

## Security Outlook 2019

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### **Synopsis**

The year 2019 will be a remarkable year for the country. The country is led by a newly elected government, has many challenges ahead. The primary objective of this commentary is to address the possible security trends in the year 2019. This commentary seeks to answer some of the security issues that would be prominent in this year.

### **Commentary**

There are a number of security issues that need to be addressed in year 2019. Terrorism and militancy was curbed by the law enforcement agencies within last few years. However, the yearlong efforts of the law enforcement agencies suggest that different groups such as JMB and ABT are still actively seeking possible recruits. The rise of the lone wolf terror also took place in the country. There are other security concerns rising in the security landscape. In this commentary, we would be elaborating on some of the specific security risks in the days to come.

### **Militancy and Terrorism**

Most devastating terror attack came with the Holey Artisan attack in 2016. Although the anti-terror drives from the law enforcing agencies reduced the operational capacities of most of the terror outfits in many fronts. In the previous year, the country had also witnessed the rise of female radicalisation. Terror outfits seeking more females to join in their ranks. Examples can be drawn from the arrest of a Bangladeshi female student in Australia last year. This female student went to Australia on a scholarship ended up stabbing the host. The arrest also unveiled the involvement of the family members in formation of the terror network. Terror outfits such as JMB had opened their India chapter in the year 2018, indicating their will to grow their sphere of influence not only in Bangladesh but also in neighboring countries. Although law enforcement agencies have taken measures to curb influence of terror outfits as well as operational capacity, the threat from lone wolf actors remains a security risk. The ability of spreading propaganda through online platforms indicates that terror organizations are heavily investing in technology and people with IT skills. One of the cases of self radicalisation led to

heinous attack on prominent intellectuals in recent time. An individual got self radicalized, was influenced by the online propaganda materials and stabbed the prominent academic and author Dr. Zafar Iqbal. The trend such as the rise of lone wolf phenomena and radicalisation of women would most likely remain a security concern in the year 2019.

## **Cross-Border Security**

Bangladesh has experienced a refugee crisis in the 2017 when thousands of Rohingya refugees crossed over the border from Myanmar to Bangladesh. The refugee crisis created many security problems such as human trafficking, drug and arms smuggling, environmental degradation and at times clashes with the local population. The government of Bangladesh had accepted and accommodated these refugees with open arms. However, as the international Aid and assistance is fast depleting, there will be challenges ahead in the years 2019 when comes to refugee management. There are similar refugee related security risks in the horizon. Many experts believe that the ongoing process of the National Register of Citizens in India's Assam state could trigger a mass exodus. As almost 28% of the Assam's population is Bangla speaking, any scraping of citizenship could result a mass exodus that would put enormous stress on Bangladesh. At the policy level, dealing with possible cross-border mass exodus in 2019 remains a challenge.

## **The Ongoing Rohingya Problem**

Bangladesh had experienced a huge Rohingya exodus coming from Myanmar. Bangladesh is a country with very limited resources with a huge population. The country received international assistance and support at the early stages. The huge Rohingya population has already created contention among the local population. Rohingya refugees have occupied the homesteads and arable lands of the locals. There are places where the local food price increased while the basic wage for the locals remains the same. There might be a longstanding environmental degradation might be underway as forests is being gradually diminishing. As foreign aid is fast depleting, more stress will be on the Bangladeshi resources to combat this refugee crisis.

## **Drug Smuggling**

Drugs had always been considered as a problem in Bangladesh. Due to the geographical location, the drug smuggling gangs had prefer Bangladesh as a route for drugs. Bangladesh is situated right between the two major drug producing hotspots. With the Rohingya refugee coming to Bangladesh across the border and conflict continuing in Afghanistan, drugs related problems must be taken seriously. Bangladesh has direct air, sea and road communications with almost all the major drug producing countries in the region. This has placed Bangladesh at a critical geographical crossroads for illicit drugs from Myanmar, India, Pakistan and Nepal. Drug

abuse directly influences the economic and social aspects of a country. In Bangladesh it is a growing national concern. There are millions of drug-addicted people in Bangladesh and most of them are young, between the ages of 18 and 30, affecting people from all strata of the society. Policies should be taken to combat this endemic before we lose youth and their potentials.

## **The Financial Security**

The growth domestic product (GDP) of Bangladesh is expected to grow by 7.1 per cent in 2019-2020 according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Although there is significant growth taking place in financial sector across the country, there are risks that can halt the sustainable development and the growth of this sector. The bad loans and volatile nature of the capital market was of the major risks in the last financial year. There are state own financial institutions are yet to go through much needed structural adjustments. Information transparency and low barriers to entry both are lacking in banking sector due to regulatory shortcomings. Any further volatility in the capital market or political instability can also setback the much desired economic development.

## **Climate Security and Disaster**

Bangladesh is a disaster prone country with very limited resources. The rise of temperature, the frequent occurrence of natural disaster had created havoc in parts of rural Bangladesh in recent years. The rise of temperature that would melt the icebergs worldwide would lead to massive flood on an epic proportion. The country is relatively small with a huge population; any natural disaster would significantly damage our limited arable land. This will trigger a huge food security issue across the country. Any form of prolonged torrential flooding, cyclone, river erosion and intense saline intrusion would have a disastrous effect on the food production. The country is situated in the middle of major tectonic plates. The geographical location and the population density are making the capital Dhaka extremely vulnerable to earth quakes. Any possible food production crisis in 2019 might trigger other security issues such as public disobedience and a whole host of social unrest.

## **Cyber Security**

In the recent years, cyber criminals have made their ways into Bangladesh. One of the most notorious cyber crimes was the persistent attacks on Bangladesh Bank's cyber infrastructures. The cyber heist does not only an indication of increasing capacity of criminal organizations targeting the state owned banks but also different tactics they employ to break into secure banking system. Thousands of people use the internet to communicate, share information and conduct trade and commerce thanks to massive internet penetration in Bangladesh. More

people, businesses and devices are connecting to the information highway, would expose themselves to new and cunning cyber ploys, orchestrated by transnational criminals, unless there are programmes to educate people about the risks involved online. The use of fake news through social media platforms had grown in recent years and especially during the pre-election period. The disinformation campaign waged by the miscreants unveils the fact that disinformation campaign is slowly becoming part of the negative campaign designed to undermine political opponents. As the nature of cyber crime continues to evolve, only a new set of counter measures would be able to protect our general public as well as critical infrastructure in the year 2019. In the year 2019, steps should be taken to strengthen the security measures against the ever evolving nature of cyber crimes.

## **Conclusion**

There are different security challenges lies ahead in the year 2019. Appropriate policy options as well as implementation is needed to mitigate security threats and produce contingency planning as the country faces new challenges in the year 2019.

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