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UNDERSTANDING THE CRITICALITY OF SOCIAL REINTEGRATION IN DERADICALISATION: AN ANALYSIS OF BANGLADESH'S CVE PRACTICES

Abstract

This paper examines how effectively social reintegration can be utilised in the deradicalisation process in Bangladesh. Social reintegration is a protracted process related to the rehabilitation of former convicts. The cognitive complexity of social reintegration requires comprehensive academic interventions. This paper analyses potential challenges of applying the preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) approaches, and highlights the consequences of the P/CVE approach for society in the context of Bangladesh. The paper adopts a unique mixed-method approach of analysing the profiles of selective violent extremist offenders and conducting relevant expert interviews to formulate a set of arguments in favour of an inclusive and integrated preventive approach to violent extremism. The paper identifies which factors constitute social integration as a preventive approach and how social reintegration as a method can be contextually adopted to sustain the preventive approach in Bangladesh. Finally, the paper suggests a whole-of-society approach that includes key government and non-government stakeholders to execute tools of social reintegration as a part of a comprehensive policy of preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Deradicalisation, Social reintegration, Police, Society, Violent Extremism

1. Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of the July 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery terror attack in Dhaka, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), security agencies, and citizens identified their distress that Bangladesh had been perceived as a critical hotspot of new waves of terrorism by the international community. On the other hand, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) shows that Bangladesh ranked 43rd out of 163 countries in 2022. It has improved from the previous year, as Bangladesh was consecutively 41st in 2021 and 2020.[1] Since July 2016, the government and its security agencies claimed

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[1] Institute of Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2021*, Last modified on January 28, 2024, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/; Anondo Mostofa, "Global Index:

that they had exterminated 93 militant operatives in strong counterterrorism drives.[2] However, the fear would only worsen as extremist actors and signs of radicalisation leading to violent extremism continue to exist in Bangladesh.

The GoB has shown zero tolerance for terrorism and violent extremism. The security agencies—Bangladesh Police and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)—have achieved considerable success in conducting counterterrorism drives. Often, young people are significant targets of violent extremism. Contrary to conventional knowledge that youth from financially lower strata of communities and educated in Islamic religious schools are prone to radicalisation, recent trends in Bangladesh showed a more complicated picture. Now, young people from educated and affluent backgrounds have become victims of the radicalisation process. These young people are well-educated in conventional education and possess a better knowledge of informational technology and social media. Moreover, they have opinions about national and international politics and would like to be part of the broader transnational networks of their choice. These groups are susceptible to new waves of radicalisation, which may threaten Bangladesh's public safety and national security. It highlights the significance of soft approaches in addition to the hard-policing approach in countering violent extremism (CVE). Against this backdrop, the paper traces the process of accommodating ideas and practices of deradicalisation in Bangladesh, focusing on the social integration of violent extremist offenders (VEOs).

Deradicalisation, as a soft approach, is a contested idea. This term is immensely related to the concept of radicalisation, which is again controversial and needs to be better defined. Academics, practitioners, and experts identified it as a cognitive process of indoctrination by an ideology that may create vulnerability among individuals or groups, leading to violent extremism.[3] Therefore, deradicalisation is a complex process, as radicalisation is cognitive. In international scholarship, deradicalisation refers to a whole-of-the-government initiative to prevent the engagement of extremist actors in radical violence.[4] Broadly, such initiatives are

Bangladesh Tackles Terrorism Best in South Asia," *The Dhaka Tribune*, November 25, 2020, https://www.dhakatribune.com/world/south-asia/2020/11/25/global-index-bangladesh-tackles-terrorism-best-in-south-asia.

[2] South Asian Terrorism Portal, *Fatalities-Islamist Terrorism in Bangladesh*, Last accessed on June 19, 2019, www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/database/Fatalities-Islamist%20Terrorism%202010.htm.

[3] John Horgan, "Individual Disengagement: A psychological analysis," In T. Bjorgo and J. Horgan (Eds.), *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (London/New York: Routledge, 2009), 17-29. D. M. E. Noricks, "Disengagement and Deradicalization: Processes and Programs," in P. K. Davis & K. Cragin (Eds.), *Social Sciences for Counterterrorism*. *Putting the Pieces Together* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2009): 299-320.

[4] John Horgan and Mary Beth Altier, "The Future of Terrorist De-Radicalization Programs," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 13, no. 2 (2012): 83–90, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43134238.

divided into two broad categories—rehabilitative (*e.g.,* in-prison de-radicalisation schemes) and preventative (*e.g.,* post-prison and non-prison-based social reintegration). Major initiatives for radicals are disengagement, reintegration, and rehabilitation. Unlike other traditional criminal offences, radicalisation is considered a contagious disease with specific symptoms, diagnosis techniques, and treatment with vaccines.[5] Therefore, the society and community where radicals live are also regarded as essential platforms that may initiate and accommodate programmes designed to prevent radicalisation.

The risk of re-radicalisation persists for suspects or convicted extremists. Hatred and stigmatised societal actors might re-radicalize a former extremist who may have been released on bail from prison. Contemporary scholarship on deradicalisation falls short of a coherent definition, objectivity in practice, evaluation, manipulation, and discrimination. Moreover, the cottage industry of deradicalisation is currently hosted by inexperienced practitioners who desperately need to develop their capacity to continue the process.

Against that backdrop, this paper asks a critical research question—how do family, society, and state contribute to the social reintegration process of deradicalisation in the context of Bangladesh? What are the challenges and constraints in the deradicalisation process in Bangladesh? The first question deals with examining ideas and practices of deradicalisation in Bangladesh. The second question aims to highlight the policy and procedural constraints of deradicalisation in the context of Bangladesh. This study adopts a mixed-method approach to data collection—quantitative data from profile analysis of terror suspects and qualitative data from key informant interviews (KIIs).[6] This paper analyses the present conditions of deradicalisation practices in Bangladesh and identifies significant gaps in this context. The findings highlight the roles of family, society, state agencies, and non-state actors in social integration.

2. Deradicalisation Debates

Deradicalisation belongs to a grey area in the broader framework of countering violent extremism.[7] Deradicalisation, as Hamed El Said describes, refers to "a package of policies and measures designed and implemented by authorities to

[5] Kamaldeep S Bhui, *et al*., "A Public Health Approach to Understanding and Preventing Violent Radicalization," *BMC Medicine* 10, no. 16 (2012), 10.1186/1741-7015-10-16.

[6] The methodology section in this paper elaborates on the tools and processes of data collection, and analysis.

[7] Daniel Koehler, "The Theory of Radicalization and De-radicalization," in Daniel Koehler *Understanding De-Radicalization; Methods, Tools and Programs to Countering Violent Extremism* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 68-74.

normalise and convince groups and individuals who have already become radicalised or violent extremists to repent and disengage from violence."[8] Scholars have discussed multidisciplinary approaches for a comprehensive deradicalisation programme. It is not only about programmes but also about various actors—government and non-government. Multiple examples of deradicalisation programmes include religious and ideological rehabilitation, reforms in education, vocational training, social awareness, family programmes, physical programmes, and post-care or release programmes to facilitate the reintegration of released detainees. Authorities need to think at both policy and implementation levels to conduct deradicalisation programmes successfully.

Is 'disengagement' a part of deradicalisation? The actual length of the deradicalisation process is hard to fix, and disengagement can be just one part of it. Koehler observes that there remains a fine line between deradicalisation and disengagement. It is particularly significant in consideration of taking steps towards social reintegration of the former extremists. Disengagement refers to some forms of disconnect between extremist ideas and actions. It bars individuals from not being involved with radical extremism for a certain period. Time is an essential factor here. On the other hand, individuals can be disengaged but may still bear radicalised ideologies in the back of their minds. Therefore, it is difficult to measure levels of disengagement, particularly ideological disengagement.

Counter-radicalisation is a pre-emptive approach. It aims to prevent members of non-radicalised society from being radicalised without the use of heavy-handed coercive or repressive means. The hard policing approach is usually considered to be counter-productive in a preventive strategy. Counter-radicalisation also refers to empowering the community to make it a resilient one. The United Nations counterterrorism taskforce defines it as:

Policies and programs aimed at addressing some of the conditions that may propel some individuals down the path to terrorism. It is used broadly to refer to a package of social, political, legal, educational, and economic programs specifically designed to deter disaffected (and possibly already radicalised) individuals from crossing the line and becoming terrorists.[9]

[8] Hamed El-Said, *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 10.

[9] United Nations, *United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, First Report of the Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism that Lead to Terrorism*, 2008, Last accessed on September 28, 2019, http://www.un.org/terrorism/pdfs/radicalisation.pdf.

John Horgan also provides some critical insights on disengagement and deradicalisation. He observes that disengagement does not mean an end of the journey towards deradicalisation. Often, extremist groups who moved back from violent activities are no more kept in discussion. Furthermore, he favours offering more focus to these disengaged extremists. The reason behind the suggestion remains obvious. If they are appropriately asked about their experiences, it would be much easier to find out the basic tenets that influence them to adopt radical behaviour.[10] However, disengagement has at least two dimensions—physical and psychological disengagements. Furthermore, if a person is willingly distancing himself/herself from extreme activities and ideologies, he is considered to be voluntarily disengaged. But if the person dies, he should be considered being involuntarily disengaged.

Alex Schmid observes that deradicalisation is a preventive approach. It refers to a de-programming of those already radicalised.[11] Therefore, in addition to the originality of some thoughts, his work offers a process-oriented outlook of deradicalisation. It says:

> "[I]t is the process of becoming less radical. This process of 'becoming less radical' applies both to behavior and beliefs. With regard to behavior, this primarily involves the cessation of violent actions. With regard to beliefs, this involves an increase in confidence in the system, a desire to be a part of society once more, and the rejection of non-democratic means. […] In general, the deradicalisation of behavior is linked with the deradicalisation of beliefs.[12]"

Deradicalisation is often confused with behavioural disengagement.[13] Disengagement can also be defined as a group-based "physical cessation of some observable behavior" in the context of violent extremism. On the other hand, deradicalisation is "the social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalisation is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity."[14]

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[10] John Horgan, "De-Radicalization or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and Counter Terrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation," *International Journal of Social Psychology* 2, no. 4 (2014): 6-7, https://doi.org/10.1174/021347409788041408.

[11] Alex P. Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation and Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review,* (The Netherlands: ICCT, 2013).

[12] Froukje Demant, Marieke Slootman, Frank Buijs, Jean Tillie, "Decline and Disengagement: An Analysis of Processes of De-radicalisation," *Amsterdam: Institute for Migration & Ethnic Studies* (2008): 13.

[13] Tom Pettinger, "De-radicalization and Counter-radicalization: Valuable tools Combating Violent Extremism, or Harmful Methods of Subjugation?" *Journal of Deradicalisation* 12 (2017): 1-59,

https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/109.

[14] Pettinger "De-radicalization and Counter-radicalization," 5.

Social reintegration refers to rehabilitating former terror suspects in communities of their own or a different one. This is framed in a multi-disciplinary setting and is based on social acceptability, institutional (family, security sector, and others) response and individual attitudinal or behavioural change. To do that, one needs to understand "the social context that former combatants might (eventually) be reintegrated into, or it has been viewed in terms of mechanistic push and pull factors, thus neglecting the agency of reintegrating communities and the contextual factors."[15] Moreover, social reintegration as a process is widely reliant on the socio-political, cultural and security conditions in the country.[16] It refers to the political and security governance of the polity that offers equal rights and justice to all, hence, does not discriminate against former convicts because of their past activities, and thus, promotes their reintegration into society.

It is essential to understand factors that shape the desire and capacity to facilitate or resist reintegration into a community. In this context, the effectiveness of deradicalisation may be considered in terms of whether it successfully generates support for reintegration by aligning former combatant narratives with the reintegrating vibe in society.

Deradicalisation is a method where enforcement cannot bring real success, but a practical and soft approach can do that. Here, exercising soft approach has been proved to be more effective than the hard approach. As a continuing process, there is a need to create an optimal environment to fight against radicalisation. In Bangladesh, law enforcement agencies have been working strongly to make such friendly atmosphere. Beside them, participation from representatives of all classes in society should be ensured. Family members can play the most crucial role. When a person comes from jail accused of terrorist activities, the community and sometimes the family do not usually accept him. This creates a hindrance for the person to get back to his everyday life. Despite having the willingness to be deradicalised, the person becomes unsuccessful due to the non-cooperative facet of the typical society.

3. Methodology of the Study

The study primarily adopted a qualitative research approach. In addition, it also considers a simple quantitative analysis of the profile data of 169 terror suspects. The findings of this quantitative analysis have triangulated the qualitative results of the study. The primary sources include (a) profiles of 169 terror suspects collected from

[15] Gordon Clubb and Marina Tapley, "Conceptualizing De-radicalisation and former combatant re-integration in Nigeria," *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 11 (2018), 10.1080/01436597.2018.1458303.

[16] Kire Babanoski, "The threats of returning foreign terrorist fighters for the European security," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 15, no. 1 (2020): 10–15, https://doi.org/10.1080/19361610.2019.1695499.

CTTC and DMP, (b) reports produced by government and non-government sources, and (c) in-depth interviews of critical stakeholders in 2019. A thorough literature review significantly assisted in supplementing and enriching the review process and findings and provided background information to support the primary findings.

Twenty KIIs have been conducted which provided important information regarding the state of deradicalisation in Bangladesh as well as different perspective on the effectiveness of various state and social organisations in implementing deradicalisation activities. Three sets of checklists or question guides were prepared to conduct interviews with (a) terror suspects and their families, (b) members of law-enforcement agencies, and (c) social and non-government organisations. Terror suspects and their family members were asked to highlight their experience of reintegration processes within the society. The information through KII has greatly aided the study objectives and purposes. The first set of respondents was set based on their reputation and experience. Later, others were selected based on the suggestions and recommendations of earlier respondents and sources in relevant sectors. The KII respondents are selected following purposive sampling techniques.

The respondents were asked to shed light on the roles of family, society, and state in the deradicalisation process. Furthermore, in interviews with security sector actors, more emphasis was put on what are the challenges of deradicalisation activities for the state. On the other hand, for non-state actors, primary focus was on their involvement in deradicalisation and CVE activities. All these respondents offered their suggestions on improving the process of social integration, which may be considered a critical component of the deradicalisation process. They also highlighted the significance of various agencies' proactive roles and how they would like to conduct deradicalisation activities differently if allowed to do so. The KII participants were primarily based in Dhaka and the suburban areas on the outskirts of Dhaka. Interviews took place in official spaces—where the participants did not feel any obligation or pressure from the authors of this paper.

In quantitative analysis, one hundred and sixty-nine (169) profile data were consulted out of more than seven hundred profiles of terror suspects. The selection of sample size followed a purposive sampling strategy. Instead of taking a large sample of terror suspects' profiles, this study has considered the following criteria to select a small sample size that would serve the study's objectives. The requirements for choosing a specific number are:

a. Terror suspects who were arrested after the July 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery terror attack till 31 December 2018.
b. Terror suspects who were arrested more than one time.

c. Terror suspects who were arrested only in operations conducted by Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC)" Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).
d. Terrorists who were members of four groups: Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Neo-Jama'at Mujahideen Bangladesh (Neo-JMB), Ansar al-Islam Bangladesh and Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh.
e. Finally, terrorists who mentioned a word or a statement on radicalisation or deradicalisation.

In the total sample of terror suspect profiles, 85 per cent are male, and 15 per cent are female. Thirteen per cent of terror suspects are from Dhaka while the rest eighty-seven per cent are from the rest of the country. In the profiles of these terror suspects, it is recorded that 43 per cent of them are educated in mainstream Bengali medium schools. 15 per cent and 11 per cent of terror suspects studied in Islamic religious schools (Madrasa) and English medium (Cambridge/GCE), respectively. A total of 58 per cent of terror suspects received their education in the secular education system. Education data is unrecorded for 30 per cent of the sample.

While looking at the professional affiliations of these terror suspects, it is revealed that 37 per cent terror suspects were students and 24 per cent were in some private services. In 21 per cent of profiles, data on professional affiliations is not recorded. Only two terror suspects out of 139 were in government services, and six of them have been self-employed/business.

The analysis of the quantitative data was carried out using simple statistical data analysis. The results of the descriptive analysis were presented in a more straightforward summary through tabular and graphical forms. This study also followed an interpretive-qualitative approach in analysing primary and secondary data to highlight the needs and significance of deradicalisation.[17] Analysing primary qualitative data aims to explore in-depth meanings and interpretations of the relationship between research factors, such as drivers of radicalisation, actors' roles, and social reintegration issues.

4. Deradicalisation in Bangladesh: Trends and Practices

Bangladesh joined its fight against terrorism after it saw a few home-grown violent extremist groups who unveiled their existence through terrific synchronised same-day bomb blasts in 63 districts of Bangladesh. This incident suddenly shocked the country as it experienced around 459 explosions on the same day, on 17 August

[17] Donatella Del Porta & M. Keating, "How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction," in D. Del Porta and M. Keating, M. (Eds.), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences* (UK: Cambridge University press, 2008): 23-26.

2005.[18] After the incident, another chapter of darkness was added with Holey Artisan attack in 2016,[19] which made people anxious about the state of violent extremism in the country.

The history of violent religious extremism in Bangladesh goes back to the mid-1990s. First-generation extremists were the Soviet-Afghan war returnees who created Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islam (HUJI) in Bangladesh. The second generation appeared in 1996 with the advance of the organisation named 'Qital Fi-Sabilillah.' This organisation transformed into 'Jamayat-ul-Mujahedin Bangladesh,' known as JMB, in 1998. It was deeply connected with HUJI. The third generation of Islamic radicalisation started in 2001 through the group known as Hizbut Tahrir. It had a direct linkage with an international movement ongoing in other countries. The fourth generation commenced in 2007 through the group known as Jamatul Muslemin, which later began to function as the 'Ansarullah Bangla Team.' Anwar Awlaki influenced them and presently they claim to represent Al-Qaida in Bangladesh with the name Ansar al-Islam. At present, Bangladesh is going through the fifth generation of this trend. The emergence of ISIS has hatched the fifth generation. This generation feels affiliated with the ideology of ISIS. In 2015, the JMB was divided into two groups: the older JMB and the ultra-radical factions, who left the JMB for some ideological reason and came to be known as Neo-JMB. This new group claims that they maintain connections with the Islamic State and identifies itself as its Bangladesh chapter.[20] However, it is not yet officially recognised that ISIS exists or functions in Bangladesh. People from various backgrounds and professionals have been included in the targeted hit list of the militants. Hardly any stratum of the society is left untouched.[21]

In 2016, several incidents of violent extremism took place in Bangladesh, which raised concerns at home and abroad. Frequent terror attacks targeting no one made the fellow citizens traumatised. Even the Islamic State (IS) claimed to be responsible for these attacks by the Search for International Terrorist Entities (SITE) intelligence group. Local and international media circulated the news vigorously and tagged

[18] The Daily Star, "*59 blasts in 63 districts in 30 minutes*," August 18, 2005, http://archive.thedailystar.net/2005/08/18/d5081801011.htm.

[19] BBC, "*Bangladesh siege: Twenty killed at Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka*," July 2, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36692613.

[20] Md Mostafizur Rahman, "Prison Radicalisation in Bangladesh; Present Scenario and Threats," *Proceedings of the RAIS Conference: The Future of Ethics, Education and Research*, 2017, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3086125.

[21] Ali Riaz, "Who are the Bangladeshi 'Islami Militants'?" *Perspective on Terrorism* 10, no. 1 (2016), http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/485.

Bangladesh as an unsafe state. However, the law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh denied IS being responsible for the terrorist activities in Bangladesh.[22]

In February 2016, the terrorists killed a Hindu priest in Satkhira, Bangladesh. In the same year, a secular online activist, university teachers, and gay rights activist were killed. A Sufi Muslim spiritual leader, a Buddhist monk, and a village doctor were also killed in 2016. In May 2016, a university teacher who was a follower of the *Baul* philosophy was injured in an attack. In June, a Hindu priest, a Christian grocer who occasionally worked for the church, and a Hindu college teacher were killed. In the month of holy Ramadan 1 July 2016, the incident of Holey Artisan took place. On the day of Eid-ul-Fitr on 7 July 2016, another militant group tried to launch an attack in Sholakia Eidgah, Kishoreganj.

4.1 Driving Factors behind Radicalisation

The evolution of religious extremism in Bangladesh is considered to have a strong tie with global extremist activities. Bangladesh has a huge population majority of which belongs to the religion Islam, and most of them firmly have faith in Islamic ideologies. A section of extremists took religion as a tool and guided a small number of people to radical extremism. The trend of militancy in Bangladesh is a direct consequence of global phenomena, as international militant activities inspire local aspirants. Furthermore, the rise of militancy in Bangladesh since the 1990s resulted from conflict in internal politics, and a primary reason for the recent surge has been the trial of 1971 war criminals.[23]

Besides this, economic, cultural, and religious factors are responsible for spreading radical ideologies in Bangladesh. Poverty, temptation of money and power, unemployment, family unrest, and social inequality are considered the economic factors behind radicalisation. Rapid change of culture, absence of recreation opportunities, degenerative culture, and lack of values are considered cultural factors behind radical extremism. Religious misinterpretation, forcefully implying one's faith in another, and rivalry among various religious groups are the other factors fueling violent extremism.

Extremist groups use various methods to radicalise their followers. The target group for recruitment by militant groups is mainly the young population. Most of the

[22] Zahid Kalam, "Interactive: Bangladesh's fight against Militancy gained new grounds in 2017," *The Daily Star*, January 3, 2018, https://www.thedailystar.net/onlinespecial/bangladesh-fight-against-militancy-terrorism-new-grounds-islamic-state-dhaka-attack-2017-1514293.html.

[23] Rapid Action Battalion, *Violent Extremism in Bangladesh: A Study on Youth Perception*, Confidential, (Dhaka: Unpublished, 2016), 34.

time, youth are focused on this kind of involvement; thus, the tools are designed to reach more youth groups to spread ideological messages. They are not only madrasah students but also from other institutions. Besides, frustrations exist in the youth of both upper-class as well as among lower-income families. For lower-income families, the youth are assured of a decent life and dream of justice and equality through the establishment of Islamic ideology. In the upper class, they target those deprived of love and proper attention from their family. Militant groups target these vulnerable youth groups who can be motivated easily to be violent extremists. Self-destructive jihadist movements like suicide bombing are most of the time executed by these young people.

Social media is a popular communication platform for young people in Bangladesh. Militants spread violent messages in the form of ideological messages. Youth who have potentially become interested may find themselves as a fellow of radical extremism. News is spread in various formats like video content, books, and misinterpreted Hadith and Ayats from the Quran. The militant groups also target educational institutes. Previous evidence highlights that private university students were more involved in radical extremism than Madrasah students. Misleading ideas, the temptation of afterlife well-being, and the temptation of power and money are how radical extremism is spread among the new members.

4.2 Deradicalisation Initiatives and Social Reintegration in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's deradicalisation initiatives have gradually been accommodating its unique socio-cultural and modern security-institutional perspectives. The government of Bangladesh often undertakes these as part of the prevention of violent extremism in Bangladesh. Many of these programmes were taken on an ad hoc basis, ultimately may potentially lose continuity in the long run. Another problem is the lack of synchronisation among the various programme-implementing agencies.[24] Furthermore, deradicalisation and social reintegration programmes must be designed by contextualising local cultures and textures of society. Moreover, the identity of citizens has always been an issue of concern, particularly in a mildly heterogeneous state such as Bangladesh. Radicalisation is historically rooted in religion's increasing role in Bangladesh's politics, which was influenced by the majoritarian amendments in constitutional provisions on the role of religion in the state and society.[25] Therefore,

[24] Dhaka Tribune, *Experts: No Coordination in Bangladesh Govt De-radicalization Programs*, November 18, 2018, https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/militancy/2018/11/29/experts-no-coordination-in-bangladesh-govt-de-radicalisation-programs.

[25] Amena A. Mohsin, "Religion, Politics and Security: The Case of Bangladesh," in Satu P. Limaye, Mohan Malik and Robert G. Wirsing (Eds.) *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia* (Hawaii: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004), 475-488.

the deradicalisation programmes in Bangladesh would require the pursuit of a consensus on the preservation of social and cultural diversity. Otherwise, there will be a phenomenon of self-exclusion and insularity by marginalised groups from the mainstream in an effort to preserve a coherent cultural identity and the corrosive experience of discrimination and racism in the community. Bangladesh's society is affected by the fault-line of religious and secular spheres of life.[26] This reflects a form of global contestation, which has spread with the rise of extremism and terrorism in post-2001. Many in society would frame secular and religious in an opposite binary to use it as a tool for some political gains. The 'return of religion' to public life has thus become an agenda, and these debates and tensions have given rise to the notion that secularism might be in a state of crisis. Social reintegration, therefore, may need to address the complementarity of secularism and religiousness and avoid its misuse as a driver of radicalisation. Are the existing deradicalisation programmes designed to address such social uniqueness of Bangladesh? The later part and the next section will discuss this in further detail.

The CTTC unit of DMP undertook project-based deradicalisation initiatives as per its mandate and capacity. It has become a *de facto* centre point of a network of actors such as psychologists, physicians, family members, employers of terror suspects, and the like, who have been instrumental in rehabilitating a former terror suspect. Although it is not in the mandate of CTTC's work to conduct structured deradicalisation activities, it has supported terror suspects in various ways: five-dimensional (cultural, psychological, religious, educational and legal) counselling programmes, connecting to livelihood opportunities and small financial help entrepreneurial venture and the like.

Other initiatives include media mobilisation, direct person-to-person interaction, or even message dissemination through books. A 60-second anti-militant television commercial was produced by the RAB, which was broadcast on TV channels but later could not keep the continuity.[27] In 2017, RAB also published and distributed books around the whole country whose motive was to eliminate the misinterpretation of the Quran and Hadith. But later, this initiative was discontinued. Bangladesh Islamic Foundation (BIF) also worked at the field level having one-to-one communication with all mosques so that they do not deliver any speech from which anyone gets distracted or follows the wrong path.[28]

[26] Ala Uddin, "Politics of Secularism and the State of Religious Pluralism in Bangladesh," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 3 (2015): 42-54, https://doi.org/10.1353/jsa.2015.0003.

[27] Dhaka Tribune, "Experts: No Coordination in Bangladesh Govt De-radicalization Programs," online.

[28] Dhaka Tribune, "Experts: No Coordination in Bangladesh Govt De-radicalisation Programs," online.

The Ministry of Education has also been engaged in several awareness-building activities regarding extremism and terrorism in several educational institutions and Madrasas. The National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC) works to control extremism-related messaging on the Internet, particularly on social media. The Religious Affairs Ministry took up a high-budget, long-term programme to create anti-militancy awareness by conducting nationwide publicity campaigns using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).[29] As part of new ways of integrating suspected militants into mainstream society, the government is also planning to engage youths in sports, culture, and other activities.

In Bangladesh, counterterrorism still dominates the CVE/PVE activities. Many activities have been taken towards counter-terrorism activities, and they are so much praised as they have a large number of success stories. Nevertheless, there is an increasing understanding among security agencies and governments that hard policing or counterterrorism activities will not be a sustainable approach to address issues of radicalisation.

Besides GoB, some Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) have initiated preventive approaches through awareness programmes and soft interventions in communities to prevent violent extremism. Some of them are closely working with CTTC. Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), Democracy International, Stop Violence Coalition, and other national and local NGOs, such as Rupantor, work in various districts at the grassroots level. However, it is yet to be understood whether these interventions are addressing issues of radicalisation. The implementing agencies should adequately monitor deradicalisation processes which should be revised or updated regularly.[30] The capacity of non-state agencies to track the progress of deradicalisation programmes can be questioned, which is an issue for further examination.

5. Challenges and Opportunities of Social Reintegration and Deradicalisation: Spotlight on Bangladesh

This section analyses the challenges and prospects of the deradicalisation process in Bangladesh. The analysis of terror suspects' profiles and KII findings inform this discussion. First, this section discusses how terror suspects explain the radicalisation process and their opinion on deradicalisation. Then it discusses the roles of major

[29] Dhaka Tribune, "Experts: No Coordination in Bangladesh Govt De-radicalisation Programs," online.

[30] "De-radicalization' Plan Inadequate," *Daily Asian Age*, 2016, Last accessed on Janauary 17, 2019, https://dailyasianage.com/news/33306/de-radicalization-plan-inadequate.

actors who will initiate and coordinate deradicalisation processes in Bangladesh. These are discussed at three levels of analysis: family, society, and state.

5.1 Perceptions of the Terror Suspects on the Radicalisation Process

Profiles of terror suspects analysed in this study reveal the role of various actors and patterns of radicalisation.

Figure 1: Actors of Radicalisation

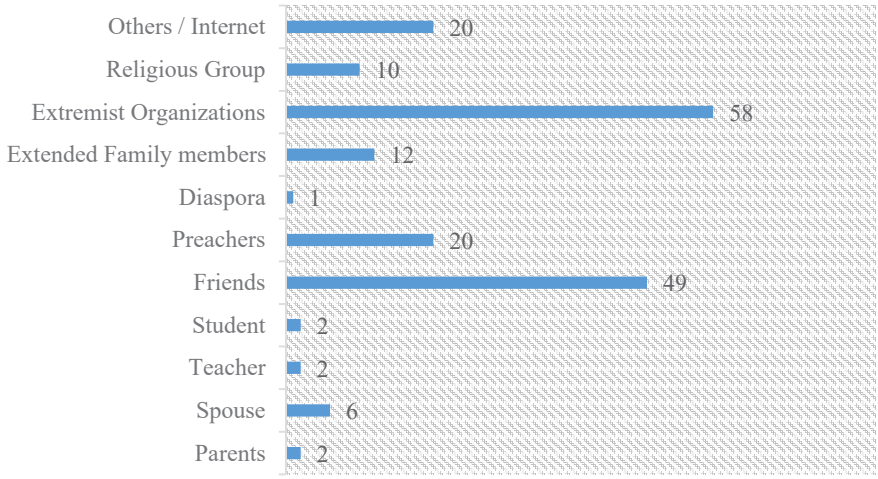

Figure 1 shows the responses of terror suspects on the role of various actors that were enabling agents for them to be radicalised. There were multiple options recorded in many profile documents. The chart shows that the highest response (32 per cent) indicates extremist groups (*i.e.,* extremist organisations) as a significant actor of radicalisation. On the other hand, the second-highest response (27 per cent) indicates 'friends' as individual agents of radicalisation. Religious preachers and groups were also identified as critical agents. The role of social media as a tool has been mentioned in a significant number of profiles. Only a few responses are recorded that said spouses and parents are actors of radicalisation. The findings in this analysis show the significance of both individuals and organisations from within communities.

One of the terror suspects from that list was interviewed by the authors of this paper. He shared his experience of how his friends motivated him to join a few meetings on faith-based discussion, and he gradually found himself an active member of the forum. He highlighted the role of friends and network of friends and religious preachers. In an interview, he said:

> I studied in an English medium school where religion studies were not taught in-depth. So, when someone tells us something about religion, mainly Islam, we pay extra attention to that. By this, a circle has grown, and I have to join with them once or twice a week. We mainly gossiped in restaurants. Senior members of this group motivated us by quoting from the Quran or Hadith. But most of the quotations were scattered and parts of any ayat. Such as the ayat of Sura Tauba-05. It is said to kill the non-believers who have no belief in Allah, but it was the order during warfare, not peaceful time, that was hidden. Then, at one stage, they provide us with videos related to Al-Qaeda or ISIS.[31]

Figure 2. Who Did Influence in Radicalisation?

Another terror suspect, who was arrested recently for a second time, told the authors in an interview in safe custody:

> In a private university in Dhaka, where I was enrolled to do my undergrad studies, some of my friends possessed a deep knowledge of religious texts. In 2016, my friends X and Y invited me to join them and shared their expertise on religious history and heroes who restored the pride of my religion. I used to pray five times salat from my childhood and have been wearing a niqab since 2012. Before that, I was not aware of Allah's instructions to maintain veils in the Holy Quran. From when I used to feel the Quran from the very core of my heart, I supported it. My friends strengthened my feelings and encouraged me to continue an Islamic lifestyle. However, I am self-motivated by reading religious texts by myself, and I will never show my face to other males.[32]

[31] Interview with a male terror suspect in Dhaka on October 9, 2018.

[32] Interview with a female terror suspect in Dhaka on October 25, 2018.

In addition to friends, one must recognise the role of educational institutions. They might not get involved in the direct preaching of certain ideologies. However, certain higher educational institutions have often provided space for the prolonged spread of radicalism, particularly radical faith-based thoughts. Radical thoughts have always received a room in universities. Revolutions are, to a large extent, based at higher educational institutions. The media, however, accused some universities after the 2016 Holy Artisan incident due to the activities of radical faith-based groups on their campuses.[33]

The authors analysed profiles and grasped narratives mentioned by terror suspects. A summary of these narratives reflects on some crucial patterns of radicalisation (see Figure 2). 38 per cent of profiles of terror suspects recorded that they were influenced by social/political/religious organisations, *i.e.,* by some forms of groups. Most profiles have brief entries; however, some explicitly mentioned how terror suspects were motivated by faith-based groups, study circles, informal groups of religious preachers, and the like. Twenty per cent of profiles recorded the role of individuals (friends, classmates, teachers from educational institutions) as influencing actors in the path of radicalisation. Spouses, *e.g.*, husband and other family members' roles, are also highlighted in 11 per cent of profiles of terror suspects. The profiles demonstrate that both individuals and groups can be the radicalising actors for any person who would be persuaded to violent extremism. In addition, figure 2 also indicates that 11 out of 139 terror profiles said that they met unknown persons on social media and radicalised them. These unknown persons were not friends before they became active on social media, spreading religious messages and attracting new young people. In the authors' interview with one of these terror suspects, it is found:

> I used to meet a few friends and was not a talkative person. I was a better viewer and listener. I liked animation movies and spent time online watching anime movies. However, by 2016 my friend X shared a few lectures on online. She shared some videos of lectures and also word documents. I was moved by these lectures and used to finish listening to them quickly. I was searching for more similar types of lectures on Anwar al-Awlaki (AaA) online. At one point, I did not depend on X and started searching for such materials on YouTube. I found AaA's lectures to be the best interpretations of religious texts.[34]

Finally, from interviews and profile analysis of terror suspects, both individuals and groups were found to be critical actors of radicalisation. There was no linear approach found that may describe the process of radicalisation as a common pathway

[33] M Niaz Asadullah, "Don't Blame Private Education for Radicalisation," *The Daily Star*, August 7, 2016, https://www.thedailystar.net/op-ed/dont-blame-private-education-only-radicalisation-1265482.

[34] Interview with a female terror suspect in Dhaka on October 19, 2018.

for all. However, the abovementioned actors played significant roles in the pre-radicalisation phase, self-identification phase, and indoctrination phases, as discussed in studies by Koehler (2017). Interviewees shared how some of the abovementioned actors convinced them in their pre-radicalisation stage, influenced their self-motivation and then brainwashed them into more conservative versions of faith. The indoctrination process is more complex as it involves various tools—social media, educational institutions, and places of employment. These are social actors who would be critical in designing a deradicalisation programme.

5.2 Factors of Resistance from Family, Society, and State for Deradicalisation

Here, the authors discuss various factors of resistance generated from three levels: family, society, and state. These resistance factors are majorly discussed in interviews and profile analysis. These factors will help readers understand which factors need to be considered to shape a social integration policy as part of the deradicalisation process.

Family is an essential agent for both radicalisation and deradicalisation process. In profile analysis, it was found that in a small number of cases, family members worked as influencing actors to facilitate the radicalisation process (see Figure 2). In addition, family members' role in the deradicalisation process is also very noteworthy. Key informant interviews in this study highlighted how a lack of interest from family members in reuniting former terror suspects is a significant obstacle for any deradicalisation programme. In an interview with a former terror suspect, now released on bail from prison, he observed:

> When someone is involved in extremism and terrorist activities, family, society, and the state make him isolated. All three components treat him as a terrorist. Family members don't recognise him as their part. Relatives stop their communication because of fear or hatred. Society also implicates him as a person not to participate in any societal programs. People from the community feel contempt for him and his family. The state does not consider the arrestee as a regular citizen. The state always shows enmity and helps little to come back to everyday life.[35]

This study identifies three resistant factors from families of terror suspects. First, families of terror suspects seriously lack awareness regarding the process of radicalisation of their children. Hence, they are reluctant to be aware of how they can play crucial roles in deradicalisation. In an interview, authors were told, "In the case

[35] Interview with a male terror suspect in Dhaka on October 9, 2018.

of upper-class families, parents don't know about the friends of children, don't know where their children go, how they spend their leisure, etc."[36]

Second, families suffer from severe denial syndrome. The denial syndrome prohibits the family members from discussing radicalisation within the family and extended family members or neighbours. By doing so, they fail to cooperate with law enforcement agencies or any other institutions that would like to collaborate in the deradicalisation process. Why do families do that? They are scared of shaming and false identities. A mother of a terror suspect, in an interview with authors, said:

> The main problem was an identity crisis. After the incident, my family was treated as the family of an extremist. Family members have to spend a lot of money to take legal action. My relatives didn't visit us for fear that there were hidden cameras in our house. They were frightened the police would harass them for their connections with us. My brothers and cousins cut loose their contacts as I have failed to control and monitor my child. Our neighbours who knew about it could not consider us as normal inhabitants. Some of those would have thought that the whole family had diverted to extremism.[37]

Finally, families do not want to participate in outreach programmes or offer support to their children—both psychological and physical. Together, this may promote radicalisation further at both conscious and subconscious levels. An interviewee told the authors of this study, "My family didn't support Jihad. When I returned with bail from prison, my family acted very strangely. Relatives never visited us. My in-laws pressured us not to contact with them."[38] The interviewee did not claim that the family's negligence pressured her to join her previous network. Nevertheless, it was pretty clear from her statements that she did not get enough support to disengage herself from her prior experience.

In addition to family members, many social actors also play critical roles in both radicalisation and deradicalisation processes. From profile analysis and interviews, this study indicates several social actors which include educational institutions, religious groups, employers, social organisations, and the like. Alex Schmid (2013) has highlighted the role of social organisations as meso-level factors. He explains how supportive and complicit social surroundings facilitate radicalisation and connect the dots between 'missing links of extremist ideas and broader constituencies of potentially radicalised individuals.[39] The findings of this study corroborate Schmid's

[36] Interview with a male terror suspect in Dhaka on October 9, 2018.

[37] Interview with a family member of a male terror suspect in Dhaka on October 9, 2018.

[38] Interview with a female terror suspect in Dhaka on October 25, 2018.

[39] Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation and Counter-Radicalisation*.

understanding and extend it to a level where one can design deradicalisation focusing on social reintegration.

There is a disconnect between social actors and the deradicalisation process. Often, a state-focus approach does not comprehend the complexity of social networks comprised of power agents—individuals or social institutions. The intersections of social hierarchy and strong politics are found to empower such agents and thus impede an inclusive social integration of a former extremist.

A terror suspect, in an interview with authors, said:

> Our society is not cooperative at all. When the police arrested me, my family was harassed by various actors in the community. Our neighbours stopped talking with my family members. My parents had to work hard not to spread the news. They were scared whether they had left the community. Local political leaders who knew about my arrest had done their best to harass my family in community gatherings. My father stopped going to Mosques for many days. My society does not permit me to become an average person or a human being as I was arrested before.[40]

A crisis of social reintegration is often inherent in national or local organisational culture. This study has extended society's concept and incorporated educational institutions and job places as critical actors. In such cases, if the organisation is not inclusive, it will disown a former terror suspect and will be unwilling to reintegrate him/her. In an interview with authors, a former terror suspect shared his similar experiences after he received bail and got free from prison. He said:

> It is challenging to absorb a person into society. I am the victim of it. In the last three job interviews, I disclosed my past involvement with radicalism so that no confusion would arise in the future between my employer and me. Even though I did better in interviews, I always got rejected from the final selection. Some companies wanted to know the case. When I told them that my case was in an anti-terrorism act, they said to me that they would talk to the top management and let me know. After a few days, they informed me negatively by saying that our top management did not want to face any legal issues. They wished the best of luck. How was it for me?[41]

In other interviews, similar stories were heard—a physician was also rejected more than once for a job at private clinics. Later, he classified this information and did not share his previous engagements with his current employer. He is concerned

[40] Interview with a male terror suspect in Dhaka on October 21, 2018.

[41] Interview with a male terror suspect in Dhaka on November 5, 2018.

about losing his job anytime they will be aware of his past life. Such lack of integration prevents a former radicalised person from being adequately deradicalised.

The role of educational institutions is also highlighted in in-depth interviews. It is critical to address rejections or negligence by academic institutions, which could have ruined an accused person's future and hamper the social reintegration process. An interviewee mentioned that she was readmitted to her university after four months of the jail sentence. She did not get a response immediately from the authorities. After six months, the university authority responded, and they asked for paperwork before they decided to give her admission. She had to face many interviews. Her parents declined to accompany her, and hence, she faced these interrogation meetings by herself. She took readmission with a junior batch as her batch-mates graduated. Her new classmates were aware; however, and they did not talk to her. They were backbiting on her previous life. The university authority never offered her psychological counselling, and teachers also avoided her. From this story, it was clear how educational institutions neglected her to integrate into society.

The interviews also highlighted that the religious and political leaders in communities are often reluctant to address deradicalisation issues proactively. Lack of cooperation from such gatekeepers would make life more miserable for the potential terror suspects. A family member of a former suspect expressed her concern:

> I thought the religious leader's role was significant. Because this person may be able to give correct guidance to my child every day; moreover, political leaders should be cooperative. After my son was arrested, some local politicians claimed money from us. They used to confuse us and asked for money to help us get bail for our son. We believed them initially. However, we understood that they bluffed us.[42]

The study, therefore, highlights both individual and collective bodies as social actors who had been resistant to the idea of social integration in the PVE-based deradicalisation process. The findings substantiated academic discussion on disengagement and the role of social actors.[43] The role of social actors and institutions failed to disengage radicalised persons from ideas and disconnect them from networks that inspired them to re-radicalise in a short time.

5.3 State and the Deradicalisation Process

This study highlights four aspects that may create more space for development in the state's involvement in the deradicalisation process by promoting social

[42] Interview with a family member of a former terror suspect in Dhaka on November 2, 2019.

[43] Koehler, *Understanding De-Radicalisation*.

integration. First, for Bangladesh, the authors observe that there is no formal deradicalsation programmes initiated by the government though there exist some institutional approaches,for example, Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC, DMP) conducted some assistance programmes (financial help and five-dimensional counselling support) for selected and most vulnerable terror suspects.[44] Moreover, existing legal frameworks do not address issues of deradicalisation and social integration. Second, there is a lack of coordination between different government agencies. Third, the level of awareness of the concepts of violent extremism and deradicalisation is yet to be heightened at the level that could lead the nation to develop effective and efficient policies. Finally, the current educational system is not viable to accommodate diversities and, hence, fails to address issues of post-modern radicalisation. The government has shown zero tolerance to all kinds of extremism, and it is willing to adopt soft approaches. Nevertheless, the changes in government policies are gradual and slow, which makes it difficult produce an outcome in the expected time.

It is observed that hard policing dominates the government's responses to violent extremism in Bangladesh. However, contemporary trends in P/CVE discourse show that some agencies are enthusiastic about incorporating soft approaches, such as awareness programmes and the potential role of education as an effective tool for countering radicalisation. A Bangladesh Enterprise Study (2015) showed that

> …education in itself can play a critical role in helping young people distance themselves from extremism and resist the 'pull factors' that may drive them to recruitment. These pull factors can be contrasted by education through awareness-raising, generating respect for others, and creating and maintaining cultures of peace and dialogue.[45]

There is a need to consider an inclusive approach to address issues of radicalisation. In an interview with the authors, a senior officer of the Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) offers valuable insight. He narrated,

> We need to share our work and experiences with the experts of other countries. Only the police cannot do it properly because the violent extremists thought of the police as their enemy. So, there needs to be a committee based on law enforcement agencies, religious clerics, psychologists, social scientists, and other relevant

[44] CTTC, in collaboration with the Centre for Alternatives, conduct a five-dimensional counselling programmes from 2023 to support violent extremist offenders. The counselling programmes are designed to address religious, psychological, cultural, educational, and legal issues.

[45] BEI, *The role of education in countering radicalisation*.

> stakeholders. If you are not target-oriented, then the proper information will go to the wrong people.[46]

In addition to an inclusive approach, the findings of this study suggest that there needs to be coordination in understanding the nuances of concepts of radicalisation. Often, it is found that different security agencies are expressing further understanding of some of these concerned ideas. It reflects the need for coordination between actors, which has produced different approaches to address issues of violent extremism. The lack of a national counterterrorism strategy is identified as another severe crisis. A senior officer from CTTC, DMP, observed:

> In case of coordination, a Counter Terrorism strategy is to be formulated. Here, we need to coordinate with law enforcement agencies, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religion, and last but not the least, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the prison department. All the related ministries will participate in the process, and the home ministry may lead the platform.[47]

Law enforcement agencies must be aware of the roles of non-state actors in the deradicalisation process. Certain individual actors are well-trained on the issue and understand the significance of non-state actors in such activities. However, there exists a critical gap between government and non-government actors.

Prisons are a critical hotspot for deradicalisation. For many terror suspects, social reintegration starts immediately after a jail sentence is over f. Wrong treatments in prison is counter-productive in the deradicalisation process. In an interview with the authors, an officer of CTTC mentioned,

> Prosecution is mainly divided into three parts. First, the police, then the jail authority, and finally, the judiciary are critical actors in this process. But before that, society's role is essential. If a family prevents a person from radicalisation, then the police have no work to do with it. If the jail department does the exact thing of correction, then our job becomes less. After jail, whether they are rehabilitated by society or not is also an important thing. When a person is released from prison, we treat the person as an alien. No one wants to meet a person who faced challenges in getting a job, getting married, and so on. It may lead the person to connect with his former inmates or groups.[48]

Prison codes have not been updated to incorporate awareness and training programmes aimed at deradicalisation of suspects and their inmates. This is a

[46] Interview with a former senior ATU officer at Police Headquarters in Dhaka on January 7, 2019.

[47] Interview with a senior CTTC officer at CTTC office in Dhaka on January 8, 2019.

[48] Interview with a CTTC officer at CTTC office in Dhaka on November 5, 2018.

significant area that would affect the social reintegration process and other soft approaches to deradicalisation processes.

In addition to Prison Codes, other existing anti-terrorism laws also lack provisions for addressing radicalisation. The Anti-Terrorism Act 2009 (ATA 2009) offers a comprehensive legal framework for combating terrorism in Bangladesh. The Act defines terrorism and specifies punishments for criminal conspiracy, attempt, abetment, or instigation of terrorist acts. It authorises the Bangladesh Bank to detect and counter terrorist financing, specifies the duration for police investigation, and creates a special tribunal for prosecuting terrorist offences. The ATA 2009 was amended in 2013 to expand the definition of terrorism to include violence targeting foreign countries, international organisations, or any crimes as listed in nine terrorism-related UN conventions. The 2013 amended law emphasises countering terrorist financing. It authorises the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) to detect, investigate, and share information related to terrorist funding and incorporates United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions 1267, 1373, and 1540 regarding terrorist financing and proliferation financing. However, it does not empower government or non-government agencies to take initiatives to prevent and counter-radicalisation.

Finally, the narrative of extremist groups is vibrantly existent in online and offline media. It is often discussed that there is a necessity of having an alternative narrative to counter extremists' narrative. The government has not yet initiated a coordinated approach to prepare an alternative narrative. The RAB published "Misinterpretation of The Quran and Hadith by Militants and their Correct Interpretation" in 2017. This was a commendable act; nevertheless, divisions among religious scholars have defamed nationwide recognition of such a counter-narrative document. It was also evident in an interview with a CTTC officer. He says, "We also try to make counter-narrative of misinterpretation. In this case, religious clerics have to play a vital role. Here, we also face some problems. For example, other religious scholars may not accept one religious narrative, and they offer different interpretations of his analysis. There is a lack of coordination among them."[49] A coordinated counter-narrative or alternative narrative is a critical and continuous process. The medium through which an alternative narrative can be communicated with relevant stakeholders is an unaddressed area in Bangladesh.

[49] Interview with a CTTC officer at CTTC office in Dhaka on November 5, 2018.

5.4 Non-state Organisations and International Development Actors

Non-state actors, such as local non-government organisations, are engaged in a few awareness-raising preventing violent extremism (PVE) programmes. A significant number of these programmes are funded by international development actors—bilateral and multilateral donors. This has raised a few concerns about its link to deradicalisation. First, donor-led PVE programmes do not necessarily address fundamental problems of radicalisation. Second, external funding has created a dependency for financial and expertise resources, which may hamper the sustainability of such programmes.

In understanding concepts and ideas on radicalisation, violent extremism and its prevention, it is yet to be understood whether NGOs and local organisations consider a common language to unpack these ideas. It is essential to mention that these ideas have differing understandings. However, it is crucial to have some common knowledge that is also contextualised, considering the realities of Bangladesh and its experience with violent extremism. An NGO expert, in his interview with the authors, said,

> Some NGOs are eager to contribute to PVE awareness campaigns. Others may have different goals and objectives and are not interested in working in this area. NGOs, however, lack expertise on this subject matter. Now, we can see microcredit NGOs are also conducting PVE activities, no matter whether they know this matter or not. It is a challenging task to run microcredit and spread the message of PVE simultaneously.[50]

It is critical to think whether an NGO without prior experience should participate in PVE activities. Arguably it has both demand and supply side. Some donors are interested in investing in PVE activities to raise awareness of violent extremism and its adverse effects. Moreover, demands are also generated from society and the NGOs. In an interview with a donor agency executive who coordinates PVE programmes, he observed:

> Donor-funded projects are mainly designed according to conditions offered by donors. We have to meet the expectations of donors. Most organisations have no expertise or workforce but are applying for the project. They have no proper human resources. They have no networking or the ability to collect resources. So, it's a challenge to work in Bangladesh. Some organisations want to grow expertise in this field. Some NGOs have the vision to increase expertise in research and integrate the

[50] Interview with an NGO professional in Dhaka on October 26, 2018.

> project into another. This number is deficient. But most of them run after funds/awards.[51]

However, the activities of NGOs also highlighted two shortcomings. First, these activities are donor-driven and do not necessarily empower grassroots organisations or sustain the interventions beyond external funding. Government agencies only encourage established NGOs in this sector. Therefore, PVE activities can also be trapped between donor-NGO bureaucracy, which would hardly offer a space to local and informal social institutions and enhance their potential to prevent violent extremism.

Second, PVE activities are holistic and often designed to spread messages of tolerance to stop extremism, particularly violent forms of extremism. It is not yet evident that deradicalisation has been a specific goal of the NGOs resourced with external funding to invest knowledge and workforce in PVE. Deradicalisation is somehow overlapped with or lost within a broader framework of PVE. NGOs rarely work on issues of social integration of terror suspects. It reflects that their focus is more on counter-radicalisation than deradicalisation. This also raises the question whether or not the government has provided enough access for non-state institutions to work on the deradicalisation of former terror suspects. A senior CTTC professional of Bangladesh Police highlights the matter. He conveyed:

> Social institutions and NGOs are not well prepared to run deradicalisation activities. Government institutions also need more resources. There are lots of works to conduct in this regard. Most of them are not conceptually clear and there is overlapping of deradicalisation with counter-radicalisation. So, after differentiating the term, social organisations need to work with the government. Without the concern or help of the government, it is not possible to run a program.[52]

Findings from existing studies and KII participants' views show that the NGOs and grassroots social organisations have the potential for deradicalisation activities. However, opportunities are still infrequent for them to make an effective contribution to this sector.

6. Mapping of Areas and Actors of Interventions: What to do?

This study identifies scopes of interventions of multiple social and political actors to ensure social reintegration as part of both deradicalisation and counter-radicalisation. A whole-of-society approach is of paramount importance in designing a unique framework for Bangladesh's deradicalisation and social reintegration

[51] Interview with a donor agency professional in Dhaka on October 24, 2018.

[52] Interview with a senior CTTC officer at CTTC office in Dhaka on January 8, 2019.

programmes by synthesising effective partnerships of diverse actors and their programmatic and intellectual interventions as part of the holistic preventive approach. A whole-of-society approach envisions an active role of various non-state actors—civil society organisations and other social and non-governmental actors in collaboration with diverse government actors to prevent violent extremism.[53] Based on the discussion in earlier sections, this study proposes the following areas/sectors that are meant to be intervened as part of the whole of society approach. Besides, the following actors are also important stakeholders who would be proactive in planning social reintegration and deradicalisation interventions. These are:

Parents and Family: Family refers to both immediate members (e.g., parents, spouse, children, and siblings) and extended members (*e.g.,* uncle, aunt, cousins, and grandparents). In discussions with terror suspects and their family members, it is understood that family members are still in the dark regarding radicalisation processes. Moreover, they are often found to be passive and reluctant to get involved in deradicalisation programmes. It is next to impossible to reintegrate a former radicalised person into their family and society without their cooperation.

Society: Society or community is a broad area for intervention. Multiple actors are functional in a society, and features of societies are not common in all states. Social reintegration depends on the formation of communities/societies in different cultures. Therefore, Bangladesh's context needs to be considered in designing social integration policies. Some institutions need to be considered while designing such policies, such as religious preachers based at mosques, community-based organisations, cultural and social clubs, political parties, and other associations rooted in communities.

State Agencies: The state actors are important stakeholders. It consists of law and order enforcement agencies, different ministries and offices, intelligence agencies, the prison department, and the like. The state allocates resources to coordinate deradicalisation activities and develops the capacity of relevant stakeholders. Coordination between state agencies to design a plan of action for deradicalisation activities is an important task. Interview findings also highlight that the state is yet to accommodate soft approaches in addressing issues of radicalisation. Different agencies of the state still need to understand the fine line between counterterrorism and preventing radicalisation adequately. Although some specialised agencies

[53] United Nations, Office of the Counter-Terrorism, *Partnerships*, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/partnerships, accessed April 05, 2024.

acknowledge society's role, it is not yet standardised, and a coordinated approach to deradicalisation is non-existent.

Education: Educational institutions are critical actors. Education refers to formal education offered by schools, colleges, and madrasas and indicates non-formal education and psycho-social counselling. The education system of Bangladesh is inconsistent. It has multivariate streams—Bengali, English, religious and technical education systems, and others. Furthermore, socio-economic issues are also instrumental in understanding the educational system of Bangladesh. Different streams of education create an inconsistency in the level of knowledge and its interpretation among students. Studies and recent extremism events disproved the conventional idea that only madrassa students are involved in violent extremism and belong to lower socio-economic strata of society. Radicalism is widespread throughout communities, and educational practices have not addressed the root causes of radicalism that lead to violence. Many policy-making actors have long ignored the necessity of psycho-social counselling of youth.

Youth Empowerment: Youth empowerment is a buzzword. It connects the education and career development of young people, contributing to the economy of a state. In Bangladesh, the government has undertaken youth empowerment policies by creating more employment opportunities and entrepreneurial abilities for young people. Nevertheless, interview findings reflect on empowerment policies that do not consider the youth's grievances or sufferings, leading to radicalisation. Furthermore, experts observe that a crisis with the current generation is that they seldom do creative thinking; instead, they are dependent on decisions made by others.

Media: Media is an essential tool. It is globally considered a critical instrument that has been exploited to spread radical messages by violent extremist groups and individuals. Furthermore, media is also an important tool for sharing alternative ideas to extremist narratives. With the rise of social media and technological advancements, media also share a responsibility to be proactive in the deradicalisation process. In contemporary times, media has multiple forms, including print, electronic, and social media.

International Development Agencies: Donor agencies or international development partners are active in resourcing counterterrorism and PVE initiatives. Both bilateral and multilateral agencies (*e.g.,* United States Agency for International Development (USAID) United Nations Development Programme and (UNDP) have supported PVE activities engaging local NGOs and think tanks. Not only have field interventions taken place in Bangladesh, but research organisations and think tanks

were also financed to organise academic studies on extremism and awareness seminars and symposiums. Analysis in the earlier section highlighted that non-state actors' activities are primarily framed in a broader PVE framework. It does not consider deradicalisation as a unique area of intervention. Moreover, a network of non-state voluntary organisations has not yet been formed to sustain the donor-led activities further.

The study proposes considering the abovementioned areas to design a set of policy recommendations and their implementation regarding deradicalisation and counter-radicalisation in Bangladesh.

7. Concluding Remarks

This study discussed the concepts and practices of deradicalisation and highlighted the significance of social reintegration as a preventive approach. Understanding the idea has also underscored the necessity of certain counter-radicalisation initiatives that overlap with deradicalisation ideas. It has examined various shortfalls of contemporary best practices worldwide and emphasised out-prison initiatives to highlight the roles of concerned social actors in a more comprehensive social integration programme. It proposes the rehabilitation process of a former terror suspect as well as reform initiatives in society to make it resilient.

The GoB has initiated specific programmes to counter and prevent violent extremism. Deradicalisation, however, is not considered a unique approach to address future threats of radicalisation that may lead to violent extremism. Deradicalisation cannot focus on time-bound programmes and cannot target any particular group. Therefore, deradicalisation processes need to engage various formal and informal groups of communities. It is, thus, complicated to coordinate between actors and their roles—how they would implement their functions to produce an expected outcome. The study argues that the number of reintegrated persons should not be the only indicator based on which one should judge the success and effectiveness of deradicalisation programmes. Instead, this study proposes the involvement of social actors to initiate reform in society to accept diversity, tolerance, and resilience, which would accommodate former terror suspects and not create further opportunities for them or anyone to be [re]-radicalised. The study also recommends continuous monitoring and evaluation of the social integration approach of deradicalisation. The deradicalisation programmes cannot be static or fixed for a longer time. It is a multidisciplinary approach and needs to be modified after a regular interval to accommodate the changing contexts of society and transformative trends of radicalisation.

Furthermore, one needs to remember that Bangladesh is not a typical case of incidents of violent extremism. A robust policing approach to counterterrorism will not yield a sustainable outcome to prevent terrorism. It also suggests that Bangladesh ought to be active in dealing with potential threats of radicalism that may lead to violent extremist activities in the future. Therefore, deradicalisation and counter-radicalisation should be the concentrations of all comprehensive PVE initiatives by government and non-government actors. New studies are critical to understand how the government and other actors frame a deradicalisation programme and how social reintegration initiatives are framed in existing deradicalisation programmes. Public support for social integration and other deradicalisation programmes is also necessary. More studies need to be assigned to understand the level of resilience of societies to accept former terror suspects. A 'whole of society' approach is necessary to prepare a resilient society to own its deradicalisation approaches and minimise threats of violent extremism.

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