

South Asia Conflict Monitor

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



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Preventing Violent Extremism in Maldives: President Solih Approach

***Guest Author: Gulbin Sultana (Ph.D)**

The growing incidents of radicalisation and religious extremism in a liberal Muslim country like the Maldives is alarming. It is a grave threat to the country as well as the South Asian region. Since the late 1970s, Maldives has seen growing trends of religious intolerance. Wahabi ideologies influenced many Maldivians in the subsequent years to fight for global Jihad. Today, the issue of radicalisation and violent extremism has emerged as a potential national security threat. This threat was identified by former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom way back in the 1990s itself, and since then some efforts have been made to tackle the issue, albeit non-effectively. President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih has now given his commitment to find effective solutions to the problem of radicalisation and violent extremism within the country. In this regard, this article explores and analyses the Solih administration's efforts to tackle the menace since he assumed power in 2018.

Acknowledging the threat

The important aspect of the efforts of Solih administration to counter radicalisation and extremism is acknowledging the fact that radical elements are present in the country and that the Maldives has been the highest foreign fighter contributor per capita to Syria and Iraq. Under the previous administration of President Yameen, there was a tendency to downplay the threat of radical extremism by hiding the facts and figures. Yameen administration was hesitant to disclose the extent of religious extremism and number of Maldivian militants

overseas. An incident of a failed bomb plot in 2017 was also kept secret by the previous administration.

Reversing the trend, Mr Solih has now said that "There was no benefit from suppressing or keeping the information about extremism hidden from the public"(Maldives Independent, December 17, 2019). According to him, the government is taking on a difficult challenge but the government policy is "to face this and find a solution." According to the Commissioner of Police Mohamed Hameed, some 1400 Maldivians have already fallen into extremist ideology across the country; 423 Maldivians attempted to join terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq, of which 173 managed to enter the war zones. As per one date of the previous administration, only 69 people were said to have entered Syria.

Rehabilitation of the former militants

Solih administration is giving emphasis on the rehabilitation of the militants who have returned to the country after fighting militancy abroad. A centre for rehabilitation and de-radicalisation is under construction in Himmafushi island. As per government estimate, of the 173 Maldivians who went to Syria, 59 still remain there. The government is planning to bring them back in

collaboration with other countries and place them in the rehabilitation centre, currently under construction, known as National Reintegration Centre, so that they cannot spread radical ideas in the society.[1]

Several Maldivians participated in the Jihad in Pakistan and Afghanistan much before going to Syria. Some of them have been handed over to the Maldivian authority. Maldivian government, however, did not take any action against those returnees as the previous laws did not permit so. Mohamed Nasheed during his presidency mooted the idea of rehabilitation of the violent extremists who were imprisoned for their alleged involvement in the Sultan Park bombing in 2007. He got them released, but the rehabilitation process could not be implemented as he was thrown out of power. In the absence of any provision for rehabilitation of the former militants, many of them are freely preaching extremist ideologies in the country. In this context, Solih administration's focus on rehabilitation and de-radicalisation process is a welcome development.

Amendment of Anti-Terrorism Act

The Prevention of Terrorism Act, which came into force in 1990, is an out-dated one and insufficient to deal with the problem of radicalism and violent extremism that the Maldives is facing today. The Yameen administration amended the Act twice in 2015, but loopholes in the amendments left lots of room for misuse. The Solih administration further amended the Act in 2019 to strengthen the ability of the relevant agencies to take appropriate measures to prevent terrorist activity while preserving the fundamental rights and freedom provided by the Constitution. An arrest has already been made using this amended Act.

Efforts to prevent the spread of extremist ideology through internet

Convinced that conventional security measures alone are inadequate in the fight against terrorism, President Solih has expressed his desire to work with technology companies from abroad to halt the proliferation of extremist ideology, the spread of hate speeches and propaganda materials, and messages of religious intolerance inciting violence through social media platforms. [2]

National Action Plan

President Solih has announced the government's decision to formulate a national action plan to share information and intelligence on radical and extremist activities among the relevant stakeholder institutions by the end of 2020. Yameen administration adopted a "whole of government" and "whole of society" approach to deal with the issue. National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) was set up to facilitate and coordinate among the agencies to share their inputs. Unfortunately, interactions among the agencies are limited. At the same time, there is no single agency to

execute the outcomes emanating from the interactions among the agencies coordinated by the NCTC. President Solih in his speech at the UN declared that "A central mechanism by which relevant stakeholder agencies can communicate, share information and work together to address terrorism and violent extremism, will be implemented."

International Community

The Maldives under President Solih is committed to work with the international community now. The country entered into an agreement with India during Prime Minister Modi's visit to the Maldives in June 2019 to establish a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism to combat violent extremism and de-radicalisation. Japan has extended a grant of \$70 million for Maldives' counter-terrorism effort.[3] During his visit to Singapore in July 2019, President Solih visited ISD counter-terrorism Centre to learn from their expertise to deal with the issue (Edition, July 1, 2019). During his visit to the USA in March 2019, he held discussions with the State Department's coordinator for counter-terrorism Nathan Alexander Sales. Maldives has also agreed to coordinate with the EU to prevent radicalisation and terrorist attacks. The EU provided 2.5 million Euros for this purpose (Avas, August 8, 2019).

The Solih administration has expressed its commitment and announced a policy plan to deal with the issue of radicalisation and counter-terrorism. Positive policy announcements are made and measures are being initiated and to some extent enforced to realise his policies to deal with the issue of radicalisation. But much more needs to be done. Issue of terrorist financing needs special attention. During Yameen administration some measures were initiated in this regard. However, no investigation has been made using the anti-terrorism act. Solih administration is yet to make a policy statement on this issue.

While Solih has the right intention to deal with the issue, he also has hard political and practical challenges facing him at home. It should be noted that the parties known to be sympathetic towards radical extremism, such as Adalath Party (AP), extended support to Solih during the Presidential elections in 2018. Though the AP does not enjoy adequate seats in the Parliament to de-stabilise the government, it has the capability to mobilise people against Mr Solih in the name of religion. Therefore, it is doubtful that Mr Solih would go out of the way to do everything possible to curb radicalisation in the society which may offend the conservatives and the radicals. In November 2019, Solih banned the most prominent human rights organisation the Maldives Democratic Network (MDN) under pressure from religious leaders blaming that it had disrespected Islam in one of its reports in 2016.

It is widely believed that Saudi funds, which were flowing largely during Yameen administration, have contributed

immensely towards radicalising the Maldivians over the years. Given the friendly relations between the Maldives and Saudi Arabia, it will be difficult for Solih administration to monitor and prevent the misuse of Saudi funds used for spreading extremist ideology.

Finally, Maldives has limited capability to monitor the radical activities across the country. The government has the best intention to deradicalize the society, but this is not going to be an easy task as the ineffectiveness of the government policies over the years have allowed conservatism to take deep roots into the society. But credit must be given to the Solih administration for at least acknowledging the existence of the grave threat of extremism in the country and showing political will to tackle the problem by taking measures at the national level and his willingness to collaborate with the international community. But he has to take proactive measures to implement and enforce the policy announcements made by him to deal with this serious problem facing the country.

NOTES

[1] “Unofficial Translation of the Presidential Address, 2020”, The President’s Office, February 3, 2020, <https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/23042>.

[2] “Racism, xenophobia, and hate speech are among the

root causes of terrorism’ – President”, The President’s Office, Republic of the Maldives, September 24, 2019, Ref: 2019-744-UNGA, [Presidency.gov.mv/press/Article/22214](https://presidency.gov.mv/press/Article/22214).

[3] “Prime Minister Abe meets with President of the Republic of Maldives Solih”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 21, 2019, https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sw/mv/page4e_001114.html.

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Image Courtesy: Maldives Independent, November 24, 2019)

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SOUTH ASIA NEWS ROUNDUP: JANUARY 2020



AFGHANISTAN



The US and Taliban peace talks, which was revived in November 2019, continued in January 2020. Taliban representatives held talks with the US negotiators in Qatar. By the end of January, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad had separate meetings with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in Islamabad about efforts for peace in Afghanistan. Khalilzad also met with Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa in the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi. The negotiators almost decided for an early ceasefire despite reports about killings, arrests and violent attacks.

The peace negotiation was stalled temporarily due to killing of Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq in a US drone attack. Since Iran has been a major stakeholder in the Afghanistan conflict, the US action

had impacts in the peace process. On multiple occasions, Taliban said that Iran has an influence on the Taliban faction of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, stationed in the western and southern parts of Afghanistan. Iran's influence on the peace talks became visible when Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani issued a statement on January 3 stating that Afghanistan's soil will not be used against any nations as per a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) signed between Washington and Kabul in 2014.

More importantly, despite progress regarding the peace talks, the Afghanistan government has continued to express its dissatisfaction over not being included in the process. While addressing thousands of soldiers at the graduation ceremony of the Afghan National Army's Commando Corps on January 13, Afghanistan's acting Minister of Defense, Asadullah Khalid, emphasized about willingness for peace talks with the Taliban but without any compromise on human rights issues. He also said that the security forces will not allow any deal to sacrifice their two-decade long achievements. In fact, similar concerns were expressed by other high officials of Afghanistan government as well.

As far as internal political situation was concerned, despite declaration of the preliminary Presidential election results, Dr Abdullah Abdullah, who stood in the second position by winning 39.52% of the votes, rejected the results and announced to file an appeal. This delayed the final declaration of the results.

The ongoing tension between Iran and the US and growing dissatisfaction of the Afghanistan government over the peace deal between the US and the Taliban affect the renewed peace process and political stability in Afghanistan in post peace deal period.

MAJOR EVENTS:

January 01: Eight soldiers have been killed in a suspected Taliban attack in Balkh province. The attack took place at a highway police checkpoint in Alam Khail village. Separately, Two Afghan Army soldiers were killed in a Taliban attack in Takhar province. The incident happened in Darqad district when a group of Taliban attacked a joint forces checkpoint. Two others, including a police officer, were wounded in the attack. ([WeForNews](#)).

January 03: Eight Taliban operatives were killed by security forces in northern Kunduz province. The incident happened when a group of Taliban militants launched an attack on security forces checkpoints in Qahwa Khana area outside the provincial capital Kunduz city. Three policemen were also wounded in the offensive ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

January 03: Afghanistan's former spy agency head and a 2019 Presidential candidate, Rahmatullah Nabil said Iranian general Qasim Soleimani was a threat to the region. Nabil has further warned that the death of Soleimani will increase tensions in the region and Afghanistan should be kept away from these tensions.

Afghanistan's Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah expressed condolences on Soleimani's assassination. ([The Khaama Press](#))

January 12: Two US service members were killed and two others were injured in Afghanistan when their vehicle struck an improvised explosive device in the Kandahar province. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the explosion ([CNN](#)).

January 20: Afghan government's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah criticized official handling of the peace process with the Taliban. Chairing a meeting of the ministers at his office, Abdullah stressed all political parties and groups should be involved in the proposed negotiation team. He said "Peace is not one person's monopoly, one person's wish -- but it is a collective desire, and the people of Afghanistan have the right to take a position regarding the peace process" ([AA](#)).

January 21: Media reports have indicated that the U.S. and Taliban leaders are moving toward a peace deal that would see the eventual withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. It's the second time in recent months the two sides have appeared close to announcing an agreement. Led by special envoy on Afghan reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. delegation has been discussing the Taliban's offer of a 7-to-10 day halt in its military operations in talks underway in Doha, where the group has a political office, the militant group's spokesman Zabihullah Mujahed. In September President Donald Trump abruptly called off talks in response to a suicide bombing in Kabul that killed an American soldier. ([Bloomberg](#))

January 22: At the WEF 2020 in Davos, Afghanistan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani said economic growth prospects of his war-hit country is going on in the right direction and it's time to develop the country's "richness". He said "security is a problem but the direction we are going in is the right direction." ([Eastern Mirror](#))

January 23: Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani said that Pakistan is still giving safe sanctuary to the Taliban linked Haqqani Network. A day before, Pakistan PM Imran Khan said to reporters at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, that the Haqqani network, which the United States has designated as a terrorist group, has no activities or bases in Pakistan ([Daily Times](#)).

BANGLADESH



Bangladesh witnessed a relatively calm period without any major violence in the review Month. The security forces continued their operations against the spreading and merger of smaller Islamist radical groups. The state security forces were largely busy in neutralizing revival of several Islamist radical groups like Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B), Neo-Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (Neo-JMB) and Allahr Dal with the support of external forces.

The Counter Terrorism & Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of police have achieved a breakthrough in arresting four Islamic State linked Neo-JMB militants in Dhaka and in Gollamari area of Khulna District in January 2020. These militants were involved in at least five bombing incidents targeted at the security personnel (police) in Dhaka's Gulistan, Malibagh, Science Lab, Paltan, and Khamarbari area, between April 29 and August 31, 2019. Also, the two of the arrested Neo-JMB

militants were involved in bombings at on the Krishak League office on September 23 (2019) and attack near Police garage on December 05. Islamic State (IS) had claimed the responsibilities of both the attacks.

MAJOR EVENTS:

January 02: The Al Qaeda linked Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B) planned to form 'Robber wing' in country's southern and northern regions, According to police, the banned militant group leaders

managed to communicate with 20 people, who were involved in petty crimes like snatching and theft. These people were asked to use chloroform on their victims. The wing was supposed to take care of all legal issues of the members if they got arrested. It was also supposed to pay for arrested or on-the-run gang member's family expenses. The CTTC unit learnt the latest strategy of HuJI-B after interrogating robbers who were arrested in the capital Dhaka city on December 26 ([Daily Star](#) / [Dhaka Tribune](#)).

January 03: Bangladesh CTTC police chief (Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime) Monirul Islam underscored that 'fines, prison sentences and death penalty' are not enough to curb militancy. He further added that there is a need to target the psyche of the militants and the youth of the country can play an important role in that regard. Families, educational institutions, civil society, cultural personalities, and Islamic clerics are responsible for clarifying and providing the correct explanations. Only then can we instil a culture of harmony, tolerance in future generations" ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

January 05: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said "Bangladesh is now globally regarded as a 'Role Model' in curbing terrorism and extremism. Ideal investment-friendly environment has been created. She also highlighted the role of police in curbing drug abuse in the country and said Bangladesh has adopted a 'Zero Tolerance Policy' against drug abuse and "for the implementation of this policy, Bangladesh Police has declared an all-out war on drugs. Police has nabbed many drug dealers and recovered a lot of narcotic drugs from their possession." The premier also appreciated police's role in providing security and maintaining law and order situation at the Rohingya refugee camps ([Daily Star](#)).

January 05: Two crude bombs went off at the Dhaka University (DU) campus. No one has claimed responsibility of that. Since December 29 and December 30, a total of 6 crude bombs exploded at the DU campus. ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

January 08: Bangladesh and Myanmar agreed to boost anti-crime border cooperation primarily to stop terrorist activities and preventing illicit human and drug trafficking, especially Yaba in the border areas. The meeting also observed the ongoing presence of Rohingya refugees that would disturb security on both sides of the border. The Director General of Border Guards of Bangladesh (BGB) Major General Md. Shafeenul Islam stated in a press briefing after 7th Senior Level Border Conference between BGB and Myanmar Police Force (MPF). Police Brigadier General Myoe Than, Chief of Police General Staff, MPF led the eight member Myanmar delegation in the meeting ([Irrawaddy](#)).



January 14: The Supreme Court (SC) upheld the death sentence of former Jatiya Party (JP) leader Syed Mohammad Qaisar for his involvement in crimes against humanity and war crimes -- including killing and rape - during the 1971 Liberation War. The International Crimes Tribunal-2 (ICT-2) on December 23, 2014, awarded death penalty to Qaisar for committing crimes against humanity in 1971 war. Later, Qaisar filed an appeal with the Appellate Division seeking acquittal of the charges in which he has been convicted and sentenced. ([The Daily Star](#))

January 14: Masjid Baitul Wahed, a mosque of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Bangladesh (AMJB) was vandalized after an altercation broke out between students from a local Qawmi madrasa (unregulated) and members of the Ahmadiyya community (considered Non-Muslims) at Kandipara area in Brahmanbaria town ([New Age Bangladesh](#)).

January 19: The Counter Terrorism & Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of police have arrested two Neo-JMB militants from Jatrabari area of Dhaka. The arrested militants were involved in at least five bombing incidents targeted at the police last year. The attacks took place between April 29 and August 31 2019, in Dhaka's Gulistan, Malibagh, Science Lab, Paltan, and Khamarbari area. Islamic State Bangladesh unit have claimed these attacks. The two arrested militants are identified as Jamal Uddin Rafique (the mastermind of the attacks who joined the group), and Md Anwar Hossain. Five policemen, a community police member, a rickshaw puller and a woman were injured in blasts in three of those five attacks ([Dhaka Tribune](#)/ [The Independent](#)).

January 20: Dhaka district court has sentenced ten / 10 HuJI-Bangladesh operatives sentenced to death for a bomb attack on a political rally in January 2001. The militant targetted a Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) rally in Dhaka that killed five and injured over 50 CPB leaders and activists. Among the convicts, only

four of them—Moin Uddin, Sumon, Sabbir and Shawkat—are now in jail custody. The six others are absconding. ([New Age](#)).

January 23: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reiterated her determination to advance the country further by freeing it from terrorism, militancy and corruption. She said on the occasion of the winter exercise of Bangladesh Army "We want to take the country forward more and free it from the hands of terrorism, militancy and graft. We are working towards to achieve this goal." ([Dhaka Tribune](#))

January 23: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina promised to free the country from the scourge of terrorism, militancy and corruption. She said: "We want to take the country forward more and free it from the hands of terrorism, militancy and graft. We are working towards to achieve this goal." Hasina was addressing a gathering on the occasion of the winter exercise of Bangladesh Army ([Rising Bangladesh](#)).

January 24: Police in Chapainawabganj have arrested 16 Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) members, the radical student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI). The arrested members holding a clandestine meeting in an orchard in Charmohanpur area of Chapainawabganj Rajshahi Division). Several crude bombs and half kilogram of gunpowder were recovered from their possession ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

January 25: Two wanted Neo Neo-Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh operatives were arrested in Gollamari area of Khulna District. According to police record they were involved in couple of bomb attacks last year. On September 23 (2019) attack on Krishak League office, two persons were injured and on December 05 bombing at a Police garage damaged property there. Islamic State (IS) had claimed the responsibilities of both the attacks. The arrestees were identified as Nur Mohammad Anik and Muzahidul Islam Rafi who are students Khulna University and active operatives of the Neo-JMB ([Daily Star](#)/[Dhaka Tribune](#)).

January 29: Bangladesh police's Anti-Terrorism Unit apprehended at least nine (9) Allahr Dal operatives from Arambagh area of Sylhet District. The banned group members were holding a clandestine meeting to take preparations for carrying out subversive activities in the country ([BanglaNews24](#)).

INDIA



Anti-CAA and NRC protests continued across the country in January 2020. Almost all of these protests remained peaceful. Tripura, Assam and Delhi witnessed maximum number of anti-CAA protests than other provinces. In Delhi, a large number of anti-CAA protestors continued their peaceful sit-in protests at Saheen Bagh area of the Capital.

In Jammu and Kashmir, although law and order situation improved, the security forces remained vigilant against any kind of attacks by the militant groups like the LeT and the HM. The level of violence, especially attacks on civilians by the militants, went down. But the militant groups' attempts to attack security forces continued. They also tried to provoke locals against the security forces during curfew relaxation time.

While the newly formed union territory, J&K, witnessed moderate level of conflicts, the central, southern and eastern parts of India witnessed a mix of arrests and killings of some left wing extremist cadres in Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand. The Maoists also extended their support to the separatist movement in Kashmir and criticized government of India on NRC and the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB). In the north-eastern part of India, insurgent outfits continued their violent activities. Manipur, especially, witnessed

a large number of violent incidents. However, the overall number of incidents and casualties remained low due to regular counter insurgency operations in the worst affected areas..

The J&K will continue to remain the biggest challenge before the security agencies in India. But even the northeast region will remain important 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 that state. Similarly, Manipur could witness increase in violence against the developments in the post Naga peace talks period. In central India, security forces will be busy with Naxalite related issues.

MAJOR EVENTS:

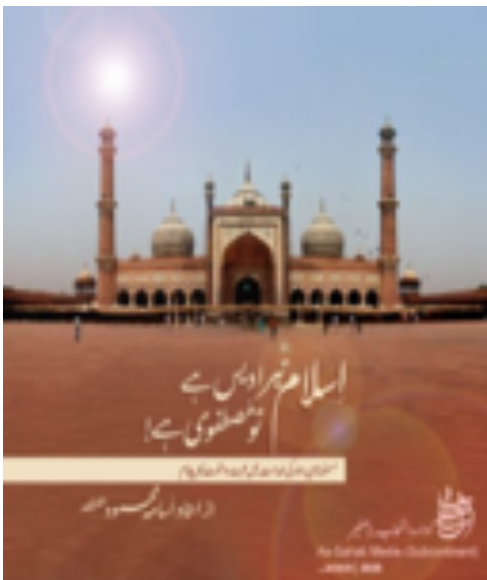
January 04: Following the recent spurge of violence allegedly orchestrated by Popular Front of India (PFI), Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Assam Government has sought ban on the group, an offshoot of Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). PFI, formed in 2006 as a successor to the National Democratic Front (NDF) has come under the scanner of National Investigation Agency (NIA) for running arms' training camp in Kannur District's Narath town in Kerala in 2013. In 2018, Jharkhand had banned the PFI for "internally influenced" by the Islamic State (IS).([Economic Times](#)/ [India Today](#)).

January 07: The Q-branch of the Chennai police and National Investigating Agency (NIA) busted a suspected Islamic State (IS) terror module and arrested three terrorists from New Gurappana Palya in Bengaluru in Karnataka. The trio identified as Mohammed Haneef Khan, Imran Khan and Mohammed Zaid was arrested along with 89 rounds of bullets, three pistols, some bomb-making material and incriminating documents, a gripper-like instrument used to climb walls from them ([Indian Express](#)).

January 09: Three Islamic State (IS) linked suspects were arrested from Wazirabad in Delhi. They were identified as Khaja Moideen, Syed Ali Navas and Abdul Samad. The trio were allegedly planning an attack in New Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. Among the trio, Khaja Moideen had previously been arrested by the NIA in a terror case while Abdul Samad was a member of Popular Front of India (PFI) ([India Today](#)). Same day, elsewhere in India, the Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) arrested another Islamic State linked suspect Zafar Ali from Gorva area of Vadodara (Gujarat) ([Times of India](#)).

January 12: Nine suspects were arrested in New Delhi by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) busting an international drug cartel allegedly led by a Taliban leader in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Afghan nationals who were arriving India by Ariana flight no. FG-313 from Kabul via Kandahar. The arrested persons disclosed that such consignments of drugs were further sold to Nigerian nationals operating in Delhi and Mumbai. According official sources, the money paid by the African receivers is taken back by the Afghan carriers to be eventually used to launch terror attacks in the Indian subcontinent ([New Indian Express](#)).

January 13: Intelligence agency sources informed that Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Pakistan has been planning the assassination of five persons in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K): Two Security Forces (SFs) officers, a journalist, a professor and a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesperson. The inputs say JeM terrorist Adil Gulzar organised a meeting in Pakharpur in Budgam District of J&K in December, along with an unidentified foreign terrorist. The information have been provided to all security agencies by the Multi Agency Centre (MAC), a coordination authority under the Union Home Ministry (UHM) that includes representatives from security and intelligence agencies ([The Print](#)).



January 22: Tamil Nadu police have arrested three people with suspected links with the Islamic State(IS) jihadi group at Devipattinam area of Ramanathapuram. They were identified as Mohammed Ali, Pura Gani and Amir were allegedly involved in spreading 'jihadi' ideology in Ramanathapuram District and plotting to kill people opposed to Islamic beliefs to spread fear among the public. Before the arrest, the suspects were discussing matters including transferring money to Abdul Shameem, one of the accused in the killing of police personnel Y Wilson. The three men were allegedly involved in spreading 'jihadi' ideology and plotting to kill those opposed to Islamic beliefs to spread fear among the

public. Special Sub Inspector Wilson was killed on duty at Kaliyakavilai checkpoint in Kanyakumari on the border with Kerala on January 8. On January 14, Abdul Shameem and Thoufiq, the two prime suspects involved in the murder of Y Wilson was arrested from Udupi Railway Station (Udupi) in Karnataka. ([MonoramaOnline/](#) [The Print/Deccan Herald](#)).

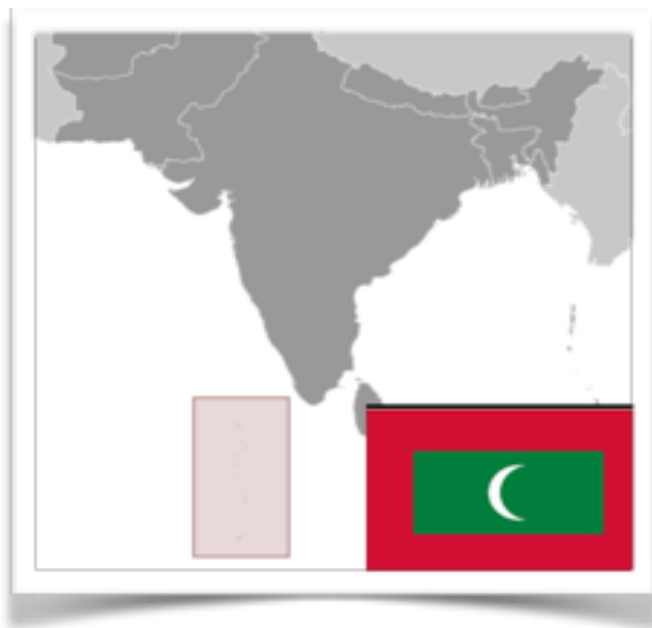
January 23: Al Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) spokesperson and present chief Osama Mahmoud urged Muslims of the region to wage jihad in Kashmir. The Audio visual message was released by AQ media arm AL-SAHAB in Urdu language. Mahmoud urged Muslims in India especially to wage jihad against their 'oppressors'. In the 27-minute message, Mahmoud says that Muslims in India have been subjected to numerous atrocities since Independence (the 1947). He cited the citizenship law, the recent controversial decision to build Ram temple on the site of demolished Babri mosque and the 2002 Gujarat riots as examples of "the oppression" of Muslims in India. He laid out a five-point plan to protect Muslims from the "ruthless storm" and "volcano under their feet" ([Al Sahab](#)).

January 25: Three Jaish-e-Muhammad militants including a senior commander Qari Yasir were killed in Tral of Pulwama District in Jammu and Kashmir. According to army sources slain militants belonged to a JeM's strike unit comprising of Pakistan based militants who were planning to carry out attacks on Republic day celebrations on Jan 26, 2020 ([Kashmir Observer](#)).

January 28: Three NSCN groups -- NSCN-K, NSCN-R and NSCN-U -- jointly met the Ceasefire Supervisory Board (CFSB) for a coordination meeting to review the Ceasefire Ground Rules (CFGR). This is the second time that the three groups came together for a joint meeting, the first being in November 2019. Speaking with EastMojo, Amento V Chophi, deputy kilonser MIP and CFSB member, NSCN-R, said, "Security forces accused us of the ongoing recruitment. However, as per the ground rules, there is no forced recruitment done by us. It is voluntary recruitment as far as NSCN-R is concerned. So there is no violation of the CFGR." ([EASTMOJO](#)).

January 31: Three Popular Front of India (PFI) members were arrested from Lucknow on January 31, on charges of inciting violence during an anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protest in the old city area of Lucknow and Parivartan Chowk on December 19, 2019. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) who is investigating the financial transactions of PFI has revealed that a total amount of Rs 120 crore have been credited to bank accounts linked to the PFI. ([India Today](#))

MALDIVES



In the review month (January 2020) the Maldivian government and security forces have continued their efforts to curb radicalization and extremism in the country as several more individuals were arrested in connection with the special operation codenamed 'Asseyri' in Maduvvari island in Raa Atoll.

In January, Minister of Islamic Affairs, Ahmed Zahir stringent has stated that the country will not tolerate blasphemers and such incidents will be closely monitored and investigated. His statement came a time when a video of a Maldivian citizen advocating for the right to leave Islam and defending apostates began circulating on social media. While the anti-Blasphemy laws are usually controversial and the government seems steadfast to maintain Maldives as a cent percent Muslim country. The issue of blasphemy has raised public outrage in Maldives earlier though any draconian punishments for so called blasphemers and apostates would attract international criticisms against the country.

MAJOR EVENTS

January 02: The Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) reduced the institution's alert status to normal, with the conclusion of the special operation conducted with strengthened security. Major Ibrahim Azim of MNDF said the alert status was decreased from 'Yellow-2' to 'normal', and said the operation conducted by the defense force had been very successful. MNDF raised the alert status to 'Yellow Two' on December 24. Yellow alerts are issued when there is an increased or predictable threat to the security and sovereignty of the country ([AVAS](#)).

January 07: Maldives Police Service (MPS) arrested three more individuals in connection with the special operation codenamed 'Asseyri' to curb religious extremism in Maduvvari island in Raa Atoll ([Edition](#)).

January 10: The Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances (DDCom) disclosed that it will soon be resubmitting the prosecution of murder cases of Dr Afrasheem Ali, journalist Ahmed Rilwan, and blogger Yameen Rasheed. To note, The commission also pressed charges against former Minister of Islamic Affairs Dr Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed, for providing false information in connection with the murder of the religious scholar. ([Edition](#)).

January 12: Minister of Islamic Affairs, Dr. Ahmed Zahir, stated that there would be no room for blasphemers in the Maldives and that such incidents would be closely monitored and investigated. The statement came while public outrage following a video of a Maldivian advocating for the right to leave Islam and defending apostates began circulating on social media during the past week. Highlighting that the Maldives is a 100% Muslim country, the minister stated that such incidents will be taken very seriously and that there will be zero-tolerance against Maldivians spreading blasphemy. ([Raajje.mv](#))

January 14: Maldives Police Service launched an investigation into a Viber messaging group campaigning against vaccination. Police said that the activity of the group based on the social media platform was initially brought to their attention in 2019. Three fresh cases of measles in the island nation that was declared as measles free by the World Health Organization (WHO) in April 2017 have brought the notice of authorities to hard-line extremists refusing to vaccinate their children ([Edition](#)).

January 30: A Maldivian Criminal Court decided a Final hearings on Yameen Rasheed murder case in late February 2020. Religious extremists on April 23, 2017 killed Yameen Rasheed, an IT professional, in the stairwell of his home. The state charged six individuals with first-degree murder: Ismail Haisham Rasheed, Ahmed Zihan Ismail, Mohamed Dhifran, Hassan Shifaz, Thaaif Ismail Rasheed and Hussain Ziyad ([The Edition](#)).

NEPAL



The long-stalled transitional justice process received a fresh momentum as the Oli government appointed two members of the transitional justice commission. But the Conflict Victims' Common Platform (CVCP) opposed the appointments of these two members. The CVCP demanded that the transitional justice act be amended on the basis of the Supreme Court's verdict of January 2, 2013, which stated that any amendment or new act relating to the issue should be drafted by a drafting task force including victims, experts and human rights activists. The CVCP said the process of appointment of members to the commission should start only after the amendment of the act.

The government crackdown on the Netra Bikram Chand-led Communist Party continued. Police sources said the Chand-led outlawed Maoist group has devised some new strategy after many senior leaders were arrested. Nearly 1,300 senior leaders of

this group, including 260 central level leaders, have been arrested as of January 2020 after the government banned their activities in early March 2019.

Nepal will witness political crisis in the coming months due to deepening factionalism in the ruling NCP. The status quoist groups in the party, headed by PM K P Sharma Oli, has been resisting the amendments in the new Constitution proposed by the revisionist faction headed by Prachanda and other senior leaders to elect some senior leaders into the National Assembly, the Upper House.

MAJOR EVENTS

January 04: Narcotics Control Bureau of Nepal Police arrested two Belarusian nationals with six kilograms of cocaine during immigration check at the Tribhuvan International Airport. The confiscated cocaine was worth more than Rs150 million. The accused were trying to smuggle the cocaine to Hong Kong by a Cathay Pacific flight. Police said the arrested men had made a meticulous plan to use Nepal as a transit point. ([The Kathmandu Post](#))

January 05: After one half years of merger between the CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist Centre), the leaders representing the Maoist party are increasingly insecure, as they see former UML leaders dominating—from the government to the party committees. Just ahead of the merger announcement, the Maoists were facing questions about whether a party that fought a bloody insurgency for 10 years was going to surrender to a traditional party like the UML. There were also concerns among Maoist leaders about whether the UML was “acquiring” their party, rather than the merger being the respectful unity of two equal entities. Party leaders now say their apprehensions were right all along. The parties merged in May 2018 to become the Nepal Communist Party (NCP). ([The Kathmandu Post](#))

January 05: Nepal government has decided to start consultations with the concerned parties beginning January 13 for an amendment to the Transitional Justice Act, with an aim to conclude the transitional justice process, which has been dragging on for over a decade now. The Ministry of Law and Justice will collect comments and feedback from all seven provinces and then launch a national level consultation before giving a final shape to the draft amendment bill on Enforced Disappearances Enquiry and Truth and Reconciliation Act-2014, according to officials. ([The Kathmandu Post](#))

January 19: Conflict Victims Common Platform (CVCP) in Kathmandu issued a press release strongly objecting to the nomination of office bearers in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons. The recommendation committee formed under former chief justice Om Prakash Mishra to nominate office bearers of the two transitional justice mechanisms had recommended the office bearers on January 18. Stating that their lack of initiative to amend the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, was one of the major causes behind the failure of the two transitional justice bodies, CVCP said the recommendation committee ignored the concerns of the conflict victims. ([The Himalayan Times](#))

January 27: Speaking during an oath-taking ceremony of the party's sister organization Federation of Indigenous Nationalities Nepal in Kathmandu, Chairperson of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) Pushpa Kamal Dahal said the constitution amendment is essential in achieving the goal of ethnic liberation. He said that the constitution amendment is a must for realizing the goal of ethnic liberation, equality, justice and proportional representation. He assured the people from marginalized communities that the constitution will be amended for the same. ([Myrepublica](#))

PAKISTAN

The decision to extend the term of Army Chief General Bajwa hugely affected the rank and files of the Pakistani Army. Around seven senior Army officials remained in house arrests for protesting against the extension. Meanwhile, Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman continued his effort to keep the six opposition parties together to initiate a protest movement to dislodge the Tehreek-e-Insaf's government headed by PM Imran Khan over the economic bankruptcy issue. The six parties include the JUI-F, the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), the Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP), the National Party (NP), the Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) and the Markazi Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadees (MJAH). Interestingly, the JUI-F has failed to convince the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, the Pakistan People's Party and Awami National



Party to extent their support to the anti-Imran movement.

In a separate development, government sources indicated that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has failed to make necessary preparations, including framing delimitation rules, for the local-body polls. However, contradicting the official sources, provincial Information Minister Shaukat Yousafzai stated that the Government would hold the elections by March, 2020 and till that time all legal formalities would be fulfilled.

In another development, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in a public rally, the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) leaders announced the formation of a jirga (tribal council) to convince Pashtun leaders to join the PTM to strengthen its cause and jointly fight for Pashtuns' rights. The PTM is a rights-based alliance, which has been demanding de-mining of the former tribal areas, end to the practices of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and unlawful

detentions.

MAJOR EVENTS



January 01: Al-Qaeda has belatedly released the third issue of its Arabic-language magazine One Ummah. It is billed as a special edition marking the September 2001 attacks in the US. The latest / third edition was released on December 31, 2019, glorifies the 9/11 attacks and incites young Muslims to carry out similar assaults. The second edition of One Ummah was published on August 2019. The first English edition of One Ummah was released on 11 September, 2019. The 56-page magazine was released by al-Qaeda's media arm Al-Sahab and distributed on the messaging service Rocket Chat.

January 01: The Pakistan Taliban (Fehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan) group has claimed carrying out 142 attacks against security forces in 2019. In an infographic summarising its operations for the year released on December 31(2019), the group also claimed killing 360 people and injuring 264 others. The infographic was produced by TTP's propaganda wing Umar Media and released via its channel on the messaging app Telegram.

January 02: The Pakistan Taliban (TTP) released the first episode of a new video series showing a sniper attack against security forces in the northwest tribal area. The five minute long video titled "Terrorising war 1" was produced by the group's propaganda arm Umar Media and released via its channel on the messaging app Telegram. It included a detailed sniper operation in Mamund area of Bajaur Agency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The latest video comes three days after the group exposed what it described were the army's "atrocities" against civilians in another propaganda video. TTP's earlier depicted attacks against government forces in two other video series titled "As-Sabiqoon" and "Al-Karraroon". (Telegram).

January 03: Hundreds of Muslim residents of Nankana Sahib pelted stones on Gurdwara Nankana Sahib. The protesters threatened to destroy the gurdwara and build a mosque in its place. The mob was being led by the family of Mohammad Hassan, the boy who allegedly abducted and converted Sikh girl Jagjit Kaur, who is the daughter of the gurdwara's granthi. In a video, recorded at the site of the protest, Hassan's brother could be seen saying that he will ensure that no Sikh is left in the city and that it is renamed from Nankana Sahib to Ghulaman-e-Mustafa. (India Today)

January 04: US diplomat Alice Wells said President Donald Trump authorised the resumption of Pakistan's participation in a US military training and educational programme in order to strengthen military-to-military

cooperation on shared priorities and "advance US national security". However, the overall security assistance suspension for Pakistan remains in effect. The announcement has been reiterated after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reached out to Army Chief Gen Qamar Bajwa in the aftermath of the assassination of top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, vowing to remain firm against Iran (Dawn)

January 05: Protesters, including women and children, chanted slogans and carried banners at an anti-America rally at Fawara Chowk in Karachi. Addressing a joint press conference on Saturday, parties of the Millat-e-Jafria Pakistan had announced an anti-American rally to protest the killing of Iran's Major General Qasem Soleimani and Hashed al-Shaabi deputy chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a US drone attack. They condemned America's "terrorist attacks" in Iraq (Dawn).

January 07: Two persons were killed and 14 others injured in VBEID blast on McConaughey Road in Quetta, Balochistan province. Hizbul Ahrar, a splinter group of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan has claimed responsibility for the attack (Dawn).

January 09: Tribal elders in Nangarhar (the eastern Afghan province) handed over 80 children and 50 women linked to the Islamic State group (IS) to their relatives in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to the report, these people had recently surrendered to Afghan security forces in Nangarhar. Earlier, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had instructed tribal elders in the border province to hand the women and children over to their kin in Pakistan "in line with Afghan culture and tradition." (ASIANNEWS)

January 10: Nearly 15 persons were killed in a suicide blast inside a mosque in Quetta's (Balochistan province) Satellite Town area during Friday evening prayers. The blast left 19 people injured. The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack, according to the SITE intelligence group (Dawn).

January 29: Two polio workers including a female health worker have been killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Parmoli area of Swabi District. Following the attack, security of the anti-polio campaigners has been enhanced in the district with deployment of security personnel during the vaccination campaign in the district (Frontier Post).

January 30: Two soldiers were killed and at least five terrorists were killed in an Intelligence-Based Operation conducted by Pakistan Army in Data Khel area of the North Waziristan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. With this, the security forces claim that terrorists have almost been wiped out from the tribal belt especially in South and North Waziristan tribal districts during the series of Operations with major being the Zerb-e-Azb followed by the operation Rad ul Fasaad. (Pakistan Observer)

SRI LANKA



MAJOR EVENTS

January 03: President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa opening the Fourth Session of the Eighth Parliament said constitution should be changed to protect the country. He presented a policy manifesto saying the country's independence would not be compromised and in order to safeguard the security, sovereignty, stability and integrity of the country, it is essential that changes be made to the existing Constitution. ([Asian Tribune](#)).

January 03: Lankan government received the Cabinet approval to withdraw the Counter Terrorism Bill, which was drafted by the previous Government to replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). The controversial Bill is being considered by the Sectoral Oversight Committee on International Relations in

Parliament. However, considering the views expressed by various parties regarding certain provisions contained in the Bill, Minister of Foreign Relations Dinesh Gunawardena has proposed the withdrawal of the Bill. ([Colombo Page](#)).

January 08: Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and visiting Law and Home Affairs Minister of Singapore Kasiviswanathan Shanmugam discussed regional concerns especially to combat terrorism, cyber security, curbing extremism and improving intelligence services. They also discussed the new legislation introduced by Singapore to address hate speech, online disinformation and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act. ([Colombo Page](#)).

January 20: Sri Lankan president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa has informed that the 20,000 missing Tamils who vanished during the nation's civil war are dead. Gotabaya Rajapaksa who was then defence secretary led government troops to victory over a Tamil insurgency movement, but his forces were accused of carrying out mass disappearances and executions of rebels and civilians ([BBC News](#)).



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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