

# South Asia Conflict Monitor

*monthly newsletter on terrorism, violence and armed conflict...*



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**NEWS ROUNDUP**  
(December 2019)

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## **BANGLADESH: Containing Islamist Resurgence and Radicalism**

This is the second year, consecutively that Bangladesh has witnessed less than 50 violent incidents and terrorist related fatalities. In a year end assessment, the Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) of the Bangladesh police claimed that the year 2019 witnessed a lesser number of terrorist attacks due to a strong counter insurgency policy. This policy focussed on counter-narratives, de-radicalisation and awareness programmes to curb the militancy alongside regular activities like arrests and intelligence gathering on the terrorist groups in the post Holey Bakery incident in Dhaka in 2016. In fact, for the third year in a row, the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crimes (CTTC) unit of the police and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) carried out over a hundred raids in militant hideouts and arrested over 300 militants representing different organizations. In addition, even the number of raids on militant hideouts went down in 2019 in comparison to the previous years.

Concerted efforts against most of the

established militant groups such as Allah'r Dal, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B) have restricted militant groups to operate and carry out violence in the country. Albeit a relative success, the problem of jihadi terrorism is still a potent force in the country which can challenge the security apparatus at any given time. Amid the ongoing efforts to curb terrorism in the country, the so called Islamic State affiliate in Bangladesh claimed another attack on police forces near the city of Khulna. This attack was carried out through an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in early December 2019. This was the sixth attack claimed by the Islamic State inspired militants in 2019. Further, Al-Munafir Media, a pro-Islamic State (IS) Bengali-language media outlet has released posters threatening violence during the Winter Holidays (Christmas and New Year) in December. Notably, the Islamic State

inspired militants (e.g., Neo-JMB) resumed attacks in the country in April 2019 following a two-year gap in their jihadi operation.

The elite Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit underscored the persistent threat of radicalisation (both virtual and physical) which is undoubtedly on the rise in the country. It is clear that this threat will remain a headache for the government and security agencies. As per CTTC research, the notorious 'Dawahilallah Forum,' online propaganda forum affiliated with Al Qaeda and Ansarullah Bangla Team, has increased its member base from 550 to 3,000 in the last few months. Alarming, CTTC's research also noted that 82 percent of the terrorists use social media, and 56 percent of the terror suspects were university graduates. The research broadly proved how new age militant elements resort to internet and novel technologies to push their subversive activities and agenda.

However, in a change of tactic, the security agencies gave emphasis on counter-narratives, de-radicalisation and awareness programmes to curb the militancy alongside regular activities. This fresh perspective has helped the country tackle the radicalisation problem. Md Moniruzzaman, a deputy inspector general (intelligence) of the newly formed ATU, said, "Alongside regular activities, we are now embracing a soft approach, trying to change the mind-set of the radicalised faction and taking up programs which raise motivation and awareness. Also, we are working on long-term capacity building and institutional skills development." The objective of this approach is to nip the threat at the bud and not to allow the militants to consolidate and expand.

Followings are the reasons for successful counter insurgency operations in Bangladesh.

Firstly, the success is due to strong intelligence and frequent action against radical groups and most importantly the police-adopted soft approach side-lining the earlier chosen coercive

methods. As a result, these radical groups did not get any space to expand their network and indoctrination programs. The terrorist attack at Holey Bakery in Dhaka in 2016 was the game changer and Bangladesh has shown resolve against any kind of terrorism since then.

Secondly, the strong political willpower to fight against radicalism complemented by the re-election of the Awami League (AL) under Sheikh Hasina that motivated the security agencies to take resolute action. During her election campaign, she reiterated her determination to take strong action against all forms of terrorism and violent extremism. In fact, she emphasised that Bangladesh would not allow its territory to be used by any terrorist, terrorist group or entity against any state or people including India. On the contrary, earlier, the BNP government under the leadership Khalida Zia adopted softer approach towards the radical groups by not allowing the security agencies to take action freely. Therefore, re-election of Sheikh Hasina, in to power in December 2018 embolden the morals of security agencies.

Thirdly, Bangladesh-India cooperation on counter insurgency and intelligence sharing was a huge positive enforcer in this endeavour. Both the countries vowed to adopt zero tolerance to terrorism and violent extremism, and agreed that a strong security partnership must build trust and mutual confidence between the two neighbours. The same was reiterated in September 2019, while both Prime Ministers met on the side-lines of the High Level Segment of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly.

Fourth, Bangladesh also took help from Myanmar to control radicalism in the bordering regions. Despite having differences over the Rohingya refugees' issue, both the countries agreed on cooperating when it came to dealing with cross-border anti-drug measures and terrorism. The decision was taken at a recently held high-level bilateral border conference in

Dhaka between the two countries. This step would certainly further contain radicalism and terrorism in Bangladesh since terrorist activities are found at the borders.

Last November, the Global Terrorism Index (2019), published by the Institute for Economics & Peace (Sydney Australia), highlighted that Bangladesh had been the most successful South Asian country in countering terrorism. No wonder, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reiterated

this accomplishment, proudly stating that her government's stringent action and zero tolerance policy against drug abuse, corruption and violent extremism, make Bangladesh a global 'Role Model'.

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## SOUTH ASIA NEWS ROUNDUP: DECEMBER 2019

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### AFGHANISTAN



Despite mutual consent between the US and the Taliban to revive the peace talks and commitment for an early ceasefire, reports about killings, arrests and violent attacks continued in Afghanistan in December 2019. The turf war between Taliban and other militant factions for area domination continued throughout the month. Zalmay Khalilzad, the US envoy for reconciliation in Afghanistan, during his two day visit to Kabul, met President Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, former President Hamid Karzai, women's rights activists and other political leaders. Earlier, Khalilzad had held talks with the Taliban in Doha and also with some Pakistani officials. In another development, after a prolonged delay, the preliminary result of Afghanistan's presidential election was declared. According to the Independent Election

Commission, President Ashraf Ghani won 50.64% of the votes counted. Dr Abdullah Abdullah stood in the second position by winning 39.52% of the vote. Dr Abdullah, in fact, has rejected the results and announced filing for an appeal before the final results. Meanwhile, India, Pakistan and the European Union (EU) welcomed the announcement of the presidential results.

The ongoing tension between Iran and the US and growing political instability due to dissatisfaction over the presidential election results by Dr Abdullah could affect the renewed peace process in the short term and peace and stability in Afghanistan in post peace deal period.

## MAJOR EVENTS:

**December 03:** The national defense ministry claimed killing of 67 Taliban militants in Kapisa, Farah, Takhar, Ghazni, Herat, Kandahar, Helmand, Faryab, Zabul and Maidan-Wardak provinces including Mullah Shirngul, Taliban shadow governor for Zawal district, Herat province. During the operation numerous of heavy and light weapons, explosives, vehicles and motorbikes and several hideouts of the insurgents have been destroyed (Bakhatar News).

**December 03:** Thousands of Kabul residents marched on the streets in Pashtunistan Watt, nearby the Presidential Palace. The protesters demanded transparent election results and clarification on the suspicious and non-biometric votes. The electoral commissions of Afghanistan have not yet provided clear answers to the demands of protestors (Khaama Press).

**December 05:** Around 10 Afghan police personnel were killed, including police commander Mohammad Zahir in a clash with the Taliban in Imam Sahib district in the northeastern province of Kunduz. The clash also left three Taliban fighters dead (The Frontier Post).

**December 05:** Nearly 180 more Islamic State (IS) militants including family members have surrendered to Afghan forces in the eastern province of Nangarhar during the last week, following increased anti-IS offensive in the province. Nangarhar Governor Shah Mahmud Myakhel said that two Turkish nationals and a number of Pakistanis are among the fresh batch of surrendered IS militants. Local news agencies also reported that militants from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Russia, Iran as well as Kurds were among them. A total of 1450 IS members, including their families, have either surrendered to Afghan forces or detained during the operations over the past few months. (Afghan Islamic Press/ Anadolu Agency).

**December 18:** Spokesman for the Taliban's political office in Qatar, Suhail Shaheen has welcomed reports of a possible US troop reduction in Afghanistan. Saheen's comment surfaced amid media reports suggesting that the US is planning to withdraw about 4,000 soldiers from Afghanistan, bringing down its total military presence in the country to somewhere between 8,000 and 9,000 soldiers (Ariana News).

**December 24:** Afghan Taliban leaders including members from Qatar are meeting the group's leader Hibatullah Akhundzada in the Pakistani City of Quetta (Balochistan) to discuss the possibility of a ceasefire with the US. According to Sayed Akbar Agha, a former Taliban commander, the discussions are underway to decide whether the ceasefire will be a short-term one or a permanent one, however a final decision has yet to be taken" (Tolo News).

**December 29:** The Taliban's ruling council agreed to a temporary cease-fire in Afghanistan. The duration of the cease-fire was not specified but it was suggested it would last for 10 days. It was also not specified when the cease-fire would begin. Four members of the Taliban negotiating team met for a week with the ruling council before they agreed on the brief cease-fire. The negotiating team returned Sunday to Qatar where the Taliban maintain their political office and where US special peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has been holding peace talks with the religious militia since September, 2018. (AP)

**December 30:** The Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid denied agreeing to any ceasefire in Afghanistan after rumours of a potential deal that would see a reduction in fighting after more than 18 years of war. In a statement released on Twitter, Zabihullah Mujahid, Taliban's official spokesman said the group has "no intention of declaring a ceasefire" (JustPaste.it).

## BANGLADESH



Bangladesh was relatively peaceful in the review month (December 2019) except some low intensity explosions. The security forces continued their operations against the spreading and merger of smaller Islamist radical groups. The state security forces were largely busy in neutralising revival of several Islamist radical groups with the support of external forces. Security forces had arrested some key operators of the Ansar al-Islam, a banned Al Qaeda linked militant group. Apart from Ansar al-Islam, Bangladesh Counter Terrorism unit (CTTC) was busy in arresting and monitoring another banned organization, Neo-Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (Neo-JMB). The security forces also arrested a large number of cadres belonging to the banned militant outfit Hizb ut-Tahrir which was engaged in propaganda activities.

International Crimes Tribunal-1 (ICT-1) announced death penalties to two arrested criminals for crime

against humanity during the Liberation War of 1971. Meanwhile, Ministry of Liberation War Affairs published the first list containing names and addresses of 10,789 Razakars, who collaborated with the Pakistani occupation forces during the 1971 Liberation War. There were protests across the country against the Razakars' list. Many freedom fighters expressed shock to see their names on the list.

### MAJOR EVENTS:

**December 03:** The Bangladesh police (the Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit) said that the militant group, Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) has opted for online platform that allows anonymous communication for recruiting new Members. The Ehsar (Permanent) members of the JMB have been using the TOR (The Onion Router) browser for fresh recruitments. The browser is well-known for its ability to prevent online surveillance. Currently, the outfit has some 40 Ehsar members and each of them receives a monthly payment of Tk 1,000-1,500. The CTTC came to know about this information following the interrogations of Abu Raihan alias Mahmud, the acting Ameer (Chief) of the JMB who was arrested on November 25 ([Daily Star](#)).

**December 06:** Islamic State group (IS) has claimed an attack on police near the city of Khulna, using an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) on Dec 05. The statement did not mention any casualties but claimed the attack damaged motorcycles. The attack is the sixth claimed by IS since it resumed attacks in the country in April this year following a two-year lull. In November, IS militants in Bangladesh featured in an allegiance media campaign, following the appointment of a new IS leader. In August, IS issued a rare video on Bangladesh threatening attacks on politicians and security forces in the country. (Telegram/Site Intel.)

**December 09:** Bangladesh police charged 14 Neo JMB members in a case filed in connection to the hotel blast in Dhaka's Panthapath area on August 15, 2017. On that day a suspected Neo-JMB suicide bomber (Saiful) was killed during an anti-militancy operation at a Dhaka hotel (Olio International) as counter-terrorism officials claim he had planned to carry out an attack on the crowd paying homage to Bangabandhu on National Mourning Day at Dhanmondi area. The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) submitted the charge sheet to the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court. Four members of a family --Abu Taoba, his wife Sadia Hosna Ali, son Akram Hosain Niloy, and daughter Tazrin Khanam Shuvo, are among the 14 charge-sheet accused ([Daily Sun](#)).

**December 09:** Pro-al-Qaeda Bengali language periodical Al-Balagh has resumed publication. In its latest seventh issue (surfaced after a two years gap) criticised a Bangladesh NGO, Move Foundation. To note, Move foundation has two overseas partners such as Counter-Terrorism Capacity Building Program (CTCBP) of Global Affairs Canada and German Embassy Dhaka. Move Foundation works to promote religious tolerance among Bangladeshi youth. The jihadist magazine accused Move of working with 'infidels and crusaders'. The latest issue was released on Social media platform RocketChat,





where several jihadi groups including al-Qaeda and IS affiliates recently moved from Telegram. The 88-page magazine focused on jihad and the importance of establishing Islamic Sharia in Bangladesh. It also featured Bengali translations of some previous statements from al-Qaeda central.

**December 11:** Bangladesh police (Anti-Terrorism Unit) arrested four Allah'r Dal members from Dilkhola area of Khulna City. The members of banned group were identified as Raja Miah, Akejul Islam, Mohamad Ahsan Ullah and Abdul Hamid. In the raid, four mobile phone sets and various types of books on extremism and documents were recovered from their possessions.

During interrogation after the arrest, the arrestees confessed on their affiliation, and about the secret meeting to plan assassination of eminent citizens as well as to damage state property ([Prathom Alo](#)).

**December 10:** The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) said that the number of terrorist incidents has come down significantly in the last three years, but the threat of radicalisation is on the rise in the country. Terrorist activities have decreased 90 percent in the country compared to 2016, as per CTTC. However, radicalisation has risen in that time, as the Dawahilallah Forum (<https://www.dawahilallah.com/>) — an extremist propaganda tool of banned militant group Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) — has increased its member base from 550 to 3,000, says the research. The research also found 82 percent terrorists use social media, and 56 percent of the terror suspects were university graduates. ([Daily Star](#)).

**December 11:** Bangladesh, Inspector General of Police Mohammad Javed Patwary and Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Shafiqul Islam in a conference in Dhaka City expressed their concern over the weak counter-extremism mechanism inside the prisons across the country. Javed Patwary in his remarks said “Prisons were the places where extremist suspects or convicts finally landed following the due course of law. We did not find any NGO working inside prisons. I believe initiatives should be strengthened to de-radicalise the terrorist or extremism suspects in jail. We should work further in this sector.” Shafiqul Islam also aired similar views when he said that the country is lagging behind with respect to the counter-extremism mechanism for those who were arrested or now in the jail. ([New Age Bangladesh](#)).

**December 20:** According to Counter Terrorism officials (Chattogram Metropolitan Police) in Chittagong, banned extremist group Hizb-ut Tahrir-Bangladesh (HuT-B) operatives were using special smartphone apps to communicate with each other. After interrogating over 15 HuT-B cadres, CT officials have found that they do not use their personnel phone numbers to install apps, in order to avoid being tracked ([Daily Star](#)).

**December 20-23:** Bangladesh police have arrested recently banned group Allah'r Dal senior commander' Mohamad Azmat Ansari arrested in Puraton Jailmor area of Gaibandha. Several Islamist/ Jihadi literatures were recovered from his possession. On December 23, police have arrested another six Allah'r Dal militants from Harinmari area in Gaibandha. As per the police Allah'r Dal had been actively recruiting members in Gaibandha district (Rangpur division ) recently and around 100 have taken oath to work for the banned group ([Dhaka Tribune](#)/ [Daily Star](#)).

**December 22:** A pro-Islamic State group (IS) Al-Munasir Media, (Bengali-language media outlet surfaced in September 2019) has released posters threatening violence during the holidays of Christmas and New Year. The posters also carried English-language texts for example: "Oh Christians, the countdown to your holiday season has begun [...] "We will continue to terrorise you and ruin your lives" (Telegram).

**December 30:** The Anti-terrorism Unit of the Bangladesh Police claimed that the year 2019 witnessed less number of terrorist attacks due to strong counter insurgency policy by focusing on counter-narratives, de-radicalisation and awareness programmes to curb the militancy alongside regular activities following the gruesome attack at Holey Bakery in Dhaka in 2016 ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

**December 30:** Mohamad Moniruzzaman, Additional Deputy Inspector General indicated that focus should be on counter-narratives, de-radicalisation and awareness programmes to curb militancy in the country. He stated, “Alongside regular activities, police are now embracing a soft approach, trying to change the mindset of the radicalised faction and taking up programs which raise motivation and awareness. Also, they are working on long-term capacity building and institutional skills development ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

## INDIA



Like previous months, the three major conflict zones of India had witnessed completely three different types of developments in December. The security forces remained on high alert in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and curfew was imposed in several places. However, law and order situation improved. The level of violence, especially attacks on civilians by the militants, went down. But the militant groups' attempts of attacks on security forces continued. They also tried to provoke locals against security forces during curfew relaxation time. The opposition political parties in India continued to criticise the Union Government over amendments in the Article 370.

While the newly formed union territory, J&K, witnessed moderate level of conflicts, the central, south and eastern part of India witnessed a mix of

arrests and killings of some left wing extremist cadres in Chhattisgarh, Telangana, West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand. The CPI-Maoist's attempt to revive the movements by generating extra funds and weapons from both internal and external sources continued. The outfit also extended its support to the separatist movement in Kashmir and criticised government of India on NRC and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Rest of India witnessed frequent protests and demonstrations by different groups against both the NRC and CAA. Media reports indicated that as of December 21, around 16 people died during the protests.

In the north-eastern part of India, substantial progress was made in the peace negotiations between the central government and NSCN-IM. In Assam, Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Chief Hagrama Mohilary hinted that there could be a peace agreement between Government of India (GoI) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland-Progressive (NDFB-P). Other insurgent outfits continued their violent activities in other provinces. However, the number of incidents and casualties remained low due to regular counter insurgency operations in the worst affected areas. Manipur specially witnessed a large number of violent incidents.

The J&K will continue to remain the biggest challenge for the security establishment. So is the North East region due to CAA and the proposed NRC. The revival of Khalistan based militant groups and their involvement in drug peddling in Punjab could create serious law and order situation in Punjab. Similarly, Manipur could witness increase in violence due to developments in the post Naga peace talks. In central India, security forces will remain busy with Naxalite related issues.

### MAJOR EVENTS:

**December 01:** Suspected Maoists killed two persons at a village in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district. According to preliminary information, the victims worked in Gadchiroli's Surajgad mines which the Maoists' disapproved of ([Deccan Herald](#)).

**December 07:** India's NIA (The National Investigation Agency) has filed a charge sheet against two Islamic State (IS) operatives including the leader of the outfit's Coimbatore module - Mohammed Azarudeen and his associate - Sheikh Hidayatullah, who were in touch with the Zahran bin Hashim of Sri Lanka (Mastermind behind the Easter Sunday attacks in Lanka in April 2019). Both the accused persons were planning to carry out similar strikes in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. NIA spokesperson Inspector General Alok Mittal said, "It has been established that Mohammed Azarudeen and Sheikh Hidayatullah had been propagating the violent extremist ideology of ISIS/Daesh since 2017 with the intention of recruiting their associates in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, into the proscribed organization for furthering its activities in India." To Note, Hidayatullah was reportedly in touch with Zahran Hashim through a Facebook page 'KhilafahGFX [[Onmonorama](#)].



**December 08:** The National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), a militant outfit of Tripura, expressed deep concern over the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB). The organization appealed to the indigenous people of Tripura to come forward to protest against the bill. The outfit told the policymakers, thinkers and lawmakers of the nation that “the fundamental conflict and political unrest in Tripura is all about the core issue of illegal immigrants that occurred in different waves right from 1947 ([Northeast Now](#)).

**December 11:** The Interpol has issued Blue notice against five suspects who joined terror groups in Syria including four Keralites and one from Karnataka State in India. They have joined Jabhat

al-Nusra and Jund al-Aqsa (both are linked with Al Qaeda) in Syria. India's NIA (National Investigation Agency) has also initiated steps to attach the properties of the five accused persons. NIA got information about a group of Keralites working in Qatar joined the rebel terror groups in Syria in January 2019 ([New Indian Express](#)).

**December 13:** Maharashtra State Anti-Terrorism Squad arrested two wanted terror accused brothers, Ejaz Akram Shaikh and Ilyas Akram Shaikh who were absconding for the last several years. The accused were arrested from Burhanpur in Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Delhi. The brothers were part of the module run by former General Secretary of Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) Safdar Nagori, along with terror convict Ehtesham Siddiqui and Abdul Subhan Qureshi of Indian Mujahideen (IM) ([India Today](#)).

**December 13:** The NIA has informed that Bangladesh based Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) has managed to have 20-22 hideouts in Bengaluru (Karnataka) from 2014 to 2018 and tried to spread its bases in South India. JMB had additionally performed a trial of rocket launchers at Krishnagiri hills alongside the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border. It was revealed that JMB has elevated exercise in Bihar, Maharashtra, Kerala and Karnataka and is trying to expand the organisation into extra areas. A listing of 125 suspects has additionally been launched by the NIA ([SunRiseRead](#)).

**December 15:** Five persons have been killed so far in police firing during the violent protest against CAB in Assam. Indefinite curfew was imposed in Assam's Dibrugarh municipal area. The Army and security forces continued flag marches in Guwahati City. Cultural personalities and civil society members are on fast for 10 hours following a call given by the All Assam Students Union (AASU), which is spearheading the protests. Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) became law with President's approval on December 13 which was earlier passed by the Parliament with majority vote ([India Today](#)/[Outlook](#) /[Live Mint](#)).

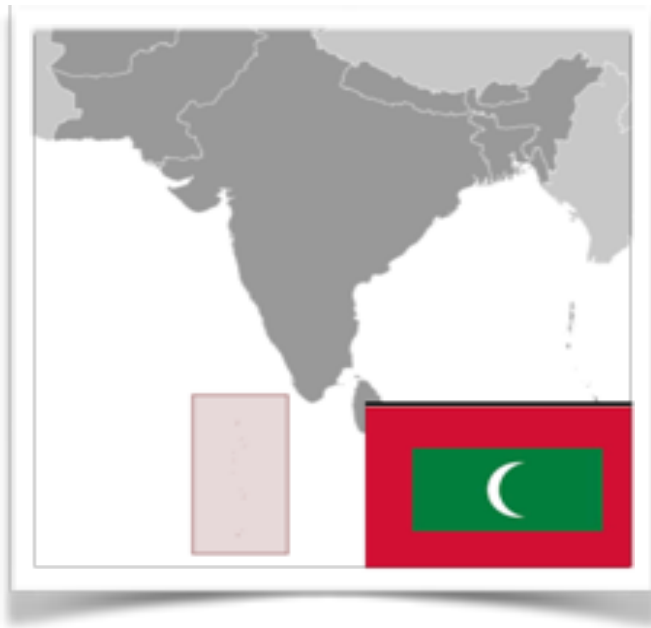
**December 16:** The National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested a suspected JMB terrorist Mosaraf Hossain, a resident of Murshidabad district of West Bengal. He was arrested in connection with the seizure of five improvised hand grenades, three fabricated grenade caps, three circuits of IEDs, one 9mm round, an air gun, suspected explosive powder and other incriminating materials from a house in Bengaluru's Chikkabanavara in July 2019 ([Outlook India](#)).

**December 18:** Special court in Jaipur (Rajasthan, India) sentenced four persons affiliated with Indian Mujahideen (IM) terrorist group to death for serial bombings in the City (eight locations) in May 2008, which killed nearly 80 people and left many others injured. The death sentence was given on charges of murder (section 302 of the IPC) and committing a terrorist act (section 16 1[A] of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act)-UAPA ([India Today](#)).

**December 23-25:** Uttar Pradesh (UP, India) Police stated that Wasim, the state head of over ground Islamist group Popular Front of India (PFI) and 16 other operatives has been arrested in connection with the violence in Lucknow during the protests against the amended Citizenship Act. In Shamli district in western UP, 28 people, including 14 members of the PFI, have been arrested since December 19 for allegedly attempting to incite mass gatherings during anti-CAA protests. On December 25, two other PFI members identified as Amzad and Javed were arrested from Meerut in Uttar Pradesh ([India Today](#)/ [Indian Express](#)).



## MALDIVES



The review month (December 2019) turned out to be eventful in terms of Maldives's counter-terrorism efforts. With a raised security alert status throughout the country in place, Maldives' police chief revealed that nearly 1,400 extremists influenced by Islamic State ideals have been active in the country. This was a significant development because the country's security agency had never before divulged such information to the public. The other information spilled by the Chief portrayed a bleak picture showing rising number of radicalised Maldivians' penchant to travel or join the ongoing jihad in Syria or in Afghanistan. The government found this opportune time to come up with a definition of extremist ideology with a guideline on how to identify extremist elements and initiate crackdown on radical groups under special military operation.

### MAJOR EVENTS

**December 03:** An Afghan court sentenced a Maldivian national Ali Shafiu, to 21 years in prison. The police in a statement said Shafiu supported religious extremism and had maintained links with such people and had been arrested in 2015 at the Velana International Airport as he had attempted to leave for Syria with his then-wife and children. He had also been arrested in relation to weapons and explosives found in a lagoon outside Hibalhidhoo in Baa Atol but had been released on 18 January 2016 due to a lack of evidence to prosecute him. Police also said Shafiu, along with his wife and four children, had travelled to Sri Lanka on 23 June 2018 for medical treatment and then travelled onwards to Pakistan and then to Afghanistan ([Edition](#)).

**December 03:** Maldivian Police and Presidential Commission on deaths and disappearances have sought charges against the alleged leaders of local groups affiliated with terrorist organisations al-Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS). According to Police, cases pertaining to first designated terrorist of Maldives Mohamed Ameen have been sent to Prosecutor General's office to press terrorism charges. The Presidential Commission has sought charges against Mohamed Mazeed and Somith Mohamed, the alleged leaders of the al-Qaeda affiliate who were accused of masterminding the murders of lawmaker Dr Afrasheem Ali in October 2012, journalist Ahmed Rilwan in August 2014 and blogger Yameen Rasheed in April 2017. The Commission also asked the Prosecutor General's office to press perjury and obstruction of justice charges against former Islamic minister Dr Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed for the murder Dr Afrasheem Ali ([Maldives Independent](#)).

**December 05:** Prosecutor General's (PG) Office has indicted Mohamed Ameen with terrorism charges and forwarded the case to the Criminal Court in Male, Maldives. The charges against Ameen include spreading extremist ideologies, recruiting Maldivian insurgents for foreign conflicts, providing financial and technological support to terrorist cells, and maintaining ties with their leaders. Ameen was the first Maldivian to be included in the list of terrorists publicised by the United States' Department of the Treasuries Office of Foreign Affairs Control (OFAC) ([Maldives Independent](#)).

**December 13:** India and the Maldives vowed to boost anti-terror cooperation and expand their maritime security ties to deal with common challenges in the Indian Ocean. After talks between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Maldivian counterpart Abdulla Shahid, both sides inked two pacts providing for cooperation in financial intelligence and election-related issues besides exchanging an instrument of ratification for a treaty on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters. A vast range of bilateral and regional

issues were discussed at the 6th Joint Commission Meeting (JCM), which was co-chaired by Jaishankar and Shahid. The JCM took place after a gap of over four years. ([Outlook](#))

**December 16:** Maldives' police chief Mohamed Hameed said that 1,400 extremists are active in Maldives who will kill for the cause of Islamic State ideals. He revealed that 432 individuals from across Maldives took interest in taking part in the Syrian conflict and attempted to travel to the warzone. At least 59 individuals are currently in Syria out of the total 173 of recorded to have crossed the border into that country. He also added speaking at a conference that the security forces successfully foiled a 2017 terrorist bomb attempt supported by IS ([The Sun](#)).

**December 16:** Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) Colonel Naeem said several radicalised individuals in the country think of education as a “western idea” and kept their children from going to school. He noted that 250 such cases have been reported. Further, statistics from Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services which indicated that vaccine hesitancy was on the rise. According to Col. Naeem extremists in Maldives believed that preventative healthcare was antithetical to reliance on God. Such individuals prohibited their wives from seeking medical assistance and would not allow them to consult male doctors ([The Edition](#)).

**December 16:** An Afghan court has sentenced the wife of Ali Shafiu from H. Moonlight Valley after the two were arrested in Afghanistan for charges related to terrorism, Commission of Police Mohamed Hameed has announced. It was reported by an Afghani news agency that a group of Maldivians belonging to the Islamic State group were arrested in Afghanistan on November 19. Shafiu was one of the people in the group who was arrested along with his wife and children. Local police have previously stated that Shafiu has been sentenced to 21 years in jail ([The Sun](#)).

**December 16:** Commissioner of Police Mohamed Hameed revealed that the Government plans to bring back Maldivian women and children stranded in Syria. Hameed also revealed government plans to build a de-radicalisation facility in K. Himmafushi, in which the repatriated individuals will undergo a rehabilitation program. The rehabilitation program will be instituted in accordance with the recently amended Anti-Terrorism Act ([The Edition](#)).

**December 18:** The Islamic ministry of Maldives has suspended preaching licenses of three Islamic scholars accused of encouraging terrorism as the police and military launched a special operation to raid homes of suspected extremists. The licenses of Abdul Raheem Mohamed from Noonu atoll Lhohi Island, Jaufar Faiz from Addu City and Mohamed Hassan from Gaafu Dhaalu atoll Thinadhoo were suspended. ([Maldives Independent](#)).

**December 18-21:** Maldives Police Service continued its special operation ‘Operation Asseyri’ to curb religious extremism in R. Maduvvari, along with its investigations in collaboration with Gender Ministry starting from December 18. Meanwhile police have arrested three men suspected of religious extremism and have reported the seizure of evidence including doctored marriage certificates and electronics. According to the police, many of the children who belonged to families of alleged religious extremists were found to have been denied their right to mandatory vaccination and education ([The Sun](#)).

**December 23:** The National Counter-Terrorism Centre offered a definition of extremist ideology with a guideline on how to identify hardliners. The definition goes like this: “Extremist ideology denies in words and deeds the spirit of the constitution, legal principles and societal norms, and becomes harsh, violent and cruel in advocating against them.” The official definition came amidst a crackdown on radical groups after the police chief revealed that there were about 1,400 extremists in the Maldives who would not hesitate to kill in the name of Islam. The NCTC also provided a list of defining traits ([Maldives Independent/ The Edition](#)).

**December 24:** The Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) raised the security alert across the country and strengthened security measures in Maldives. According to a press release by MNDF, the alert status was raised to 'Yellow -2 ' which stands for an increased or predictable threat to the security and sovereignty of the country ([The Edition](#)).

## NEPAL



Except few low intensity bomb blasts by the Netra Bikram Chand-led Communist Party, Nepal was relatively calm in December 2019. Three civilians and one police personnel were killed in bomb blast in Mahendranagar area of Dhanusha District in Province No. 2. The cadres of the outfit are mostly targeting bombing of infrastructures, extorting money from private schools and colleges, businesspersons, officials and representatives at local levels, even threatening them of life and planting bombs in main streets of cities. Despite these unlawful activities, the government has not taken any strong measures against the top leaders of the outfit. Rather the government has continued to appeal to the Chand faction to join the peace talks. However, at the same time, police arrested an unspecified number of cadres of this faction.

Besides this, transitional justice issues created confusion in Nepal. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who is

charged with human rights violations during Maoist insurgency, and who is currently Chairperson of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP), proposed to set up a new mechanism for transitional justice. In the political paper presented for discussion at the NCP's Standing Committee meeting, Dahal proposed setting up a political mechanism — a body with leaders from the ruling and opposition parties — to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission on Investigation of Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP). The proposal was strongly opposed by the war victims.

Politically, Nepal witnessed some movements within the ruling coalition partners. The Samajwadi Party-Nepal (SP-N), one of the coalition partners of the NCP, the main ruling party in Kathmandu, withdrew support. The party justified its move by indicating that Prime Minister's rejection of a proposal forwarded by the party forced it to take such a decision. It accused Prime Minister Oli of rejecting its proposal of constitution amendment. The SP-N had signed a two-point agreement with the NCP before joining the ruling coalition.

Nepal will remain vulnerable due to presence of criminal elements (e.g. illegal Chinese nationals engaged in cybercrime and illegal business activities) and Islamist radical groups who can easily take advantage of the country's poor governance system, weak leadership and its liberal visa on arrival regime to promote tourism.

### MAJOR EVENTS

**December 03:** An unidentified group exploded bomb at the office of a micro-finance company located in Punarbas Municipality of Kanchanpur district. Branch Manager Bhawani Bhatta said "Earlier, an unidentified group had demanded a donation of Rs 50,000; the blast could have been a result of not heeding to that demand." Pamphlets were found at the crime scene, which stated that financial institutions were responsible for causing women to suffer from mental stress and sexual abuse. ([The Himalayan Times](#))

**December 13:** Three persons including a policeman killed in a bomb blast in Dhanusha district. Police said the explosion occurred near a house belonging to Rajeshwor Shah based in Mahendranagar area of Chhireswarnath municipality-5. No organisation claimed responsibility of the blast ([MyRepublica](#)).

**December 18:** The transitional justice process took centre stage of public discussion in Nepal after Pushpa Kamal Dahal's proposal of setting up a political mechanism—a body with leaders from the ruling and opposition parties—to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons. In his political paper presented for discussion at the Nepal Communist Party's Standing Committee meeting, Dahal, who is also the executive chairman of the NCP, has argued that forming the body is necessary for concluding the process that has dragged on for over a decade. ([The Kathmandu Post](#))

## PAKISTAN



Pakistan witnessed low level of violence in December 2019, except couple of violent incidents and bomb blasts in Quetta, North Waziristan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In fact the number of violent incidents increased in the review month in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in comparison to previous month.

Like previous month, the internal politics of Pakistan took a dramatic turn over extension of term of Army Chief General Bajwa, arrest of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed and other party leaders who were booked in July in multiple cases pertaining to alleged terror financing and money laundering. A special court in Islamabad found former President General (retd.) Pervez Musharraf guilty of high treason and handed him death penalty under Article 6 of the Constitution. All Pakistan Muslim League (APML), the political party founded by former President General (retd.) Pervez Musharraf,

announced to challenge the December 17 verdict of the special court. Other than APML, Attorney General of Pakistan Anwar Mansoor Khan Ghafoor expressed dissatisfaction over the verdict on General Musharraf. On the other hand, reacting on the verdict, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) chief Sirajul Haq said that it would ensure the supremacy of the Constitution and strengthen democracy in Pakistan. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) too welcomed the decision. While major political parties welcomed the verdict on Musharraf, the PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) and Pakistan Army officials expressed concern over the development. The issue has virtually divided the Pakistani society between the Army and opposition parties.

### MAJOR EVENTS

**December 01:** One Frontier Corps (FC) soldier was killed and two others were injured in an exchange of fire with terrorists after they raided a check post in North Waziristan. The paramilitary force has been attacked multiple times this year as it maintains law and order in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the border regions of Afghanistan and Iran ([Dawn](#)).

**December 05:** Two Pakistan Army soldiers along with two terrorists were killed in North Waziristan. The region is one of the seven tribal districts in erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata). North Waziristan – once a focal point in the global war on terror – held provincial elections for the first time in July 2019, a key step in bringing the region into the political mainstream after years of turmoil fuelled by terrorism ([The Express Tribune](#)).

**December 11:** Shia leader, Syed Zahoor Abbas Shah Bukhari was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Lakki Marwat town of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Bukhari was a renowned poet of the Pashto language and known for his romantic poetry across KP. On that day unidentified assailants shot dead Feroz Shah, a political activist of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in Kanju area of Mingora town in Swat. ([Dawn](#) / [MENAFN](#)).

**December 12:** Pakistan's anti-terrorism court (ATC) on December 11 indicted Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed and other party leaders (three of his top aides Hafiz Abdul Salam bin Mohammad, Mohammad Ashraf and Zafar Iqbal) who were booked in July in multiple cases pertaining to alleged terror financing and money laundering. On July 3, top JuD leadership was booked in nearly two dozen cases pertaining to terror financing and money laundering under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), 1997. The CTD, which registered the cases in five cities of Punjab, declared that the JuD was financing terrorism from the massive funds collected through non-profit organisations and trusts including Al-Anfaal Trust, Dawatul Irshad Trust, Muaz Bin Jabal Trust, etc. ([Dawn](#))



**December 16:** Al-Qaeda latest Nawa-i-Afghan Jihad magazine eulogised Pensacola, Florida shooter (the Saudi Royal Air Force officer) and incited attacks against US soldiers. The editorial in the latest issue of the Urdu-language magazine hailed the Saudi officer Muhammad al-Shamrani as a “jihadist hero” and called on military officers in Muslim countries to follow suit by targeting the US soldiers. Muhammad al-Shamrani, the



Saudi gunman, who was under training at the base, killed three sailors and wounded eight others before he was shot dead. The AQIS editorial also paid tribute Omar Dabaa Ilyas, the Muslim man who saved a copy of the Koran from being burned during a recent protest in Norway. It said Ilyas had made Muslims proud by attacking an “infidel” who was burning a copy of the Koran (Telegram/ [www.matboatejihad.net](http://www.matboatejihad.net)).

**December 17:** A special court in Pakistan sentenced the country’s former President Pervez Musharraf, to death in a treason case. The sentence marked the first time in the country’s history that a former President often labeled as a military dictator has been held accountable for his actions while in power ([Dawn](#)).

**December 18:** Two police officials escorting polio vaccinators team were shot dead in Lower Dir district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. The victims have been identified as Constable Farman and Sepoy Mukarram. The immunisation campaign was halted in the area, where the crippling disease is endemic. ([Pakistan Today](#))

**December 19:** A pro-Islamic State (IS) channel on the messaging app Telegram has shared an Urdu-language article criticising anti-polio vaccination campaigns in Muslim countries. The article that advises Muslims not to cooperate with such health missions comes amid an ongoing anti-polio campaign in Pakistan’s north-western Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The article said the polio eradication programmes were part of a “Jewish plot” against Muslims and questioned why such programmes were implemented “only” in Muslim countries. It described the vaccination programmes as part of a Western conspiracy to sterilise Muslims and commit genocide against future Muslim generations (*Tafakkur* /Telegram).

**December 20:** The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan jihadist group has claimed responsibility for an attack that reportedly targeted an anti-polio vaccination campaign in the north-western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The blast killed two security personnel and injured several others in two remote-controlled mine attacks in Ladha town of South Waziristan district. This was the second attack targeting anti-polio teams claimed by the Taliban in three days in KP province where a vaccination drive is underway ([RFE/RL](#)).

**December 23:** A pro-Islamic State group (IS) Urdu language guide has called for attacks against Pakistani targets and provided tips on carrying out the operations. The article titled “Ways to take revenge against Pakistan’s apostates”, included 24 tips for IS supporters. It listed out the targets as politicians, military personnel, spies and “bad” clerics who support the government. It was first shared by the admin of a pro-IS group called Dar Arqam Forum (**Telegram**).

**December 27:** Pakistan police have unearthed a media cell of the AQIS (Al-Qaeda Indian Subcontinent) in Gujranwala, Punjab. The cell was also involved in financing terrorist operations of the AQIS. Five senior and important members have been arrested. The five terrorists arrested by the agencies are very important members of the AQIS. One of them is Asim Akbar alias Saeed alias Baba alias Bazurg alias Jaffer, a resident of Lahore. He has been associated with Al-Qaeda since 2005. He was in-charge of the media cell. He had trained many activists of AQIS in media graphics and animations including Abu Hasham who was killed in Afghanistan a few months back. Other terrorist Abdullah Umair is a resident of Karachi. He had joined the organisation in 2010. He remained a close aide of the present operational/militant commander of AQIS Atif Ghauri alias Yahya who is in Afghanistan now. He was now coordinating activities of AQIS in Pakistan and Afghanistan ([Dawn](#)).

## SRI LANKA



The newly elected President of Sri Lanka Gotabaya Rajapaksa reviewed the progress of Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) dealing with the investigation of Easter Sunday terror attacks. He directed the Commission to expedite the process. Separately, the President reiterated his promise made during the elections campaign to combat terrorism and crime.

Besides, as a political vendetta against the opposition parties, Rajapaksa ordered a presidential probe on the previous government's anti-corruption panel, which investigated the members of the Rajapaksa family, including him.

Further, insecurity has come to stay among the minority groups like the Muslims and the Tamils due to the new government's proposal to remove/limit power of the minority parties by bring amendments in the Constitution. Meanwhile, minority Tamils in

Sri Lanka organised protests in Colombo against India's controversial citizenship law by stating that it openly "discriminates" against Muslims.

### MAJOR EVENTS

**December 02:** President Gotabaya Rajapaksa met with members of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) to investigate and inquire into the Easter Sunday terror attacks. Chairman of the five-member Commission, Court of Appeal Judge Janaka de Silva explaining the scope and the composition of the Commission briefed the President on the progress made so far. President Rajapaksa emphasised the need to identify roots and modalities of the attack and to bring those who were responsible before the law. President said that His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith was also of the same view in this connection ([ColomboPage](#)).

**December 03:** The Swiss Federal Court ruled that the Tamil Tigers are not a criminal organisation and has acquitted 12 people of charges filed by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG). In its indictment, the OAG had accused the people of violating the Swiss Penal Code by raising funds for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) between 1999 and 2009. After its nine-year investigation, the OAG suspected the accused of financially supporting the World Tamil Coordinating Committee (WTCC). But in June 2018 the Federal Criminal Court found that the hierarchical link between the LTTE and WTCC could not be sufficiently established. ([Swissinfo](#))

**December 14:** The Presidential Commission of Inquiry appointed to investigate the terrorist attacks on Easter Sunday recorded the testimonies of several police officers including ASP HG Neranjala Abeywardena of the Colombo North Police Division. The Commission has also allowed an anonymous person to give evidence in confidentiality. Abeywardena told the Commission that no prior notification of an attack on Easter Sunday was received and had such an announcement been made an attack could have been avoided ([Colombo Page](#)).

**December 17:** Sri Lanka's former Defense Secretary Hemasiri Fernando and suspended IGP Pujith Jayasundara have been remanded further until December 23 by the Colombo Magistrate's Court. The two former top officials have been accused of failing to take measures to prevent the Easter Sunday attacks despite having prior knowledge of the attack, and remanded on charges of criminal negligence and murder ([ColomboPage](#)).

**December 28:** Sri Lankan President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa emphasized that it has been the responsibility of the people's representatives to act in accordance with the aspirations of the people and commit to build a working country that fulfills the people's expectations ([Colombo Page](#)).

**The South Asia Conflict Monitor (SACM)** aims to provide in-depth analyses, country briefs, summary sketches of important players and a timeline of major events on issues relating to armed conflicts, insurgencies and terrorism. It also aims to cover the government's strategies on conflict resolution and related policies to tackle these risks and crises.

**The South Asia Conflict Monitor** is a monthly bulletin designed to provide quality information and actionable intelligence for the policy and research communities, the media, business houses, law enforcement agencies and the general reader by filtering relevant open source information and intelligence gathered from the ground contacts and sources.

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The Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict (SSPC) is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan research organization based in New Delhi, dedicated to conduct rigorous and comprehensive research, and work towards disseminating information through commentaries and analyses on a broad spectrum of issues relating to peace, conflict and human development. SSPC has been registered under the Societies Registration Act (XXI) of 1860. The SSPC came into being as a platform to exchange ideas, to undertake quality research, and to ensure a fruitful dialogue.

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