

IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICE AS A NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT: SELECTED OPERATIONAL RESPONSE MEASURES

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding the Research Environment: Setting the Context

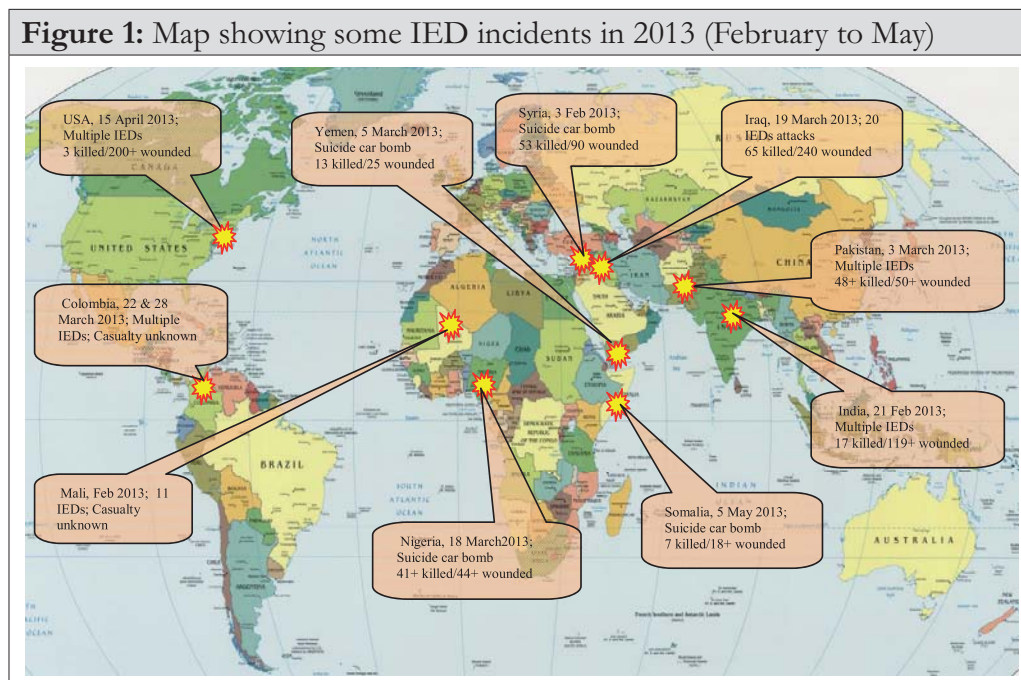
In present world order, the threat of improvised explosive device (IED) is contemporary and seemingly unavoidable. It has sufficiently drawn the attention of world community where Bangladesh (BD) is no exception. Recently Bangladesh has experienced wide spread IED related incidents both at public and private places. IEDs, in the form of Cocktail/ Handmade Bombs, Improvised Bombs, Grenades and Petrol Bombs, were indiscriminately used against innocent civilians throughout the country. Being actuated, IEDs generate monstrous effect and brutality beyond one's imagination. Under present circumstances there is no denying a fact that IED is a national security threat and it demands a comprehensive response from appropriate authority. Apart from its local use, IED is also an effective weapon used in the wide range of asymmetric warfare across the world. Fathoming the vividness of the issue, it is necessary to address the threat holistically and in a pragmatic manner. At this backdrop, it is time worthy to study the improvised explosive device as a national security threat and ascertain the selected operational response measures.

IED and Its Journey

The term IED originated from the British Army in the 1970s, after the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) used bombs made from agricultural fertilizer and Semtex (general-purpose plastic explosive similar to C4 explosive). In short, IED may be defined as, *A device placed or fabricated in an improvised manner incorporating destructive, lethal, noxious, pyrotechnic, or incendiary chemicals and designed to destroy, disrupt, delay, distract, incapacitate, or harass. It may incorporate military stores, but is normally devised from non-military components.* They are unique in nature because the IED builder has to improvise with the materials at hand.

Global Perspective of IED: Drawing the Trend

To fathom the global perspective of IED, let us have a look at some IED incidents in the year 2013 (Barbero, 2013: Slide 5) from February to May only. It will be clear from the following figure that IED has become an endemic issue throughout the world:



Present, IEDs have become a strategic weapon to draw attention. Politically unstable and Muslim countries suffer most from IEDs.

IED IN BANGLADESH

Factors Contributing IED Attack

Various factors that influenced the IED attack in Bangladesh are:

- Greed for power.
- Poor administration and spread of corruption.
- Ideological inspiration.
- Availability of explosive substances at a lower price.
- Access to technical know-how
- Poor surveillance/intelligence failure

- g. Vulnerability of Madrassa education
- h. Situation across the world
- j. Socio- Political situation

The Nature and Extent of Threat

Analyzing the recent incidents, one can say that IED threat is enduring in BD. Availability of raw materials locally, at a lower price and access to technical know-how for its preparation has made its use popular. Nature and extent of the threat can be summarized as (*extracts from Case Study (attached as Annex A) is also considered*):

- a. Bangladeshi people are generally peace loving and soft hearted. Threat of IED exerts serious effect on their physical and cognitive domain.
- b. Currently IED threat mostly revolves around political issues. It has been seen that when the opposition parties find no other alternative to protest/draw attention/fulfill their demand, they resort to violent actions like IED attack.
- c. Use of petrol/hand bombs is frequent, particularly during political turmoil. Alike recent months, IEDs might again be indiscriminately used across the country to create panic and deterrence.
- d. Although the threat is still at manageable level, but if it is not restricted, the perpetrators might go beyond control and start undermining the capability of the state.
- e. Due to the presence and increased activities of AQ and ISIS in the South Asia region, the nature of IED threat might range into a wide spectrum of threats.

Analysis

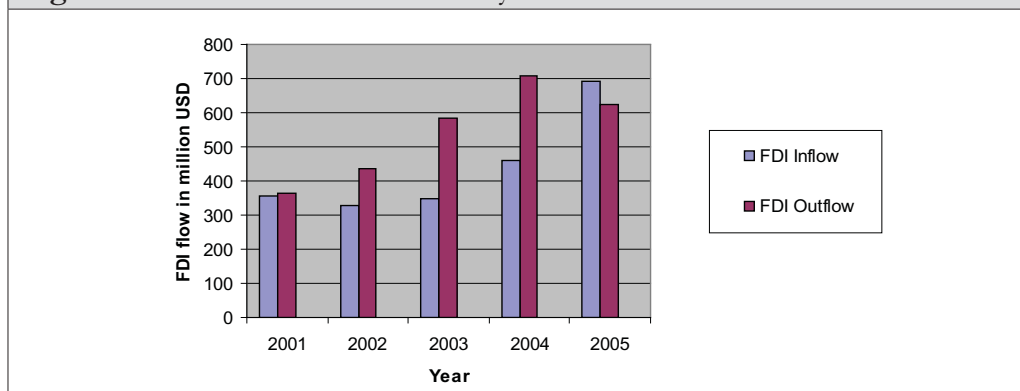
IEDs are gaining traction not only worldwide but also in BD. In BD, evaluation of recent attacks shows that politically embedded issues are the prime causes of IED attacks. Most of the attacks were evidently aimed at creating panic/deterrence by which attention of native and world community can be drawn. Recently the nature and style of threat has greatly changed. Unlike previous attempt of successful mass protest (like 1990), now the opposing parties quickly resort to subversion as they fail to motivate mass people. But it was evident that subversive use of IED cannot win people's support, rather it loses people's confidence and ultimately ends as nose head aspiration.

Effect of IED Attack in Different Sectors

On Economy

IED incidents have serious negative impact on the economy of the country. On 19 February, Daily *Kaler Kantha* reported the loss of One Lac Twenty Thousand Crore taka in last forty four days due to strike and violence where the main reason of public panic was IED (particularly petrol bomb and cocktail) attack. In such situation, no entrepreneur want to invest; rather they try to pull out their investment. To understand the effect more vividly let us have a look at the inflow and outflow of FDI during 2001-2005, it is the period when IED attacks were maximum in the country (less recent months). The following table and graph shows that FDI outflow were more than inflow in the year 2001-2004 during which IED threat was maximum (Islam, 2008:11):

Figure 2: FDI inflow-outflow in the years when IED threat was maximum



On Socio-Cultural Sectors

Socio-cultural effects of IED attacks are deep-rooted and will have a lasting effect. Some of those are:

- a. Education sector has suffered badly in recent months. IED has become a very easy means to stop or close an educational institute or even cessation of a public exam. This year the exam schedule of Higher Secondary examination was upset time and again. Students were badly affected by the fear of petrol bombs and cocktails. The episode badly affected the cognitive behavior of minors, particularly who were victim. Besides, the most dangerous part could be that some may even be inspired by the negative thrill.

- b. Public health was another sector which suffered immensely during last turmoil. Many people were deprived of the medical facility owing to not venturing the risk of going to hospitals. Moreover, the influx of burnt victims created a suffocated and fearful environment in some places.
- c. Employment of mass people was also affected. Daily labours, construction workers, drivers of different transports, garment workers, street sellers etc could not earn their living properly. Furthermore, employment by the foreign investment was curbed.
- d. Subversion activities like IED attack also breed the uprising of different opposing groups, Mukto Mona Bloggers, internet news portals etc. Some of them at times get indulged with anti religious and sensitive comments which later on create another issue for violence.

On Politics

Although most of the IED attacks in Bangladesh are motivated by unholy political agenda, yet it has far reaching bad effects on the overall political image and practices. Any political party being defamed with branding extremism will surely suffer people's choice. In general, use of IED in politics undermines the human quality, creativity, public relation/communication, respect for others' view etc. Political leaders, if they get subjugated/attracted by the temporary benefit of IEDs, the state craft will corrupt and the nation will suffer badly.

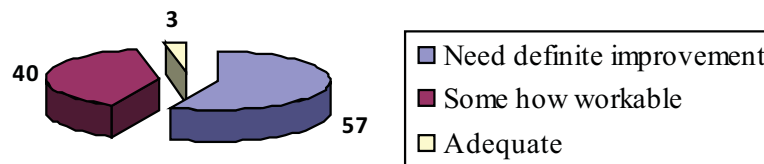
Major Challenges and Selected Operational Response Measures

The threat of IED is contemporary, enduring and a big challenge. Although we are yet to experience worse situations like Iraq, Afghanistan or even Pakistan but the Geo-Strategic Location, Demography (mainly illiteracy, religious sentiment and emotional aspect of BD people), Internal Power Dynamics and Expansion of AQ and ISIS in South Asia particularly makes BD vulnerable to IED threat. Hence, to counter the threat we need to identify the related challenges at different levels and ascertain the response measures.

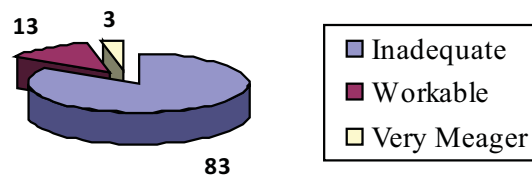
Initial Challenge – The Way BD Look at It

There is no denying a fact that in BD we are yet to perceive the IED threat to its full spectrum. To visualize the magnitude and dimensions of IED threat one has to see it being within a big canvas, accommodating both domestic and international affairs. Terrorists today are no longer confined to their national boundary; they operate from foreign bases with a wide and complex web of international linkage. Combating IED threat can no more remain isolated government action programs; it requires a concerted and well coordinated national and international plan and response. Here lies BD's initial challenge; we are yet to recognize the threat from a greater perspective as such our preparation and response measures are also inadequate. The *Survey Results* have further confirmed the weaknesses:

- a. To counter the IED threat, present standard of operational response measures by law enforcing/ other government agencies:



- b. The level of our preparation to face the IED threat is:



Government/Strategic Level

To deal with the threat it requires a national effort based on a whole-of-government approach that addresses the device, the network and the socio-political aspects of the operational environment. Challenges and proposed response measures at this level are:

- a. **Challenges** (related to)
 - Outlook of the Government regarding IED threat.
 - Perceiving IED as a Threat System.

- Conceptual preparation and inter Ministerial coordination.
- Resource limitation.
- Addressing AQ and ISIS issue.
- Effective diplomacy to prevent and deter IED threat.
- Implementation of laws/acts to curb IED attack and stop illegal use of hazardous (explosives, flammable items etc) material.
- Developing effective Lines of Operation (LOO), integrating all concerned.

b. Selected Response Measures

- First and foremost thing we need to do at national level is to perceive IED as a threat system and focus on whole-of-government approach to address the threat.
- Bringing stakeholders of all strata and build a consensus to stop use/supply of hazardous substances that are ultimately used for making different high explosive IEDs, petrol bombs, cocktails etc.
- Banning terrorist/militant groups or parties, who so ever demonstrate slightest threat to human security as well as national security.
- Constantly monitoring the activities of extremist parties.
- Money Laundering Prevention Act (MLPA), enacted in 2002 should be strictly adhered to.
- Proper implementation of Speedy Trial Tribunal 2002.
- Anti Terrorism Act-2008 must be firmly enforced.
- Introducing the system of awarding Corporal Punishment for any kind of involvement in IED matters/attack.
- An Executive Committee, comprising representatives from concerned ministries and related government agencies, may be formed to manage anti/counter terrorism activities within the country. As and when necessary, the Committee will assemble and coordinate the function of different government organizations. Through this integration we will get better result and can avoid duplication of effort. Here, point to note is - the Committee should be allowed to work independently and freely, being under no ministry or government office. Again, government has to ensure that its organs do render every possible support asked by the Committee.

- **Establishing LOO for countering IED threat.** Some suggested lines are set out below:

- **LOO 1 : Diplomatic**

Military or paramilitary forces perhaps cannot bring an end to a threat like IED unless it is diplomatically/politically agreed upon/resolved. With this connotation BD should make all endeavors to settle the IED related problems both at home and abroad (if deployed anytime) through diplomatic efforts, in addition to other efforts.

- **LOO 2 : Military and Paramilitary**

This LOO will include all activities of Armed forces, Police, BGB, RAB etc. Training, neutralization of devices, attacking the network etc are some of mentionable operations. Most of these operations will be conducted in civilian environment, hence, a close tie with civil administration and off-course local people will be needed.

- **LOO 3 : Psychological**

This LOO is to ensure comprehensive psychological warfare against the IED network and local activities. It will encompass the intimate support of electronic and print media, social leaders, celebrities etc. Trained forces will also contribute their bit in psychological operation.

- We might activate a Data Center, either with Police/RAB/DGFI, which will be the primary source of information and intelligence relating to the illegal use of explosives and hazardous material. Their role will be to collect data from all concerned, collate, interpret and disseminate those. Data center will maintain records of all bomb-related incidents, regardless of design, target, party or motive. These records will be used to shape the IED trend and method of use that ultimately will be invaluable information to the tactical operators. Besides, this center will also collect and process information on IED/terrorist matters outside BD that might prove useful for BD's interest. For efficient functioning of the Center, less the support staff, most of the members of this center should be preferably qualified bomb technicians and some should have intelligence training.
- Finally, we need to allot adequate funds for the acquisition of resources and establishing facilities.

Agencies/Operational Level Challenges and Selected Response Measures

a. Environment and IED Threat

Political, social and economic environment are closely related to IED attack. At agency level we need to carry out comparative case studies and social science researches, taking the incidents of both domestic and international arena, to ascertain the effect of environment and the response measures. In this regard, agencies may utilize the intellect of civil society/scholars/professors to understand the variety of human behavior.

b. Acquisition, Synthesis and Analysis of IED related Data

There is a need to detect the activities that precede IED activation/detonation. It requires a wide variety of information including data from both human and technical sources, and the systematic inference of actionable knowledge from the fusion of the data. In BD, our agencies badly lack in processing data and making them into viable intelligence. Moreover we have gaps in coordination and integration between agencies. As such, proposed Committee and Data center may (as suggested in strategic level) be useful in coordinating the activities of related agencies. In this regard, RAB and DGFI officers proposed (during focused group discussion) to carry out Case studies/Research on IED matters and trend. Outputs of the researches will be very useful in formulating the action plan.

c. Analytical Techniques for Assessing IED Countermeasures

This is an operational level tool, like the *After Action Review*, to assess own action. It is mostly an action of law enforcing agencies/ military forces. In BD we need analytical methods that quantitatively assess the effectiveness of IED countermeasures. To do this we will require base information to answer the questions like: *Which all agencies have taken what all measures? What is the rate of success? Why did we fail? etc.* Perhaps, once activated, our proposed Committee can address the issue.

d. Detection and Disruption throughout the IED Threat Chain

There are various points in the chain of events leading up to an IED attack at which improved detection and disruption technologies might be usefully applied. For each detection opportunity, there are basic issues regarding the particular signatures, methods, and limits of detection. This detection and disruption

technology is yet a challenge for BD. Initially, we may plan to strengthen our existing intelligence network with a comprehensive plan for future development. Since the environment surrounding this action (i.e. detection and disruption) is dynamic and ever changing (as perpetrators always change their technique) so our operational level response should also be dynamic.

e. Ensuring Resource Availability

At operational level we lack in resources like, funds, facilities, gadgets/devices, training establishment etc. Resources have direct relation with finance and it mostly rolls down from top, as such, at agency level we need to: firstly think and act jointly to minimize the resource constraints and secondly to coordinate activities like exercises/training/operations in a manner that economy of effort is maintained.

f. Implementation of Laws/Acts at Different Courts/Levels

In BD we have laws/rules/acts to guard against IED attack, but we profusely lack in their implementation. Anti Money Laundering act 2002, Speedy Trial Tribunal 2002, Anti Terrorism Act 2008 etc which are already in vogue should be pursued vigorously. Despite having these laws some culprits are still escaping the punishment, for example- according to a news paper, Md Khairul Bashar, the so called operation leader of Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami of BD (HUJI-B) got bailed out from one of our esteemed Court (Daily Jugantar, 18 January 2015:2). How can this happen? It is a big backlash. We should be adequately skilled to be able to keep the perpetrators under lock. Introduction of Corporal punishment may also be considered seriously.

g. Establishing LOO at Agency/Operation level

We need to establish operational level LOO for countering IED threat. Some suggested lines are mentioned below:

- **LOO 1 : Attack the Network**

This LOO will consist of lethal and nonlethal actions and operations targeting IED networks. It can be conducted simultaneously at multiple levels (from street to the masterminds). In this line, orchestration of intelligence, political, media and other efforts along with field level operation is vital to the success.

- **LOO 2 : Defeat the Device**

This LOO will consist of activities to detect and neutralize IEDs. These will be mostly tactical level actions having operational level impact. To perform these, we will need trained manpower and devices/equipments. The team/group might also be requiring support of local people.

- **LOO 3 : Train the Force**

This LOO is to ensure comprehensive training of BD forces. Selected personnel from Armed forces, Police, BGB, RAB will undergo a systematic program. Training should ensure that deployed troops are aware of the IED threat in their operational area and have an understanding of their missions, functions, and responsibilities, as well as the capabilities of their equipment. This type of training may be conducted in some military institution like Ordnance Center and School of BD Army.

Field/ Tactical Level Challenges and Selected Response Measures

a. Knowing How to Deal with Modern/Latest IEDs

We are yet to know, at ground level, as to how we deal with a latest IED. It must be remembered that petrol bombs or cocktail situations are primitive kind. Currently, across the world or even in our region very powerful IEDs with huge destruction ability have been used. As BD has not experienced such devastating attack (less grenade attack of 21 August 2001), we are yet to prepare ourselves both physically and conceptually.

b. Lack of Techniques, Tactics and Procedure (TTP) and Concept of Operation

At tactical level, the Counter-IED (C-IED) plan provides guidance for isolation and attacking elements of the IED network, mitigating the effects of an IED blast, training the force in C-IED TTP, and developing a comprehensive concept of operation. In BD we have limitation on most of the above mentioned activities. We are yet to formalize the *Concept of Operation* to C-IED. A suggested theme (Author formulated) is appended below:

Concept of Operation can be a verbal or graphical representation that clearly expresses what the field commander intends to accomplish and how it will be done using available resources. The concept is designed to give an overall picture of the operation. It will describe how the actions of the force components and supporting organizations will be integrated, synchronized, and phased to

accomplish the mission, including potential branches and sequels. The staff officer will write (or graphically portrays) the concept in sufficient detail so that subordinate and supporting elements understand their mission, tasks, and other requirements and can develop their plans accordingly. The concept should be consistent with the approved course of action (by higher level).

c. Lack of Modern Equipment

We have serious lack in IEDD equipment (during discussion, most of the Resourced Personnel and other Interviewees also opined same). At the moment 57 Engineer Company of BD Army and Bomb Squad of RAB Headquarter are primarily doing the disposal work of IEDs. Many of their equipments are old and not up to the mark (in line with international standard). However, Bomb squad of RAB has some workable items but again their quantity is meager. To enhance our C-IED capability we need to buy some modern gadgets.

d. Inadequacy in Training

Our existing training system is not adequate. Shortfalls are:

- It is not modern, as we do not have modern gadgets, technologies, concept and adequate facilities.
- We lack in integrated training among units/teams of involved agencies.
- Even in Army, our training is not coordinated. Although the Corps of Engineers is primarily responsible for bomb disposal, however their men undergo bomb disposal training for only two months or less time in ECSME. But in Corps of Ordnance, men under go ammunition technician course (covering the Explosive Ordnance Disposal) for almost nine months including physical demolition of munitions and explosives. Moreover, Ordnance School imparts workable knowledge on a lot of conventional munitions. From both technical and economic point of view and to maintain similar standard, it is therefore suggested that a single institution be given the responsibility to train the men on IED matters.
- If we consider IED as a system, then we must train our men on intelligence aspects as well. At the moment our training covers some aspects on disposing the device but not covering training on preventive intelligence measures.
- To enhance our capability the paper also suggests inclusion of adequate foreign training on IED matters.

Integration of Efforts

To deal with IED threat integration of effort is a must. BD has a number of ministries and agencies who share the responsibility to guard against terrorism and IED attack. Given the limitations it is assumed that they try to do their part judiciously. But the weakness is, their efforts are not integrated. We know, *Unity is Strength*. If we can combine our potency, perhaps we will be able to do better against terrorism and IED. The suggested Committee could bring the synergy through coordinating the action plan and integrating the resources. In so doing their working agenda may include:

- a. Identifying the causes of terrorism and proffered tactics in the country.
- b. Advising the government for taking pragmatic steps to eliminate the root causes.
- c. Remain updated with global scenario on terrorism and suggest methods to block entries of terrorists, their means and methods into Bangladesh.
- d. Coordinate all proactive/preventive/reactive steps against terrorism in the country.
- e. Visualize future developments in the terrorism tactics and suggest ways to prevent those.
- f. Conduct constant surveillance on the likely breeding pockets of terrorism and advice steps for prevention.

Proffered Actions by Media, Business Sector and General Mass

Media Response Measures

a. **Anti Extremism Campaign**

Usually, the rise of radicalism and intolerance is rejected by general mass. Ordinary people have always condemned the heinous acts by the extremists. Through skillful media campaign (both electronic and print) we can subdue the rise of terrorism and use of IED to a great extent. Celebrities (sports stars, movie stars etc) and eminent personalities can also take part in such campaign.

b. Awareness Building

Government can use the media to grow awareness among the people about IED threat. A list of Do's and Don'ts, during a IED situation, may also be broadcasted using television, radio and news papers.

c. Exposing the Perpetrators

Media should expose the culprits and their deeds in front of the mass. Their consequences and regrets should also be highlighted.

d. Information Collection

Media has strong intelligence collection network. We can use their capability in collecting information about terrorism.

Response of Business Sector

a. Rejection

Finance is a prime pre-requisite for terrorism. Businessmen at all levels should reject the business entity which overtly or covertly support, promote and finance the extremist groups.

b. Assist in Monitoring

Although BD is a small country but a large portion of population (almost a crore) is directly involved in business sector. If the business personalities assist government and other agencies by involving their employees to monitor/protest against IED use, the C-IED measures will be greatly enhanced. But this will only be possible once the owners enjoy the confidence of their workers. Besides, the Banking sector in particular can assist in monitoring illegal/unusual transaction of currency.

c. Remaining out of Terrorism Sphere

For illegal profit or to avoid loss, businessmen should not get involved in terrorist activities.

d. Controlling the Storage and Supply of Hazardous Items

Businesses which deal with hazardous items including liquid fuel should carefully maintain the storage and supply accountability. They should strictly monitor that poisonous and explosive ingredients/chemicals are not sold to unauthorized/doubtful customers.

Response from General Mass

The biggest strength of BD is its population. If the people of BD sincerely want, we can eradicate the IED threat. It is a well known fact that without the help of native people no terrorist group, either local or outsider, can sustain. As such if we can inspire our people and make them aware, probably they can contribute the most against IED threat. General mass in this regard may assist by (the list is not exhaustive):

- a. Creating a social voice against IED. They can be a part of public awareness building programs.
- b. Introducing Community Policing to guard against IED.
- c. Preventing friends and family from getting involved into extremism/terrorism.
- d. Boycotting the personnel and groups/parties that promote/support terrorism.
- e. In extreme situation, stand and resist the perpetrators in respective community.
- f. Assist C-IED operations by giving valuable information.
- g. Imams of different mosques can play an active role by preaching the correct explanation of 'Jihad' and enumerating the consequences of heinous acts like IED attack.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper floats following recommendations:

To address the menace effectively, BD needs to bring necessary amendments in the Constitution, keeping the provision of forming Special Tribunal for IED matters, empowered with speedy trial and quick execution. The paper also recommends introducing Corporal punishment for any kind of involvement in IED attack keeping no scope to appeal.

To invigorate public awareness building programs at all levels. It should aim to sensitize people about the perils of IED and promote Community Policing, involving people from all strata of the society specially the youth and the social elites.

CONCLUSION

In present world order, the threat of IED is contemporary and almost unavoidable. Recently BD has experienced widespread IED related incidents. IEDs, in the form of Cocktail/ Handmade Bombs, Improvised Bombs, Grenades and Petrol Bombs, were indiscriminately used against innocent civilians. Apparently, most of the recent attacks were directed due to political reason. Apart from local IED threat, BD is also vulnerable to international/regional threat (of IED) due to its Geo-Political and Geo-Strategic position. In addition, threat of AQ and ISIS linking through JMB, HUJI-B or Hijbut Tahrir etc cannot be ruled out as well. Moreover, in conventional arena IED is an effective weapon used in the wide range of asymmetric warfare across the world.

Under the present circumstances, IED is surely a national security concern. Although the threat is still at manageable level, but if it is not restricted, the perpetrators might go beyond control and start undermining the capability of the state. Hence, it is time for BD to take pragmatic and methodical steps to counter the threat. The paper has identified some of the challenges at government/strategic level, agency/operational level and field/tactical level. Besides, it has also suggested few operational response measures to counter the threat. Some mentionable measures are: To build the public awareness and consensus against IED; Introduce and implement laws/acts/rules/punishments quickly and properly; Form national level Committee to coordinate and guide the C-IED matters; Activate data center; Define lines of operation at different levels; Improve resource base including equipments, develop integrated training; Conduct research; Develop and improve the TTP etc. A holistic approach to C-IED will also require integration of efforts by concerned offices/organizations, response from business personnel, politicians, media and above all the support of general mass.

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