

The Dhaka Attack: Lessons for Bangladesh

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Abstract: The horrific terror attack at the Holey Artisan Bakery in Bangladesh's capital on 1 July 2016 by a group of religious extremists has instilled an instrument of fear across the country. Although a list of militant attacks took place in the country since the late 1990s, the Dhaka attack bore new significance at least three key reasons. Firstly, it was the country's first ever hostage crisis which lasted for 12 long hours and caused the tragic death of 29 people including 18 foreigners. Secondly, the café attack proved the Islamic State's links in Bangladesh which the government had been denying for over a year. Finally, it has highlighted significant gaps in the country's counterterrorism strategy which needed to be addressed. In this context, the paper investigates the operational and tactical features of the attack displayed by the terrorists as well as evaluates the counterterrorism responses of the Bangladeshi security forces. It also derives lessons learned from the attack and the Bangladeshi response. The author has used both primary and secondary data to write this paper. It has significant policy implications that might be helpful to counterterrorism bodies in Bangladesh and elsewhere in preparing for or countering future terrorist attacks.

Key Words: Dhaka, Islamic State, Neo-JMB, Islamic militancy, counterterrorism.

Date of Submission: 12-02-2018

Date of acceptance: 26-02-2018

I. INTRODUCTION

The 1st July 2016 extremists' attack at the Holey Artisan Bakery at Dhaka, some referred as the 'Bangladesh's version of 9/11', has been considered one of the most heinous terror attacks in the recent memories of Bangladesh. It is not the country's first coordinated terror attack committed by Islamic militants. Previously, the nationwide coordinated bomb blasts in 63 districts out of 64 on 17 August 2005 not only highlighted the organizational capabilities of these militants, but also shocked the entire nation. [1] Notwithstanding, this Artisan attack has brought some significant aspects to light, namely the nature and target groups of the attack, the profile of the attackers, the involvement of the Islamic State (IS) and gaps in the country's counterterrorism strategy. The brutal terror attack which led a 12 hours long hostage crisis ended with heart-breaking casualties of foreigners, civilians and law enforcers.

Why the terrorists targeted Dhaka's Holey Artisan restaurant? The restaurant is located at the capital's Gulshan area which is a diplomatic enclave of Bangladesh. A total 28 embassies and high commissions, and a number of international organizations' headquarters are located in that zone which is the city's richest, luxurious and secured area. It is a symbol of aristocratic Bangladesh filled with foreigners and local elites. The area's Holey Artisan Bakery was an attractive site for the masterminds of the attack mainly for two reasons. First, it has strategic significance for the Islamist terrorists as it is located within two kilometers of over dozens diplomatic consulates. Second, it was a very popular restaurant among the foreigners who were regular customers of the place. The main purpose of the Holey Artisan attackers was to kill foreigners and guarantee international media coverage. The Holey Artisan restaurant serves as an ideal venue for achieving that purpose. The attacks on the foreigners beside the foreign consulates guaranteed international media coverage which would inevitably result in travel to Bangladesh being cancelled or postponed with consequent damage to Bangladesh's rising economy. As a matter of fact, it happened since the international media covered the stories all over the world. And many countries namely USA, UK, Australia, and Denmark have already alarmed their citizens on travelling to Bangladesh hurting the country's economy. [2]

Evidence suggests that the motive of the extremists to kill the foreigners was part of the global jihadist movement. The Syria-based global jihadi extremist group, the Islamic State, claimed the responsibility of the café attack. According to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2017, the Islamic State was the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2016, responsible for killing over 9000 people in the year alone. [3] With the vision to establish a global 'Caliphate' rule in 2014, it has declared a global jihad against the infidels and consequently conducted or inspired more than 140 attacks in 29 countries. [4] In line with the Islamic State's global jihad, the banned militant group 'Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)', sometimes named as neo-JMB, which is a

local affiliate of the Islamic State [5], conducted the Holey Artisan terror attack to cause fear and alarm. It is understood that the attack intended not only to instill fear and death but also to attract recruits to its cause. Thus, it poses a complex challenge before Bangladesh to face and fight Islamic militancy in its territory.

II. The Dhaka Attack

The Dhaka attack is not the Islamist extremists' first attempt to take foreigners as hostages and slaughter them. An Al-Qaeda affiliate terrorist outfit, Al-Mourabitoun, took around 150 foreigners as hostages in the In Amenas in Algeria in 2013 and killed 39 foreigners. The Dhaka café attack also bore similarities with the terrorist attack at Mumbai in 2008 where a group of operatives of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a Pakistan-based terrorist outfit, killed 28 foreign nationals in the Taj Mahal Palace. In the present context, the Holey Artisan attack, which caused the death of 18 foreigners, reflected that it required precise planning and thorough preparation by the perpetrators who combined surprise, slaughter and suicide as tactics to fulfil the mission to kill foreigners. To understand the dynamics involved in the incident, a detail analysis of the Dhaka café attack is presented in the following sections.

2.1. Preparation and Training

The extremists took four months long preparation for the Dhaka café attack. On February 2016, the masterminds planned to carry out a massive jihadi-style attack on foreigners in the Dhaka's diplomatic area. They made this plan in a northern district Gaibandha, some 235 kilometers away from Dhaka city. For the operation, they decided to select their soldiers who were from Dhaka since they knew the location better and already left home with the intention to join jihadi forces in Syria. The selected attackers were trained how to use AK-22 rifles, pistols and bombs by the military commander of JMB, a former major of the Bangladesh Army. [6] They were trained almost for a month in a militant den at a char (shoal) in Gaibandha before heading for Dhaka. [7]

At the early June 2016, one month before the attack, the masterminds of the attack rented a house in Bashundhara, near the diplomatic zone. Only 3-4 days before the incident, the attackers came to know about the Holey Artisan as their target spot, which was known to them beforehand. The attackers went to restaurant once again and conducted a reconnaissance as final preparation.

2.2. The Attackers

All the terrorists were Bangladeshi citizens, aged below 25. Three of them were from well-off families and went to the country's top English medium schools and private universities, which have long been considered a million miles away from the domain of extremism but the Holey Artisan attack proved it wrong. Two of them were the students of Scholastica while one went to International Turkish Hope School. Anyone in the country can testify the image and untarnished status they have acquired so far. Two of them went to the country's top private universities, North South University and BRAC University, before heading to Malaysia's Monash University. However, while these three came from rich families, two of them had poor family background and went to local college and madrasa. [8] Showing no sign of radicalization and extremism before, all of them went missing since the early 2016. According to police sources, law enforcers had been trying to arrest them for months. [9]

Apart from these attackers, there were 16 other terrorists involved in the planning and coordination of the successful completion of the attack. Eight of them have already been killed in the last one year, three of them are arrested and search is on for the rest five who are on the run. [10] It is suspected that these militants have taken shelter in India.

2.3. Setting out the Attack

The 1st July 2016, Bangladesh along with the Muslim world was passing the last days of the Holy Month of Ramadan and preparing for the Eid-ul-fitr, one of the biggest religious festivals for the Muslims. It was Friday, a holy day for the Muslims as the day of Jummah prayer, death in the name of Islam in such a day offers reward to the Muslims as religious preaching goes. The attackers said their Jummah prayer and prepared themselves for the final operation in the afternoon. They wore t-shirt and jeans and took their backpacks full of arms and ammunitions. The attackers used five 9mm pistols, five AK-22 rifles, 11 grenades, and knives for the attack. They also carried Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Each carried one AK-22 rifle, one pistol, one knife and plenty of ammunition in his backpack. They divided themselves into two groups, took rickshaw and then walked some way to reach the target spot.

2.4. The Attack Launched

Shouting the slogan ‘Allah Akbar’ (God is great), the five attackers opened fire indiscriminately and detonated several bombs at around 8.45 pm while entering the Holey Artisan Bakery. Panic erupted within a moment and the frightened customers scampered for safety, some dove under tables and chairs and some rushed up the stairs. The stair-takers hid in a restroom at the second floor and were crouched in fear, unable to breathe. They heard a voice from outside shouting and asking the Bengali and Muslims to come out. They came out and saw two young men, clean shaved and dressed in jeans and t-shirts, saying: “You don’t need to be tensed. We will not kill Bengalis. We will kill only foreigners. The foreigners with their skimpy clothes and taste of alcohol, are impeding the spread of Islam.” [11]

When police resistance arrived at the spot, they opened fire at the police and detonated bombs, leaving a few policemen injured. While the police forces waited for reinforcements, the attackers fulfilled their mission with the hostages. The attackers took around 35 people as hostages. Reports say that the attackers were unfailingly polite and solicitous with the restaurant staffs and other Bangladeshis. Among all the hostages, the gunmen separated Muslims and non-Muslims and served food and water to the Muslims only. They asked the hostages to recite verses from the Quran and spared those who could do so but tortured and savagely butchered those who couldn’t. [12] Survivors of the siege later told the local media that even Muslims who could not recite the Quran were also killed. [13]

While the gunmen were done with the foreigners, they made the restaurant staffs turn on wireless network and uploaded the images of the bodies on the internet using the customers’ cellphones. Later, on the night of the attack, the US-based SITE Intelligence, which monitor global jihadi activities, posted the photos of the attackers saying that the images were released by the Islamic State. [14] The attackers were wearing black Punjabi and scarf in the photos and posing with guns and smiling. [15] When the para commando led ‘Operation Thunderbolt’ stormed the restaurant, they remained calm and looked at the dead bodies and said, “see you in heaven, take care.” [16] All of these five terrorists were killed in the operation and the 12-hours-long siege ended at 8.30 am on the next day.

2.5. Hostages and Victims

As indicated earlier, the purpose of the attack was to kill foreigners. Among the 35 hostages composed of Bangladeshi and foreign nationals, the victims were mostly foreigners. A total 24 people were killed, out of which, 9 were Italians, 7 Japanese, 3 Bangladeshis and 1 Indian. [17] Most of them were brutally hacked to death with sharp knives and some of them were shot dead. During the attack and resistance operation, around 40 people were injured, most of them were law enforcement officials and two of them died in hospitals. However, 13 hostages were rescued alive by the para-commando forces after the operation thunderbolt.

2.6. Involvement of the Islamic State

After a few hours of the attack launched, the Islamic State claimed that its soldiers have killed 22 people in the Dhaka café attack. [18] The Islamic State’s news agency ‘Amaq’ made this information public in a tweeted message “Islamic State commandoes attack a restaurant frequented by foreigners in the city of Dhaka in Bangladesh”. [19] The Islamic State then continued to post the updates of the attack throughout the night and also posted some pictures from inside the restaurant, taken by the attackers and digitally transmitted to them. [20] Also within less than 24 hours of the crisis ended, the global militant outfit also published the pictures and pseudonyms of the five attackers but with no real identity. [21] Figure 1 shows the real names and the Islamic State’s pseudonyms of the attackers:

Figure 1: The Dhaka Attack Terrorists’ Real Names Versus Islamic State’s Pseudonyms

No.	Real Names	Islamic State’s Pseudonyms
1	Meer Saameh Mubasheer	Abu Salmah al-Bengali
2	Rohan Imtiaz	Abu Rafiq al-Bengali
3	Nibras Islam	Abu Muharib al-Bengali
4	Khairul Islam	Abu Omar al-Bengali
5	Andaleeb Ahmed	Abu Muslim al-Bengali

Source: Compiled by the author from different media sources

In a latest issue of its online magazine ‘Dabiq’, the Islamic State claimed that the five Dhaka café attackers were “inghimasi (suicide fighter) soldiers of Caliphate”. [22] It also later revealed why the Holey Artisan Bakery had been selected as a target for the attack. The new media product of the Islamic State ‘Rumiyah’ described the place as, “a sinister place in which crusaders would gather to drink alcohol and commit vices throughout the night, feeling secure from the wrath of Allah that was awaiting them”. [23]

2.7. Bangladesh's Response

Although the initial response of the law enforcers was slow since the type of attack was entirely new for Bangladesh as the first-ever hostage crisis, the overall response was quite commendable. Within 15 minutes of the attack, Gulshan patrol police team reached to spot as first responders and tried to take control of the café, but failed. Later, an immediate response team was formed by the forces of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), Detective Branch (DB), Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Border Guard Bangladesh, Bangladesh Navy's Special Warfare Diving and Salvage (SWADS) and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) forces. The team, led by the Director General of RAB, divided the forces into different groups and deployed them for multiple actions. The immediate response mainly performed three functions. Firstly, it cordoned off the area and surrounded the whole restaurant taking position at different points. Secondly, it conducted a thorough reconnaissance and created an operational map to attack the terrorists. Thirdly, it collected necessary equipment and kept fighting with the attackers. Although the response was rescued two hostages from the roof but could not end the crisis. The final response came from the para-commando of the Bangladesh Army. A joint strike team, led by the para-commando forces, was formed. After trying to fail to negotiate a way out, the team prepared the rescue operation under the name 'Operation Thunderbolt'. At around 7.30 am in the next morning, a contingent of no more than 40 commando forces with two Armored Personal Carriers (APCs) launched the operation. The APCs tore down the wall of the café and the commandoes entered inside the building and engaged in gunfight with the militants. Within 13 minutes, they killed the attackers and took control over the situation. [24]

III. LESSONS FOR BANGLADESH

3.1. Intelligence Failure

Bangladeshi intelligence officials received prior warnings both from their internal and external sources that a major attack on foreigners was imminent, but lack of specificity and uncertainty about the threat windows seemed to have prevented specific responses. Monirul Islam, Chief of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Unit, emphasized on the intelligence failure to provide specific information on the Dhaka attack at the 'Police Chief Conference in South Asia and Neighboring Countries' held on 12-14 March 2017 at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, Dhaka. [25] Having prior warnings from the intelligence agencies, police forces enhanced and strengthened security check-posts, remain vigilant and closely watched embassies and major hotels in those areas thinking as of likely targets but did not consider the Holey Artisan café as potential target.[26] It also indicates lack of coordination between the intelligence agencies and law enforcers since the local police in Gulshan seemed to have taken the warnings very lightly as the first group of police forced appeared to the attack spot without heavy weapons and manpower. [27] The attack additionally highlights that the intelligence agencies were over-burdened with different other tasks and not really aware of the fact that an attack of this extent could have taken place in a restaurant. [28] This indicates not only intelligence failure but also an imagination failure since the intelligence agencies and security forces failed to imagine the potential attack target spot as well as how to manage the warnings. [29]

3.2. Management Failure

The attack highlighted the Bangladesh government's inability to manage the problem of the new episode of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh. A new episode of Islamic terrorism in Bangladesh has started since the government began war criminals' trial in 2013. This new trend has attracted students from English medium schools and private universities as their recruitment targets while the earlier trend of militancy mostly targeted students from madrasa and conservative families as recruits. [30] It also made non-Muslims, minority groups, freethinkers and bloggers and sometimes law enforcers as their operational targets [31] in contrast to previous trend of attacking on cultural festivals e.g. Ramna Batamul bombing in 2001, 21 August grenade attacks at Awami League rally in 2004, and country-wide coordinated terror attack in 2005. Although the government has slowed down their growth by banning major Islamic extremist groups, it has also failed to manage the reemergence of these groups from 2013 with new tactics, motivation and communications. The action officials of the government should have been able to draw all available knowledge on these groups leaving no clue or possibility behind. The lead investigator of the Holey Artisan Case, Deputy Commissioner of Police Mohibul Islam told in an interview that, "we thought this would be a part of the series started in 2013, and we suspected a new organization but could not point finger on it". [32] The government bodies should have managed to ensure that specific target information be collected and shared as well as duties were clearly assigned across security forces and agencies.

In addition, there was broader management issues on how top leaders set priorities and allocated resources. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced her party Awami League's election manifesto on 28 December 2013 for the national election held in 5 January 2014. In the 26-point manifesto titled 'Marching Ahead Bangladesh: Road to Peace, Democratic Development and Prosperity', it is mentioned that, "the criminals involved in burning the Holy Quran, destroying public and private properties, attacking on the

minorities and attempting to foil the trial of the war criminals will be tried as well as no concession will be given to the forces of terror and international terrorism”. [33] Although the manifesto encompassed the problem militant activities in general, it did not particularly mention about the government’s stance against the rising and changing trend of terrorism and militancy in Bangladesh. However, the Sheikh Hasina government’s seriousness against the Islamic militancy in Bangladesh reflected through a series of arrests and disruption attempts. The law enforcers arrested roughly 14000 extremists in 2015 alone but they could not prevent the Holey Artisan attack from taking place. It is obvious that it happened due to the extremists’ volatile nature with a combination unpredictability and changing dynamics. This reflects that they may be homegrown but they won’t be found where the law enforcers are looking for them; they are in places where the law enforcement never thought they would be. The government officials did not find a way to deal with their unpredictability and assign forces to prevent their plans being succeeded.

3.3. Poor Border Management

Bangladesh and India share a 4,053 kilometers long international border which is fifth largest land border in the world. Not unknown, the poor border control mechanism in this border is responsible for regular cross-border trafficking of humans, drugs and arms which both the governments of Bangladesh and India have been struggling to control. The issue of loose border management once again came to the front due to the Holey Artisan attack. Intelligence sources have found that the weapons used in the Dhaka café attack were trafficked from India through the north-western border of Bangladesh. Other sources confirmed that a consignment of AK-22 rifles along with other weapons was transported to Bangladesh from India in mango baskets a month before the attack. [38] Initially, it was reported that these AK-22 rifles were modified in the Munger city of Bihar state of India before arrived at the border of Chapainawabganj, a north-western district of Bangladesh. [39] Later, India’s National Investigation Agency (NIA) revealed that these assault rifles were produced in a clandestine arms factory located in the Devipur village, Malda district of West Bengal [40], only 10 kilometers away from the border of Chapainawabganj district of Bangladesh. One JMB operative arrested in West Bengal admitted his involvement in delivering the arms to Bangladesh’s border and also confessed during interrogation that Pakistani gunsmiths, who were from the Munger city of Bihar, produced these AK-22 rifles and trained the JMB operatives to make similar weapons in the Malda district of West Bengal. [41] However, Bangladesh police sources found that the militants smuggled the firearms and explosives from the Shibganj upazila of Chapainawabganj and transported to Dhaka’s Bashundhara residential area, close to the Holey Artisan café. [42] It is important to note that the militants use mango baskets to transport these arms and explosives to Dhaka to avoid detection since a huge volume of mangoes reach Dhaka from Chapainawabganj during the summer season. [43] The militants utilized this advantage which matched perfectly with the time of attack as the month of July is one of hottest months during the summer, a season of mangoes.

Although Bangladeshi intelligence agencies received warnings from both internal and external sources about the imminent terror attack in Dhaka months before the incident took place, it is not clear whether they had considered improving border security mechanism due to the transnational connections of Islamic militancy. Whatever the security measures were taken proved insufficient to prevent arms smuggling from the border as well as capture the smugglers and militants inside the country. The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) with the strength of only 67000 men has been guarding one of longest land borders in the world often faces difficulties in terms of border management, equipment and shortage of facilities. The whole northwestern border with India has been patrolled by one of the BGB regional headquarters based in Rangpur and 16 sector commands [44] which proved inadequate to stop cross-border trafficking in recent years, particularly the northwestern border in Chapainawabganj [45] which was utilized to smuggle the weapons used in the Dhaka café attack.

3.4. Inadequate Security Check and Target Identification

The entry points of Gulshan and its nearby areas are regularly patrolled by police almost 24-hours. Every citizen regularly visits those areas know the police vigilance which is sometimes irritating to the city-dwellers. In addition, security in those areas has been much tightened after the killing of an Italian citizen, somewhat nine months ago before the café attack took place. Even some of the gates adjoining the areas were closed by erecting walls to restrict the movement. [34] However, having warnings from the intelligence agencies, the police forces strengthened security check-posts in different entry points of the Gulshan area and guarded the residential area of the foreign diplomats. [35] The law enforcers mainly targeted the vehicles e.g. CNG and private cars, and did not properly check the suspected pedestrians. [36] Consequently, the terrorists as like the regular student passers-by crossed the security check-posts carrying AK-22 rifles, pistols, ammunitions, grenades and knives in their backpack. This indicates that the tight-security check and target identification measures of the police check-posts in these areas were ineffective at least in case of any serious coordinated attack of this extent. This in fact raises questions against the police constables on duty for their lack of seriousness, often seen smoking and chattering with mates while doing security check to the public. [37] The

attack not only indicates the inadequate security system of the country but also reveals that if the well-protected diplomatic zone of the country can be under attack, then any area of the country is no longer safe.

3.5. Inadequate Counterterrorism Training and Equipment for Local Police

The Dhaka terror incident has highlighted that the local police force lacks in sufficient training to combat militants especially in such terror attack. It is understood that the first force to respond to any terrorist incident is police, who must have proper training and equipment to effectively manage the incident. Similarly, in this context, the police forces of the Gulshan police station appeared within 15 minutes of the attack spot being the first responders. The police forces were carrying 7.62 Chinese semi-autonomic rifles, 9mm pistols and shot-guns while the attackers were using AK-22 rifles, 9mm pistols and grenades. To fight an incident of this extent, the police forces should have come with much preparation with heavy firepower which seemed otherwise. [52] So, in their initial attempt, the ill-prepared policemen could not put an end to the siege rather ended up in the deaths of two policemen and another 35 injured since the terrorists started firing and throwing grenades forcing the police to wait for reinforcements. [53] Their lack of counterterrorism training also reflected when they did not prevent the media from live telecast of the outside situation of police preparation which the attackers were watching from inside the café. The live-telecast of the media was not halted until the Director General of RAB ordered the severance of communication and cordon off the area. [54] This reflects poor counterterrorism training and operation management of Bangladesh local police forces.

3.6. Underestimating the Warnings from Internal and External sources

The Islamic State's English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, released in April 2016 featured an interview of Tamim Chowdhury, the Islamic State's Governor of the Bengal Province who claimed that, "Bengal is an important region for Caliphate and global jihad and our soldiers are presently sharpening their knives to slaughter the atheists in the region". [55] In the Bengal region, Bangladesh, being the host of 160 million population 88% of whom are Muslims, has long been not only the recruitment target of the Islamic militants but also the operational ground for them. This was a clear warning that the Islamic State aimed to strike harder in the country. The indication appeared credible when the government of Bangladesh has been informed by the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom that the rising rate of decreasing democratic space in the country was pushing it sliding towards extremism. Even the US Ambassador in Dhaka, in a press briefing 2 hours before the attack, clearly mentioned that the Islamic State had found its way to Bangladesh. [56]

However, the government of Sheikh Hasina underestimated these warnings and had been denying the presence of Islamic State in Bangladesh over a year. [57] Instead, it pointed finger against the homegrown radicals and extremists operating under the shadow of the political opposition, which historically has had close ties with the right-wing Islamists. Even after the attack, while the Islamic State claimed the responsibility of the incident as its own, the Bangladesh government denied the claim and stated that the terrorists were the members of the homegrown militant outfit *Jamaat-ul-Mujahidin* (JMB). [58] If the government identified the enemy as the Islamic State as it was, it would certainly help the law enforcers, military and intelligence services to prepare themselves to fight the Islamic State. [59] Even a warning was posted on social media about an imminent attack in Dhaka just a few hours before the café attack, the law enforcement agencies misread the attack warnings [60] underestimated the possibility of the café being a potential target. [61]

3.7. Lack of Implementation of Regulations to Prevent Terror Financing

Although the overall cost for the Holey Artisan terror attack starting from planning to execution is not known yet, the neo-JMB militants spent around USD 10,000 exclusively to carry out the Dhaka café attack as police sources estimated. The operatives spent around USD 6,000 to purchase five 9mm pistols and three AK-22 rifles to be used in the attack, and the rest USD 4,000 to buy 11 grenades and other explosives. [46] Some additional expenses were incurred by the plot leaders and facilitators to pay the house rent of the attackers, purchase their clothes and other staffs. Police investigation uncovered the three key local donors of the neo-JMB led Hotel Artisan attack, two of them are dead and one is believed to have joined the Islamic State in Syria. Also known as the key financiers of the neo-JMB militant outfit, these three (a former banker, a former major in the Bangladesh Army and a former pediatrician at the Dhaka Shishu Hospital) donated to the organization a lot more than USD 216,000 mostly obtained by selling properties and retirement benefits. [47] According to police sources, the finance to execute the Dhaka café attack came from this amount and any foreign sources are yet to be found. [48]

However, the attack revealed that the Holey Artisan terror attack finance came from the local sources and Bangladesh, being a member of the Asia/Pacific Group (APG) on Money Laundering, lacks in adequate mechanism to control terror financing. While at the policy level, the Bangladesh Bank (the central bank) and the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) as lead actors of Bangladesh government comply with the international anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT), at the implementation

level, their efforts seem ineffective. According to the APG Mutual Evaluation Report 2016, Bangladesh is facing terrorism financing (TF) threats mostly from domestic terrorist groups and the country's measures to implement the international AML/CFT regulations to deal with the threats require significant improvement. [49] Besides, there are evidences that the domestic fundamentalists fund the militants and major sectors e.g. education, health, banks and financial institutions in the country. [50] Although Bangladesh Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) 2009, as amended in 2012 and 2013, prohibits the collection of money, material support and services for any purpose which may be used by a terrorist entity, the proper implementation of such provision remains inadequate. [51]

IV. CONCLUSION

The Dhaka attack has highlighted a complex challenge before Bangladesh in terms of Islamic militancy which has several implications on the country. Firstly, Bangladesh will continue to face a serious threat from extremism in the foreseeable future. And the threat is most likely to grow and can be multiplied even since other home-grown militants in Bangladesh will eventually take inspiration from the Dhaka attack and may follow the suit to pledge their allegiance to the Islamic State. Already, another extremist outfit based in Bangladesh, Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), showed its allegiance to the Al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-continent (AQIS). There are at least a dozen domestic extremist groups operating in Bangladesh. If they manage to remain strong enough to inflict such type of terror, Bangladesh might fall into a complex web of religious extremism. Secondly, the Dhaka attack revealed significant gaps in its security policy and counterterrorism strategy. It has demonstrated that the terrorists have not considered them as button-pushing suicide bombers, rather they considered themselves as martyrs and received warrior-like death in a fight with the para-commando forces. Who knows they will not bring something new in the near future? Based on the changing face of global jihadist movement, the government of Bangladesh must endeavor to address these gaps and remain alert for countering any future terrorist incident.

APPENDIX

Chronology of the Attack (all times are local)

- 8:45 pm — Five heavily armed gunmen enter the Holey Artisan Bakery and stormed the place.
- 9.10 pm – They open fire and hold around 35 people hostages.
- 9.30 pm – Terrorists open fire at police.
- 9.50 pm – Police and RAB cordon off the area.
- 10.00 pm — Two policemen are injured and more police, RAB and BGB forces arrive at the spot.
- 10.30 pm — Explosions and gunshots heard from inside the restaurant.
- 11.00 pm — Many law enforcers are injured by the firing of the terrorists.
- 11.20 pm — RAB chief asks TV channels to stop live broadcasts for security reasons.
- 12.10 am – US describes the situation ‘very fluid, very live’.
- 1.00 am — The two critically injured officers who were hit by bullets succumb to their injuries in a hospital.
- 1.33 am — IS claims responsibility for Gulshan attack, says SITE Intelligence monitoring agency.
- 1.45 am – A 30-member commando team started for the spot to join the rescue operation.
- 2.45 am – The Special Warfare Diving and Salvage Command, a special commando force, arrives.
- 2.55 am – SWAT rescues two foreigners from the restaurant.
- 3.05 am – A large contingency of police and security guards cordon off the area.
- 3.14 am – IS claims 24 killed and 40 injured in the attack.
- 4.00 am — US President has briefed about the attack at Gulshan.
- 4.30 am – Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh has said, “seven of his countrymen are among the hostages”.
- 4.53 am – Home Minister of Bangladesh arrives at the spot.
- 6.10 am — Bangladesh security forces say that they are ready to launch a rescue operation.
- 7.30 am — A joint strike team, led by a newly formed paramilitary force, storms the restaurant.
- 7.40 am – Five hostages are rescued by the team within 10 minutes of the rescue operation.
- 7.48 am — Heavy firing and explosions continue.
- 8.10 am – Chief of Army Staff arrives at the spot.
- 8.30 am — ‘Operation Thunderbolt’ ends successfully. Chief of Naval Staff arrives.
- 8.55 am – The joint strike team has taken control of the building and begun search operation.
- 9.15 am – The hostage standoff ends after almost 12 hours.
- 11.35 am – Four men who are believed to be the restaurant employees are taken away by DB.
- 12.45 pm — Thirteen hostages are rescued and bodies of 20 hostages are found. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina condemns the attack and says six gunmen were killed and one suspect arrested.
- 12.56 pm – The rescued hostages are taken to DB headquarters.
- 3.50 pm — India's foreign minister says one hostage, who was a student at UC-Berkeley, was killed.

6.30 pm — Pope Francis condemns the attack as an ‘offense against God and humanity.’
7.45 pm — Italian Foreign Minister Paolo says nine Italians have been identified among the dead.
8.45 pm — Japan's government confirms seven Japanese development workers are killed in the attack.
Midnight— Police release photographs of bodies and names of five militants killed inside the restaurant.

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