm, thereby causing a pervasive sense of uncertainty and insecurity. To this poverty stricken people, the concept of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state bear little meaning unless there was, in the first place, a redressing of their multifarious human insecurities. Given the scope of the paper, it is clearly impossible to provide detailed programmes and activities of the government and other relevant agencies in meeting the human security needs of a vast majority of Bangladeshi population. In brief, it can only be said that Bangladesh like other underdeveloped countries is en route for realizing the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) strategies and achievement of Millennium Development Goals, which if implemented properly with firm political commitment could pave the way for addressing many problematic issues related to human security, in other words, the welfare of the general masses. Simultaneously, with the efforts at the governmental level, relentless efforts by various donors and NGOs of international repute are now on the swing to develop the human security scenario in Bangladesh. This is a good example how issues that are likely to generate tension leading to conflict and violence can have synergetic effects on the nation and various agencies working within it.
However, one should note with caution that development is not always conflict-reducing. As Robert J. Muscat, in his seminal work on ‘Investing in Peace’ hints at development that should more effectively address the root causes of violent conflict in the 21st century. Muscat’s opinion holds true as most threats to security in the Third World stem from chronic intra-state conflict, state failure and economic underdevelopment and associated problems of social dislocation and environmental degradation. In is in this interest that the government agencies and the donor nations should act in unison to modify their approach to development with emphasis on conflict prevention on top of their foreign policy agenda. Needless to state, given the linkages between breakdowns in the economy and stability, security and development need to go hand in hand, mutually reinforcing each other. In other words, there is the need to securitize development as a counter measure against structural aggression.

The rise of extremism, in particular violence and terrorist acts, has provided the government with the opportunity to enact laws and pass a series of anti-terrorist bills. It should be mentioned that Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) which was formed in 2004 has now been further reactivated to deal with crimes of various nature during the present interim government. While few international organizations and human rights bodies have been critical about its role, the general public is content with its performance in restoring law and order in the country. RAB now is equipped to have its access to any crime spot in the country. Its activities are now also seen in the remote off-shore islands. Police Reform Programme (PRP) launched in Bangladesh in recent times is a good example of how the police service as a law enforcing agency is brought under a greater development oriented human security agenda of the country. The development goal of PRP “is to create a
Conducive environment for poverty reduction in Bangladesh through improved security, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups including poor women and children.\(^2\)

With respect to human security issues in the oceanic domain of Bangladesh, ocean governance is well equipped to deal with all the human security issues like food, health, environment, political security, and community security etc. The synergy for dealing with the critical oceanic issues stems from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (1982) where it is mentioned that 'the problems of ocean space are clearly inter-related and need to be considered as a whole'. Like in the terrestrial domain where human security needs to be addressed in a multi-layered level, such provision is advocated by ocean governance too. Thus, if efforts at the national level are insufficient, then the gap can be filled up by regional means. In order to bridge the two, there is the possibility of help and assistance from international level as well. Bangladesh, with its limited capacity, should try to implement the international programmes related to the oceans. The expected dividends – economic, political, social, human, psychological etc. of all cooperative endeavours under the guidance as provided by ocean governance would be promising for both the current and future generations.

**Conclusion**

The absence of a violent conflict like the CHT case, or a thawing down of terrorist and extremist activities in Bangladesh in recent times should not give rise to complacency that Bangladesh society is now violent free. Rather, various insecurities like political, economic, personal, cultural and social etc. can at any point of time generate tensions and disorder to break up the social fabric of Bangladesh with serious implications for human security, in particular, and for national security in general.
It should be borne in mind that the complex nature of human security issues with ‘interconnectedness’ between them, the necessity of proper identification of areas, actors and actions, a final opinion in favour of sustainable development, indeed, poses a myriad challenges for a state. While it is true that good governance can be a panacea in addressing many of the human security issues, the problem remains with respect to the appropriate approaches for understanding the most critical human security issues which, if not addressed, is likely to foment extremism. Thus, a proactive approach for understanding the causes of extremism and relating them to human security agenda needs knowledge.

Finally, it should be noted that despite the interrelationship between human security and the state, the latter remains the principle agency/actor, in particular for responding to all extremist acts, while the non-state actors would help the state in close partnership with each other. In this regard, until the state succeeds in overcoming all its weaknesses of politico-social and economic nature, a proactive approach for understanding the phenomenon of extremism would find little credence.

Endnotes


7 It may be mentioned here that although Indo-Bangladesh borders and frontiers are calm, there are the occasional short armed conflict between the BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) and BSF (Border Security Forces) of India over issues like trespassing the enclaves, illegal movement of people to and fro between the two sides, and smuggling etc.

8 The naxalite movement that started in West Bengal first in the mid-sixties later on spread to other Indian states like Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. The movement used intense violence and consolidated its position through linkages with subversive/secessionist groups.

9 The cross-border security dimension of the CHT conflict stemmed from India’s involvement. ‘What was primarily an internal issue of Bangladesh soon became an Indo-Bangladesh affair, with the latter having to worry about its impact on the country’s security and foreign policy matters. India sees the insurgency in the CHT as an opportunity to exert influence on its impoverished neighbour’. Referring to India, Tridip Chandra Chakma told a press conference in Dhaka that “neighbouring country wants to use the Shantibahini as a pressure group”, The Daily Star, Dhaka, 2 September 1994.


12 Ibid., pp. 42-43.

13 A survey on ‘Campus Violence in three Decades’ shows that the casualties of campus violence in three decades since 1974 were 128, with 4290 persons seriously wounded. Out of 128, the number of casualties in Dhaka University was 72, Rajshahi University 25, Chittagong University 11, Bangladesh Agricultural University 8, Islami University (Kushtia) 7, and Jahangirnagar University 5. Campus violence became so rampant during the regimes of Ziaur Rahman and Ershad that it drew world attention. In 1993, for example, The New York Times identified the Dhaka University as the 'most violent campus in the world'.


17 In August 2005, JMB successfully coordinated the detonation of over 400 simultaneous explosions throughout Bangladesh. JMB primarily targeted governmental buildings, detonating mostly non-fatal devices throughout the regional capitals of the country
in addition to Dhaka, Bangladesh’s capital. The attacks killed several people and injured over 100 people.


