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Country Report on Terrorism 2015 - Chapter 2 - Bangladesh

Overview: The Government of Bangladesh has articulated a "zero-tolerance" policy towards terrorism and remained committed to counterterrorism cooperation. Bangladesh experienced a significant increase in violent extremist activity in 2015 compared to 2014. Notably, attacks in 2015 were claimed both in the names of al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), whereas in past years violent extremist activity was associated with local groups. Despite these claims, the Government of Bangladesh attributed recent extremist violence to the political opposition and local terrorists.

Terrorist organizations used social media to spread their radical ideologies and solicit followers from Bangladesh. An article titled "The Revival of Jihad in Bengal" appeared in the November 2015 edition of the ISIL online magazine *Dabiq*, outlining ISIL activities in Bangladesh and plans for future attacks. Bangladesh participated in the White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism in February and follow-on summits. It also joined the Saudi-led Islamic counterterrorism alliance announced in December.

2015 Terrorist Incidents: In 2015, Bangladesh experienced an increase in terrorist attacks against religious minorities and government installations and for the first time, transnational groups have claimed responsibility for these attacks.

AQIS claimed attacks on February 26, March 30, May 12, August 7, and October 31 that resulted in the murders of four bloggers and a publisher, including an American citizen. ISIL also claimed nine attacks, including the murder of an Italian NGO worker (September 28): a Japanese aid worker (October 3), and an attack on an Italian priest (November 18). ISIL reportedly was behind an attack on a Shia Ashura procession (October 24) that killed one person and injured nearly 100; an attack on a police checkpoint (November 4) killing a police officer; and a December 25 suicide attack on an Ahmadiyya Muslim Community mosque. The attacker died in the December 25 attack and the press reported 10 to 12 injuries. The Government of Bangladesh insisted that ISIL did not have an operational presence in the country and attributed the ISIL-claimed attacks to domestic elements.

Additionally, there was an unclaimed December 18 attack using crude explosives at two mosques on a naval base in Chittagong (injuring between six and 25 according to press reports), as well as threats and small scale attacks against Christians, Hindus, and minority Muslim groups. In each of the terrorist incidents claimed by AQIS, attackers used machetes. The attacks claimed in the name of ISIL involved a variety of weapons: machetes, pistols, and crude explosives. In the case of the attack on the Ahmadiyya mosque, a suicide vest was used.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Bangladesh's criminal justice system continued to make progress in fully implementing the Antiterrorism Act of 2009 (ATA) as amended in 2012 and 2013.

Although Bangladesh's ATA does not outlaw recruitment and travel in furtherance of terrorism, the broad language of the law provides several mechanisms by which Bangladesh can implement UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2178 (2014), related to addressing the foreign terrorist fighter threat. Government forces reportedly arrested numerous members of ISIL and of domestic terrorist groups, including suspected supporters of Jamaat ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT). On December 24, police arrested three suspected JMB terrorists in a raid, recovering crude explosive devices and a suicide vest.

Bangladesh cooperated with the United States to further strengthen control of its borders and land, sea, and air ports of entry. Bangladesh continued to participate in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program and received counterterrorism training for law enforcement officers in such areas as crisis response, explosive ordnance disposal, and aviation security. Bangladesh also received Department of State-funded prosecutorial skills training and community oriented-policing training in targeted areas of the country. U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) continued security and stability training with a number of Bangladesh security forces – including the Bangladesh Coast Guard, Bangladesh Navy Special Warfare and Diving Salvage unit, and the Bangladesh Army 1st Para Commando Battalion. Although the Bangladesh military does not have a clear counterterrorism mandate, SOCPAC will continue to maintain strong partnerships with these forces to develop their special operations capabilities.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Bangladesh is a member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body. The Bangladesh Bank (the central bank) and its financial intelligence unit/anti-money laundering section, Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), lead the government's efforts to comply with international standards on countering the financing of terrorism. The BFIU is a member of the Egmont Group. The APG Mutual Evaluation Team conducted a country assessment in October 2015. In addition to signing 10 Memorandums of Understanding with financial intelligence unit counterparts in other countries, the BFIU has continued its effort to increase capacity with various training programs for its own officials and of officials of other stakeholders.

The terrorism finance provisions of Bangladesh's anti-terrorism act (ATA) prohibit the provision, receipt, and collection of money, services, and material support where "there are reasonable grounds to believe that the same has been used or may be used for any purpose by a terrorist entity." The Act prohibits membership in and support of prohibited organizations, i.e., organizations engaged or involved in terrorist activities, including the organizations listed in the UN 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and al-Qa'ida sanctions regime. The ATA includes a broad provision authorizing mutual legal cooperation on terrorism matters with other nations and a comprehensive forfeiture provision for assets involved in terrorism activities. However, at year's end, successful implementation of existing laws remained a significant issue. From July 2014 to June 2015, charges were filed in 64 money laundering cases with one conviction recorded. A Banking Dialogue was held in London sponsored by the Department of Justice in the fall of 2015 for members of the Bangladesh Bank, BFIU, and senior local bank officials, and the Department of State continued to support technical training and mentorship for Bangladeshi investigators and prosecutors in handling counterterrorism finance and anti-money laundering cases. The Dialogue included discussion on counterterrorism finance and money laundering.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the 2016 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes: http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm.

Countering Violent Extremism: In 2015, Bangladesh formed the Community Support Mechanism (CSM) under the Global Fund for Community Engagement and Resilience (GCERF), a public-private global fund to support local, grassroots efforts to counter violent extremism. The CSM identified five local organizations to be potential recipients of GCERF funds, and submitted a national application to the GCERF Board of Directors which was approved with Independent Review Panel recommendations in December. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and the National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention worked with imams and religious scholars to build public awareness against terrorism. In 2015, the police began developing a plan to engage religious leaders in the fight against violent extremism by helping to counter terrorist propaganda with appropriate scripture-based messages.

International and Regional Cooperation: Bangladesh is active in several international fora. Bangladesh is party to various counterterrorism protocols under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and is bringing the country's counterterrorism efforts in line with the four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. In 2015, the government demonstrated strong interest in cooperating with India on counterterrorism. It has signed memoranda of understanding with a number of countries to share evidence regarding criminal investigations, including investigations related to financial crimes and terrorism financing.