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Country Report on Terrorism 2023 - Chapter 1 - Bangladesh

Overview: In 2023, Bangladesh had no reported instances of transnational terrorist violence as authorities continued to pursue militants rigorously, particularly al-Qa’ida-affiliated groups, Ansarullah Bangla Team (also known as Ansar al-Islam) and ISIS-affiliated Neo-Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (or Neo-JMB). U.S.-trained Bangladesh police units arrested dozens of terrorist suspects. However, the government frequently conflated political opposition with “terrorism,” and some elements of the security forces allegedly have conducted extrajudicial killings and committed other human rights violations.

2023 Terrorist Incidents: In May an attack the government attributed to ethnic separatist militants of the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) killed two soldiers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area of southeastern Bangladesh. Another soldier was killed in March in a similar attack. Separately, authorities alleged the KNF provided a training safe haven in the remote hills to a new al-Qa’ida-inspired group, Jama’atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya (JAHS), beginning in 2022. Authorities said they had substantially disrupted JAHS by early 2023 and announced the arrest of the group’s alleged emir in July. The group conducted no known attacks in 2023. Moinul Hasan Shamim and Abu Siddiq Sohel, both convicted for their role in the 2015 murder of Bangladeshi publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan, remained at large through 2023 after they escaped custody in a November 2022 attack on the Dhaka Chief Judicial Magistrate building.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The Antiterrorism Act of 2009, as amended, remained the basis for the arrest and detention of terrorist suspects. In 2023 the government revised the controversial 2018 Digital Security Act, renamed the Cyber Security Act (CSA), which gives police modest additional authorities against potential terrorist

activity online. Domestic and international critics asserted, however, that the CSA retained troublesome provisions that allow law enforcement and private citizens to target, harass, and arrest perceived government critics and other members of civil society for exercising freedom of expression.

The Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), the Antiterrorism Unit (ATU) of the National Police, and the para-military Rapid Action Battalion, the last of which was sanctioned under the Global Magnitsky Act sanctions program in 2021 for serious human rights abuse, continued raids against and arrests of suspected terrorists. In 2023, Bangladeshi law enforcement and the RAB arrested 163 people and filed 55 cases. U.S.-trained bomb disposal units in several cities safely detonated improvised explosive devices during the tense run-up to the national elections, scheduled for the first week of 2024. Other government entities with CT missions include the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence's Counterterrorism Investigation Bureau, the National Security Intelligence organization, Border Guard Bangladesh, the Special Branch of the National Police, the Airport Immigration Police, and the Airport Armed Police Battalion.

Bangladesh cooperated with the United States to strengthen its internal security and response to terrorism. The U.S. government provided various forms of assistance to DMP/CTTC, the ATU, and metropolitan police units in Chattogram, Rajshahi, and Sylhet. The U.S. government also provided training to Antiterrorism Tribunal (ATT) judges and included prosecutors and police in courses on handling evidence, conducting investigations, and prosecuting terrorism and terrorist financing cases. The U.S. Office of Defense Cooperation continues ongoing counter-IED and explosive ordnance disposal programs with Bangladesh armed forces.

Bangladesh has the capacity to patrol land and maritime borders and has improved cargo and passenger screening with updated equipment, procedures, and increased staff. Bangladeshi authorities sustained recent improvements in port security, particularly at Bangladesh's principal port in Chittagong. Bangladeshi authorities also undertook planning to implement effective security measures at a new international airport terminal currently under construction in Dhaka and procured appropriate high-quality equipment. Both airport and port authorities were enthusiastic about cooperation with the U.S. government to improve port and airport security.

The country shares information with INTERPOL. The National Police's Special Branch has established a basic national terrorist watchlist, but it is not shared effectively across law enforcement elements. The country welcomes continued U.S. technical cooperation in improving processes and scope for its watchlist. The country does not systematically use

Advance Passenger Information or Passenger Name Record data to screen travelers before flights arrive.

Bangladesh is host to nearly one million Rohingya refugees. Though violence in the camps remained a concern and Bangladeshi officials publicly highlighted the potential for refugee radicalization to increase terrorist group recruitment and violence, no information emerged about terrorist threats from the camps in 2023. Government officers often refer to gang violence in the camps as terrorism.

In 2019 the ATT sentenced seven terrorists to death for their supporting roles in the 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attack. In 2023 the Supreme Court upheld their convictions but commuted their sentences to life imprisonment. The seven ATTs carried a caseload of 634 cases, a slight decrease from 2022 (681 cases).

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Bangladesh is a member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, and its Financial Intelligence Unit is a member of the Egmont Group. There were no significant changes in 2023.

Countering Violent Extremism: The DMP/CTTC, think tanks, the UN, and universities cooperated to conduct CVE-related research on topics such as terrorist organization mapping, social profiling, motivating factors, and radicalization to violence of women. With support from a private Japanese foundation, the CTTC launched a substantial rehabilitation and reintegration program focused on paroled or suspected terrorists, offering a range of counseling services to participants.

Online radicalization to violence remains a concern in Bangladesh, drawing significant government attention to providing counternarratives and engaging vulnerable populations. In December the government arrested two senior members of the Bangladesh chapter of Hizb ut-Tahrir, a proscribed group in Bangladesh, alleging the individuals were proselytizing through an online conference and the distribution of posters in major cities.

Terrorist recruitment in the prison system remained a concern. A U.S. government program provided training to prison officials in 2023 on managing dangerous prisoners. The DMP/CTTC and its partners planned to expand their rehabilitation and reintegration effort to include prisoners on the cusp of parole during 2024.

Dhaka City North Corporation, Dhaka City South Corporation, Dhamrai, Narayanganj City Corporation, Savar, and Singra are members of the Strong Cities Network.

International and Regional Cooperation: Bangladesh was active in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's activities in the CT arena. While not

a member, Bangladesh attended a Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS working group on FTFs held in Kuwait in March, as an observer, and expressed interest in attending future working groups. To date, Bangladesh has declined to repatriate any of its nationals, of whom fewer than 10 are detained in northeast Syria.

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