



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies
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SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS

International Conference
on

Human Security Approach to Counter Extremism in South Asia: Relevance of Japanese Culture

24-25 November, 2009

The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) with support of the Japan Foundation organized a two-day International Conference on ‘**Human Security Approach to Counter Extremism in South Asia: Relevance of Japanese Culture**’ on November 24-25, 2009 at the BIISS auditorium, Dhaka.

Advocate Shahara Khatun, MP, Hon’ble Minister for Home Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh inaugurated the Conference as the Chief Guest. **H. E. Mr. Tamotsu Shinotsuka**, Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh, was present at the Inaugural Session as the Special Guest. **Major General Sheikh Md Monirul Islam, ndc, psc** Director General of BIISS delivered the Address of Welcome. **Major General Muhammad Firdaus Mian, psc** Chairman, Board of Governors of BIISS presided over the Inaugural Session. **Prof. Muzaffer Ahmad**, Former Chairman, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and Member, Board of Governors of BIISS was the Chief Guest at the Concluding Session of the Conference. The Concluding Session was chaired by **Major General Sheikh Md Monirul Islam, ndc, psc** Director General of BIISS. “**National Security Bangladesh 2008**” a yearly publication of the Institute was launched in the Conference. **Dr. Iftekharuzzaman**, Executive Director, Transparency International Bangladesh reviewed the book.

Scholars of different sectors, members of academia and policy makers from India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Japan and Bangladesh participated in the Conference. The Conference was divided into three working sessions over which ten papers were presented. The first session dealt with the state of human security and mapping of

extremism in South Asia. The second session and part of third session focused on the synergy and conflict of human security and extremism in South Asian countries. The third and concluding session highlighted the relevance of Japan and its culture of peace for South Asia.

Major General Sheikh Md Monirul Islam, ndc, psc Director General of the BISS in his speech discussed the constraints that South Asia is facing now and pointed out terrorism and extremism as the scariest issues of the region. While searching the root causes of terrorism and extremism, he mentioned that the political culture in the South Asian states is unable to meet the political and economic aspirations of the masses. The economic inequalities and deprivation have created frustration and insecurity among the masses, leading to an increasing criminalization of society in which there are available targets for exploitation by the extremist elements. Foreign interference also plays a role to further exacerbate terrorism and extremism in this region. According to him, as the SAARC Convention and Protocol have failed to combat terrorism and extremism in this region, it is necessary to have a South Asian Regional Counter Terrorism Strategy to combat terrorism and extremism in this region.

In reviewing the book “National Security Bangladesh 2008” launched by the Chief Guest, Advocate Shahara Khatun, MP, Honourable Minister for Home Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, **Dr. Iftekharuzzaman**, Executive Director, Transparency International Bangladesh, underscored the high standard of research, the degree of efforts that went into it, the hard work put in by the authors and the editor, the way it meets the demand for the knowledge produced by it, the value it adds to the literature, and the quality of production itself. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, therefore, focused on some issues that should be addressed to meet the validity of such type of book. Amongst many issues, the most important are: role and implications of armed forces deployed under emergency in the last two years (2007-2008), addressing the root causes of militancy and small arms proliferation, non-traditional factors leading to conventional insecurities, state of citizens’ access to justice and law enforcement agencies, state of violation of human rights and insecurities of the many disadvantaged sections of the society, people’s inaccessibility to the basic entitlements and services provided by the state, issue-areas that CSOs are engaged in non-traditional human security and in legal, institutional and policy reforms. Finally, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman

suggested publication of the book in Bengali if not whole, at least a summary of the work in user friendly format.

In his address, Special Guest, **H. E. Mr. Tamotsu Shinotsuka**, Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh, emphasized on encouraging intellectual contributions to create a moral sensitiveness towards human development, accommodating peacefully diversities of opinions and interests. Mr. Tamotsu focused on understanding each other and working together to meet responsibilities for ensuring human security in South Asian region. Mr. Shinotsuka also underscored the need for creating a framework of regional cooperation to harmonize socio-political and economic values to secure new dimensions of human development and fight against extremism. In this respect, Japanese peace culture finds its relevance.

In her inaugural address, **Advocate Shahara Khatun, MP**, Hon'ble Minister for Home Affairs mentioned that among the critical issues that come under the rubric of human security, extremism is one. Extremism is closely associated with terrorism as the rise of extremism leads to increased terrorist agendas. She figured out South Asia as one of the most conflict-prone regions of the world and mentioned that although the typology of conflicts in South Asia is varied in nature and that their occurrences vary from state to state, the common factor discernible in all the stated conflicts is extremism in different forms with their dramatic and devastating consequences for the peoples of the region and their respective human security. She urged that as the issues of terrorism and extremism is of paramount importance, it is necessary to start examining the roots of these phenomena and to bring out appropriate response strategies that must be implemented in order to combat these modern day crises.

The Chair of the International Conference, **Major General Muhammad Firdaus Mian, psc**, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS, in his remarks, emphasized on South Asian extremism scenario that is no less ominous than elsewhere. The Chair of the Conference therefore put emphasis on 'people centric' security that would be able to combat extremism if its operational modalities are carried out properly in a holistic manner. Finally, he focused on Japan's economic and development engagement in South Asia is immense and has a human security dimension. The countries of the South

Asian region might find the Japanese culture of peace relevant in their respective contexts.

A number of issues related to human security and extremism were discussed in the two-day International Conference. With respect to extremism, issues such as its causes, constituents, principal sources, goals and objectives, resort to violence, ramifications for national and regional peace and stability, impact on the well-being of individuals and few other related issues were taken up for discussion by the participants. Alongside, the discussion on relevance of human security as an approach to end extremism in South Asia figured prominently in the deliberations during the two-day Conference.

The participants discussed that there has been much focus on traditional security paradigm and national security has been largely viewed in terms of military security and territorial security, whereas non-traditional security dimension which has become the pillar of human security in the recent years has gained more strong ground at the non-governmental level rather than at government level. In contemporary Bangladesh, the concept of security is understood in a much broader and comprehensive sense to include both traditional and non-traditional threats and risks and that the interface between the two is now a reality that the country's security community can not dispense with. The gross neglect of human security eventually played a decisive role in providing space for the growth of religious extremism and ethno-nationalist militancy and extremism. Pointing out the issues of improper leadership, the speakers opined that the potentialities of South Asia could not flourish due to lack of good and proper leadership. In the case of Sri Lanka the failure of the bargaining strategy adopted by the political leadership of the Tamils and the reluctance of the part of Colombo began the changes in the political climate of the country. On the other hand, the conflicts and violence have forced many government and non-government actors to ensure sustained peace in the region through proper development process.

The speakers expressed the view that gross state indifference to the fundamental features of multi-cultural societies, either in theory or in practice, generates a chain reaction of hatred and mistrust among the people, in particular those who suffer from discrimination. This can destabilize the entire society. The failure of institutional power and governance for accommodating all ethnic identities in decision-making process and

for rebuilding the national economy to empower the marginalized sectors and regions bring extremist political tendencies in South Asia. Ethnic, ideological and political conflicts which are consolidating day by day for reasons like worsening socio-economic and political conditions pose a serious threat to international stability and inter-state relations. In Sri Lanka ethnic dimension is one of the root causes of the rise and fall of the LTTE. Language issue is a major cause of conflict between the two groups of Sri Lanka. In Nepal, the ethno-linguistic variables and the probable ethnic violence are the serious threats to the human security of the Nepalese.

According to the speakers of the Conference, democracy can tolerate non-democratic elements within its system until they affect the democratic process. The European and western countries practice adult democracy but the South Asian countries practice young democracy which is another reason to explain the human security deficit in this region. For example, in a young democracy like India, extremist activities might persist for some more years to come.

The participants raised the issue that while extremism in South Asia is country-specific and that a complex web of factors peculiar to each of the South Asian states determine its shape, nature and intensity, it is the human security deficit that lies at the root of each of the extremist activities here. 'Fear factor' in symbiosis with the 'want factor' depicts the human security scenario in a very negative way in the region. The majority of the Bangladeshis perceive both 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear' issues as having the largest impact on their security. Ignorance, poverty and deprivation make the youth of the South Asian countries vulnerable to militancy and extremism. The failure to identify oneself with the mainstream life of the land or to grow a stake in the continuity of the prevailing system lies at the root of extremism.

The participants discussed that in South Asia human security is in a very formative stage. The dominant paradigm of human security in the region is state centric. In South Asia the paradigm shift of human security from traditional to non-traditional has failed as the people dealing with security paradigm are not willing to accept the shift. The people of South Asia still expect state to ensure security.

In South Asia, India-Pakistan conflict is a threat for regional security. A cooperative approach is needed to counter terrorism. The South Asian countries should work together by compulsion to ensure human security in order to reduce extremism. There are many mechanisms which exist in the region. For example, SAARC has a convention and Protocol related to terrorism and extremism. If there is political will, these mechanisms can do well in countering terrorism and extremism in South Asia.

The speakers debated over the term Islamic extremism and said that such definition would not lead to the solution of the problem. They also pointed out some specific groups to know whether they are extremists or not. In this connection, the issue of registration of political parties came in front and the speakers said that registering of parties do not mean that they do not have any link or sympathy with extremism.

The speakers said that state should come first as robust organization and deal with other vulnerable groups. Civil societies are important in all countries to ensure human security. In Sri Lanka, a Sri Lankan civil society can be formed as their civil society is divided into Sinhalese and Tamil civil societies.

The participants discussed that employment generation, wage ratio increase, regional cooperation, disarmament and solidarity would help the region to ensure human security and thus ensure reduction in terrorism and extremism. Investment in human and social development will reduce the curiosity of the youth of the region to become extremists and terrorists. The country's economy is the strongest factor to influence the human security scenario in Nepal. Recently, most of the Gurkhas repatriated back their financial earnings to the UK, after the British granted them UK citizenship. This has cost a very negative impact on Nepalese economy.

The speakers opined that Japanese experience demonstrates that education, skilfulness, professionalism, hard work, commitment and dedication along with good leadership are the priority areas of human security. Japan's racial, ethnic and religious homogeneity contributed to formulate the country's human security agenda. Human security has become Japan's one of the diplomatic pillars since the end of the Cold War. In order to reduce violence and extremism, Japan wants to collaborate with other countries in various ways other than military means. Thus, the Japanese concept and

policy towards human security and the operational procedure for human security related issues can be explored to find out its relevance in South Asia for addressing the various challenges that lie on the way of social and economic welfare of the people of South Asia. Japan has been providing assistance to address the root causes of conflicts or instability prevailing in several countries and regions. Japan is making efforts to disseminate the concept of human security and to realize human security. Japan has been making efforts to facilitate understanding and cooperation on human security from other countries through taking up human security as an agenda and discussion on it at the high level meetings. Japan has been establishing groups aiming to mainstream human security and cooperating actively with such groups. As the Japanese economy grew, Japan provided an increasing amount of ODA to developing countries, especially those in Northeast and Southeast Asian countries. This proved to be a strong diplomatic tool for Japan to strengthen relationship with the aid recipients.

In the light of the above, the Conference made the following recommendations for the governments, policy making community, NGOs and the civil society:

- The evolving concept of human security could provide the necessary guideline for a new security agenda in South Asia.
- The state-centric approach towards addressing extremism in South Asia should give its way to the human security approach.
- Once an understanding of vulnerability and the root causes of extremism is gained, a pro-active approach can be developed where the regional states can provide a framework of mutual cooperation, regional economic and political integration and a common platform.
- The use of military force to solve terrorism and extremism is not sufficient. Extremism should be taken as a state of mind which demands that counter terrorism and extremism measures should be taken in an appropriate manner. Political accommodation or peace accords have been another method to deal with terrorism and extremism.
- To address extremism in an appropriate manner it is necessary to understand its root causes. Human security approach is the most appropriate approach or strategy in this respect.

- The human resource, which is the best asset of South Asia, must be nurtured, developed, managed and used for greater welfare benefits.
- It is necessary to honour political commitments and seriousness in implementation of the accords signed between the authority and the actors termed as terrorists or dissidents.
- Third party mediation, such as Norway's mediation in the Sri Lankan peace process, can be used as a response mechanism.
- Civil Society intervention can also be used in peace building and peace making in conflict threats. Civil society intervention can only be successful if there is a healthy interaction between the government and the civil society organizations.
- Human security needs a proper understanding of the insecurities at each level and tries to address the insecurities at each level singly or in combination with other levels.
- There is an inter relationship between the human security and state-centric approaches for responding to extremism. It is necessary to harmonize the human security and state security in order to derive an approach which can respond to extremism holistically and individually.
- Human security elements need to be strongly incorporated in developing counter extremism strategy.
- Promoting democracy would be helpful to counter terrorism and extremism. The political leaders should be more accountable.
- Rule of law should be ensured. It is necessary to reform the justice system and have more efficient law enforcing agencies to fight crime.
- Human security concept should find its resonance in the ocean medium too. Ocean governance can fulfil the human security crisis by addressing a number of insecurities in this sphere.
- Education system has a very significant role both in fomenting and eradicating terrorism and extremism. It is necessary to increase investment in the reform of education system. The school text books should be revised and the madrassa system should be modernized. Public schooling system should as well be improved.
- Intellectual intervention in the interpretation of religion is necessary. Otherwise, misinterpretation of religion by the extremist interpreters will continue in promoting extremism.

- Concerted regional efforts to address the phenomenon of extremism in all its forms and manifestations. A regional approach is sought because many of the extremist activities in the region have cross-border implications. The South Asian Regional Task Force for Countering Terrorism needs early materialization.