

# Prison Radicalization in Bangladesh: A Critical Study

Thowhidul Islam<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Prison radicalization has now become a challenge to the global security, particularly, in the countries under the threat for violent extremism. Prison is a place used for confinement of convicted criminals. It is also a center of correctional activities with potential scopes for transforming the imprisoned people into good human being. But the present prison system is not only at risk, but also creates secure opportunities for extremists to spread their radical ideologies. Historically, the prisons of Bangladesh are concerned with punishing offenders through incarceration. Prison system of the country was introduced by the British rulers as a weapon of suppression to secure colonial interest. It was never designed as an institution for correction. Many reforms were made, in course of time, but mostly in the management aspects, not in the system. On the other hand, Bangladesh is facing threats by radicalism in recent past. The condition of the prisons of Bangladesh is very vulnerable because of overcrowd inmates, unhealthy accommodation, poor quality food, corruption and even physical persecution by the prison staff. The vulnerability of the prisons of Bangladesh creates high risk of radicalization there and even to become a safer hub for recruitment of militant groups. This study aims at assessing the realities and possibilities of prison radicalization in Bangladesh. It also highlights the radicalization threats in the country and the prison system with a view to ascertaining the presence of elements for prison radicalization. The methodology used in this study is composed of critical review of available literature, analysis of relevant data and information from limited number of primary sources and various secondary sources. Having a clear perception about the radicalization threat in the country, its prison system, current scenario

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1- Associate Professor of Bangladesh Studies, Center for General Education (CGED).  
International Islamic University Chittagong.

of prison vulnerability and scopes for radicalization there, the paper suggests effective measures for successful deradicalization programs and to make the prisons a perfect center for transformation and correction.

**Key Words:** Prison, Radicalization, Extremism, Deradicalization, Bangladesh.

## 1. Introduction

Prison radicalization has now become a big challenge to the global security, particularly, in the moderate Muslim countries those are under the threat for violent extremism. Primarily, prison is a place used for confinement of convicted criminals. It is also a center of correctional activities with potential scope for transformation. The aim of prison is to protect society by confining offenders in secure location and to engage them in programs that will assist them in transforming into good human being and law abiding citizens. At the same time, it is evident that several prisons have been serving as recruitment centers for radicalization. Historically, the prison system of Bangladesh was introduced by the British colonial authority. It was, primarily, concerned with punishing offenders through incarceration. It was never designed as a correction center. It is overcrowded with 216.9% of actual capacity. Living condition, logistic facilities i.e. food, health service etc. are of very poor. Physical persecution by the prison staff, corruption, providing illegal facilities in exchange of bribe are very regular practices in the prisons of Bangladesh. On the other hand, the majority people of the country are, economically, poor and, educationally, illiterate. They are the most vulnerable community for radicalization and have always been targeted by the extremist groups for motivating into radical ideology. Simultaneously, radicalization threat has been increasing in the country since the 1990s. Extremist groups have attempted a noticeable number of radical attacks in the country in recent decades. The recent influx of Rohingya people into the country has increased the level of threat perception of radicalization in the country. All these factors i.e. existence of extremist groups, socio-economic condition and vulnerable situation of the prison have together contributed to the emergence of prison radicalization in the country. It has not only been becoming a big challenge to the national security, but also creating secure environment for the recruitment of new members and place of brain wash for the extremist groups.

### 1.1 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to ascertain the realities, possibilities and threat perceptions of prison radicalization in Bangladesh.

For an effective understanding, it focuses on several background issues such as radicalization concept, radicalization threat in Bangladesh, the prison system of the country and its vulnerability that together contribute to the emergence of prison radicalization in Bangladesh. Identifying its challenges, the study also suggests for a number of recommendations for effective deradicalization program in the country.

## **1.2 Methodology of the Research**

The methodology used in this study is composed of critical review of available literature, analysis of relevant data and information from various secondary sources like books, journal articles, magazines, working papers, dissertations, various official websites, intelligence documents, newspapers, etc. The study also collected data from primary sources about the vulnerability of the prisons of Bangladesh, but it was very limited. Despite the drawbacks of studying prison radicalization based on secondary data, official and journalistic sources, to ensure the maximum reliability, the same data were verified against different sources. The author has also followed the methodology of description and elucidation. Finally, the study has concentrated on written explanatory facts and events related with the prison radicalization in Bangladesh.

## **2. Prison Radicalization**

Radicalization is a process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo or contemporary ideas and expressions of the nation (Randy, 2011: 7-11). It is “a process whereby people adopt extremist belief systems—including the willingness to use, encourage or facilitate violence—with the aim of promoting an ideology, political project or cause as a means of social transformation. At the heart of the process of radicalization leading to violence is a dynamic that involves individuals severing ties with those in their immediate environment (family, friends, colleagues, etc.), and progressing along a radical path that may eventually lead to violence. Violent radicalization entails:

- The adoption of an ideology that becomes a way of life and a framework for meaningful action for the individual;
- Belief in the use of violent means to promote a cause;
- The merging of ideology and violent action” (CPRLV, 2019).

Though sometimes, the concepts of radicalism, terrorism and extremism become conflated, but the term radicalization is used in this paper to refer to the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs.

Prison is, primarily, aimed at protecting society with the confinement of criminals in a safer place. Prison represents a social system in which an attempt is made to create and maintain total or almost total social control (Sykes, 1999: xiv). It also facilitates the offenders with different types of programs that will assist transforming them into good human being and law abiding citizens after their return back to the society. These good objectives of prison system could only be achieved by an effective prison management with necessary facilities. However, poor prison governance, lack of necessary facilities and many other circumstantial perspectives such as isolation, individuals' frustration, influence of bad company may result not only in a negative way, but also the rise of radicalization.

Prison radicalization is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, prisons, besides being a place of confinement for the offenders, have served as recruitment centers for ideological extremists across the globe. Famous individuals in different courses of history used prison to develop extremist philosophies and recruit others into their mode of thinking. From Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin to Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi or Ayman al-Zawahiri all used their time behind bars to develop and cultivate their extremist ideologies (Kahara, 2017: 5-6). Prisons have served as a fertile recruitment ground for radicals of all hues, particularly of religious radicals. In the present era, while extremism has been posing a serious threat to the global security, prison radicalization has become a big challenge. It has been contributing to the spread of radical ideas and recruitment of radical groups in a comparatively safer zone. Prison radicalization has already spread out in many countries such as Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, France, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi- Arabia, Singapore, Spain, UK, USA, Yemen etc. (Rahman, 2017: 159). A number of prominent extremist leaders of present world either were radicalized in prison or used prisons as a center for radicalization. For example, Abu Muhammad Al –Maqdisi was imprisoned in Jordan in 1995 for 15 years, where he advocated his radical ideology for new recruits. His famous recruit was Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, who later became the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq. Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian eye surgeon, was imprisoned in 1981 in Egypt for collaborating in the assassination of Egypt's President Anwar Sadat. Prison time only redoubled Zawahiri's radicalization process and



immediately after his release, he took over leadership of Egyptian Islamic Jihad (Wright, 2002). He became the leader of al-Qaeda following the killing of Osama Bin Laden by US forces in May 2011. 'Jail to Jihad' of Indonesia rightly fostered the influence of prison radicalization. Afif, was an aspiring Muslim and imprisoned in a high-security jail of Indonesia, where he was radicalized and became a soldier for Islamic State (ISIS) (Rahman, 2017: 159). Afif's recruitment manifested the danger of prison radicalization and uncovered how a poor prison system (in Indonesia), where staff shortage, overcrowding and corruption have opened the door for extreme radicalization (Reuters, 2016; BBC, 2014). Ismail and Sim (2016) carried out a study of violent extremism and radicalization in prisons in Indonesia. They visited several prisons that hold terrorist convicts, and reviewed the case histories of 40 known terrorists. Their findings discovered that the prison is seen by the Indonesian extremists as a way station to further their ideology and glory. Many extremists in the Arab world have repeatedly used prisons to recruit new followers, reinforce the commitment of existing extremists and to network and exchange ideas with like-minded individuals (Brandon, 2009: 1). Capano (2018) has given several examples how radicalization is expanding in the well secured prisons of Europe and how prisons are playing role in the radicalization process and the challenges posed by the incarceration of extremist offenders. Exploring the background of the attackers involved in extremist violence, particularly in Europe, it is found that a very large number of them were radicalized in prisons. Several studies (such as Hoffman, 2019; Brandon, 2009; Hannah et. al., 2008) conducted research surveys on the extremist radicalization in the west and found that there is increasing evidence of prison radicalization in the west and 'the prisons have become incubators of extremism' (European Union, 2018: 5). Preventing radicalization in prisons remains a significant challenge across the EU. Even, the European Commission called on its member states to look into possible alternatives to detention for terrorism-related crimes and to map existing practices to prevent and counter radicalization in the prison (European Union, 2018: 6). Several imprisonment perspectives and factors such as separation from close family and supportive relationships; threats to personal identity and masculinity; deprivation of autonomy; insecurity, anxiety and threats to self-esteem they experience in a violent environment; rejection by the dominant group; separation from a dominant moral code; removal to a harsh, violent and unpredictable context in the prisons; individuals frustration towards life instigate them to radicalization (Hannah et. al., 2008; 5-8).

### **3. Radicalization Threat in Bangladesh**

The rise of radicalization is not a regional, rather a global concern. Historically, the society of Bangladesh has been enjoying a very peaceful coexistence among all the religious groups. Although political use of religion practiced in the region dates back to pre-independence days and was the principal ground for the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the history of radicalization in Bangladesh has not a very long past. After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, a form of radicalization was seen in 1975 with the changes in political situation. The Successive governments tried to make civilian alliance under a military auspicious, but political instability continued. Since then, violent politics has become a norm in Bangladesh (Moniruzzaman, 2009; Rahaman, 2007). Besides political violence, the country has been experiencing two types of radicalism: first, radicalism by the Islamist groups and second, extremism by the ultra-left-wing political groups. The ultra-left-wing activities originated since the Independence of the country whereas the religion based violence activities originated before Independence. (Islam, 2017: 8).

The history of Islamist radicalism in the country goes back to the 1980s, when around 3,000 Bangladeshis reportedly joined the US and Saudi-sponsored anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan (Riaz, 2008). These Soviet-Afghan war returnees created Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islam (HUJI) in Bangladesh in 1992 as the first generation radical group in the country. It was led by three Afghanistan veterans, Mufti Abdur Rouf, Mowlana Abdus Salam and Mufti Abdur Hannan Sheikh, who declared that Bangladesh should become an Islamic state (Riaz and Fair, 2011: 71-90). The group became more active under the leadership of Mufti Hannan and has attempted several radical attacks on the secularists, diplomats and even civilians in the following years. Its deadliest action was the August 2004 grenade attack on a rally of the then opposition leader, chief of Awami League and present Prime Minister of the country, Sheikh Hasina, killing over twenty people.

The second generation of Islamist radicals appeared in 1996 with the establishment of the organization named 'Qital Fi-Sabilillah'. This organization transformed into 'Jamayat-ul-Mujahedin' known as JMB in 1998. The JMB and its militant wing Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) became active in the early 2000s. JMB's 17 August 2005 countrywide coordinated and simultaneous attacks, involving over 459 low-intensity bombs, in all but one of Bangladesh's 64 districts, proved a turning point (The Daily Star, 2005). The subsequent security crackdown, including trials and executions of top JMB members, forced the group into hiding.

The third generation started from 2001, with the group known as Hizbut Tahrir, which had a direct linkage with an international movement on-going in different countries. The fourth generation commenced in 2007 with the group known as Jamatul Muslemin which later began to function as 'Ansarulah Bangla Team'. The group started as online community and inspired by the sermons of Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen who joined al-Qaeda's Yemen branch. They soon began identifying itself as the Bangladesh chapter of al-Qaeda with the name Ansar Al-Islam (Prothom Alo, 2016). The emergence of ISIS in the Middle-East has also influenced the local radicals and thus, the fifth generation of Islamist radicals emerged. They are educated young group, to be pursuing their objective of establishing an Islamic state in Bangladesh (Riaz, 2016). In 2015, the JMB was divided into two groups, older JMB and Neo-JMB. This Neo-JMB claims that they belong to the Bangladesh chapter of ISIS. This group led the most unprecedented savagery in Bangladesh in 2016. That brutal incidence was occurred in a restaurant at Dhaka by a group of 7 young attackers which extinguished the lives of 29 people, including 20 hostages (18 foreigners and 2 locals). All of the attackers were also killed during the rescue operation conducted by the Bangladesh Army. It was found that all of the attackers were educated in western curriculum and came from well to do families. It is claimed that a new generation of radicals, earlier linked either to JMB or Ansar, now identifies more directly with ISIS (BDNews24, 2016, 2015). The government, however, refuses to acknowledge an ISIS presence in Bangladesh. Several studies suggest that the number of radical militant groups in Bangladesh ranges from 20 to 50 (Ahsan, 2005; Khan, 2007). In 2009, the Government identified 12 militant groups – the JMB, HUJI-B, HT, Ulema Anjuman al Bainat, Hizb-ut Tahrir (HuT), Islami Democratic Party (IDP), Islami Samaj, Touhid Trust, JMJB, Shahadat-e al Hikma Party Bangladesh, Tamira Ar-Din Bangladesh (Hizb e Abu Omar), and Allahr Dal. The security agencies identified 33 militant groups (Tutul, 2015: 71). Though the number is big, but the HUJI, JMJB, JMB, ABT and HT are described as the most prominent militant groups in Bangladesh (Datta, 2007; The Daily Star, 2005). The profile of major radical groups in Bangladesh has been described below (Tutul, 2015: 74-78):

Sl.	Organization	Established	Estimated Member	Status
1	HUJI	1992	15,000	Banned in 2005
2	JMB	1998	10,000	Banned in 2005
3	Hazbut Towhid (HT)	1994		Banned
4	JMJB	1998	300000	Banned in 2005
5	Islamic Biplob Parisad	2001		
6	Shahadat al Hiqma	1996	36000	Banned in 2003
7	Khatm-e Nabuyat Andolon	Late 1980s		
8	Hizbut Tahir (HuT)	2000s	20,000	Banned in 2009
9	Tamir ud Deen	1999		Black listed
10	IDP	2008		Black listed
11	Allar Dal			Black listed
12	Ulema Anjuman Al Baiyinaat			
13	Touhid Trust	2001		Banned in 2005

The rise of radicalization in the country is the consequence of political use of religion, defective education system, socio-economic backwardness, misinterpretation of religious doctrines together with political instability in many Muslim countries as well as the influence of globalization. Despite many operational successes by the law enforcement agencies, limited success was achieved in disrupting terrorist contrives, ideologies, motivations and networking (Islam, 2017: 3). Some of the groups like Neo-JMB, Ansar-Al-Islam, Ansaullah Bangla Team and Hizbut Tahrir have emerged in Bangladesh preaching ideologies by training, distributing books and pamphlets among the mass people



and educational institutions, mainly in rural areas. The most frightening concern is that the extremist groups prefer women and families to promote extremism in the rural districts (Islam, 2017: 3-11). The influx of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar's Rakhine state in August-December 2017 increased the radicalization concerns for Bangladesh. Several radical groups, including ISIS, have referenced the Rohingya's plight in efforts to mobilize support. It is reportedly said that Myanmar's insurgent group Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) established relationship with Harkat-ul Jihad of Bangladesh (IPAC, 2017). Flow of money from Middle-East in disguise of charity and exposure of Islam in a particular conservative form, namely Wahabi or more recently, Salafi are also contributing to this kind of Islamization in Bangladesh. Flow of money from Middle East in disguise of different aid or charity played an important role in the expansion of Islamic beliefs, but sometimes in a very strict and extreme thought. It, occasionally, creates confrontation with the liberal thoughts of Islam in the country. The political use of religion, ideological contradictions, rigid religious beliefs, socio-economic factors like poverty, social inequality, hunger, backwardness and unemployment have also been significantly contributing to the rise of extremism in Bangladesh. Underdevelopment, poor governance, malfunctioning institutions, and violent politics combine to create an "enabling environment" for extremism in Bangladesh (Fink, 2010: 1). Thus, the radicalization poses the strongest threat to the national security in Bangladesh.

#### **4. Prison System in Bangladesh**

The prison system of the country was introduced by the British rulers as a weapon of control and suppression to protect colonial interest. It was never designed as an institution for correction. In course of time, the colonial rulers brought some reforms, but mostly in the aspects of prison management, not in the system. A series of prison reform committees were formed in 1836, 1864, 1877, 1888 and 1892. The recommendations of these committees were consolidated in 1894 which appeared as the first ever Prisons Act of the region. Presently, prisons system of Bangladesh is managed under the provisions of Prisons Act 1894, Prisoners Act 1900, Identification of Prisoners Act 1920, Rules made under Section 59 and 60(a) of the Prisons Act 1894 (Bangladesh Prison, 2019). The present jail code and laws governing Bangladesh prison system are, namely: The Prison Act 1894; The Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898; The Prisoners Act 1900; The Civil Procedure Code of 1908; The Lunacy Act 1912; Identification of Prisoners Act 1920; Jail Code of 1920; The Children's Act 1974; and The Special Power Act 1974.

## 4.1 Prison Administration

Bangladesh currently has 68 prisons that include 13 Central Jails and 55 District Jails (Bangladesh Prison, 2019). The Ministry of Home Affairs, through the Directorate of Prisons, exercises overall responsibility for the management of the prison. Inspector General (IG prison) works as the chief of the prison administration, while Additional Inspector General assists him. Each prison is administered by sergeants, guards and other prison staff, under the supervision of the Superintendent of Jails (Bangladesh Prison, 2019).

## 4.2 Accommodation and Logistic Facility in the Prison

Prisoners are required to sleep together in single dormitories, accommodating about 100 to 150 prisoners. Under dormitory rules, each prisoner should have 36 sq. ft. of floor space. Each convicted prisoner is supposed to get 250 gm of rice, 125 gm of wheat while the persons in lock up will get 200gm of rice, 87 gm wheat everyday. Apart from these, prisoners are supposed to get 133 gm of vegetables and 72 gm of fish or meat. Each prisoner is entitled to get a plate, dish, glass, and three coarse sheets. Everyone has to sleep without mosquito net. During the winter no additional clothes are provided. Only the convicted prisoners are entitled to dress. Each convicted male gets 2 shirts, 2 pajamas, 2 towels and a cap whereas each woman gets 2 saris, and 2 blouses.

## 4.3 Key Statistics of Bangladesh Prisons (World prison brief, 2019; Bangladesh Jail, 2017):

Number of Prisons	68
Total Prison population	88,211 (as of May, 2019)
Official capacity of prison system	40,664 (as of May, 2019)
Occupancy level (based on official capacity)	216.9% (as of May, 2019)
Prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)	52 (based on an estimated national population of 168.38 million at May 2019)
Female prisoners (% of prison population)	4.1% (as of May, 2019)
Juveniles / minors prisoners (% of prison population)	0.7% (as of May, 2019)
Foreign prisoners (% of prison population)	0.8% (as of May, 2019)
Average of Prisoners	Male: 36.64 and Female: 30.78

## 5. Vulnerability of the Prisons and Prison Radicalization

Prison radicalization is closely connected with the condition of prison. The vulnerable condition of prison can lead to the prison radicalization. The condition and standard of the prisons of Bangladesh is not only vulnerable but also far away from complying with the international standards for prisons. These are beleaguered by severe overcrowding, outdated material infrastructure, unhygienic food, unhealthy accommodation, lack of adequate health care, physical torture, corrupt practices of prison staff, violation of human rights, sentry brutality etc. These vulnerable conditions of the prison can create an atmosphere that open the scope of radicalization in prison and for spreading radical ideology there.

### 5.1 Overcrowding

Bangladesh's prisons are severely overcrowded with convicted prisoners together with the people who have yet to be convicted. The number of detainees grossly outnumbers the actual capacity of the prison. It has 88,211 prisoners (as of May, 2019), while the capacity is of 40,664 and that is 216.9% higher than the capacity. Pre-trial detainee prisoners are forming 81.3% of total (World prison brief, 2019). Overcrowding is more acute in Dhaka Central Jail with a capacity of 2,682 inmates, it currently occupied by 11,014 prisoners. This is 410% of the prescribed habitation, while it is 280% in other prisons. It is too overcrowded that "200 prisoners could be observed to be sleeping in a 40 square meter cell". IG (prison) stated that the inmates were in an inhumane situation as their number kept rising (The New Age, 2018). According to the jail statistics, the number of inmates was 2,023 in Narayanganj jail against the capacity of 200 and 863 in Manikganj district jail against the capacity of 100 (The New Age, 2018; Al Jazeera, 2016). Due to overcrowding, prisoners slept in shifts and did not have adequate toilet facilities. There is even a news report that 65 prisoners were crammed into a room suitable for 20 at most. They had no place for sleeping. They could only sit with their legs almost touching their chests.<sup>2</sup> This massive overcrowding makes hard for the authority to provide all facilities to the prisoners. The baneful effect of overcrowding is that it doesn't segregate among convicts i.e. those punished for serious offenders and those for minor offences. As a result of this, hardened criminals as well as members of radical groups may spread their influence over other inmates.

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2- Authors interview with the prisoners who released recently.

## 5.2 Poor Medical Service

The country's prison system has a very poor medical service. There are only six doctors in five out of 68 prisons across the country. As many as 111 posts of doctors have remained vacant. Only nine ambulances are available to shift prisoners from different jails to hospitals (The Daily Star, 2017). Only twelve prisons have hospitals. Dhaka prison has a 172-bed hospital with only two doctors, where at least 350-400 patients go for treatment on a regular basis and some 140-150 patients remain admitted every day (The Daily Star, 2017). So, a very predictable result of overcrowding, malnutrition, unhygienic conditions, and absence of medical care is the spread of contagious diseases, often leading to premature disability and deaths in prisons. Sick inmates carrying virulent pathogens, infect new prisoners, and constitute a serious threat to public health when they are released. Not only the general prisoners, but also everyone including prison staff suffer because of the shortage of doctors and poor health care facilities.

## 5.3 Violation of Human Rights in the Prison

The US Department of State reported in its 2013 Country Report on Human Rights Practices that "Prison conditions remained harsh and at times life threatening due to overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and lack of proper sanitation" (US Department of State, 2014). Sometimes the prisoners are kept in the jail even after completing their imprisonment which is clear violation of their fundamental rights as well as human rights. Odhikar, a human rights organization in the country, reported in its report:

"Despite the fact that the Prisons Act, 1894 has specific provisions binding medical officers or their subordinate to give treatment without delay, there are not enough doctors in the prisons of Bangladesh. According to section 94 of the Jail Code, there should be separate hospitals for the male and female prisoners which is not always followed in the prisons of Bangladesh. Section 129 of the Jail Code illustrates that there should be enough space for sleeping for the prisoners but gross overcrowding makes this impossible... The food supply is also inadequate and sub standard. According to the Jail Code, every prisoner is entitled to 116 grams of bread; 291 grams of rice; 233.28 grams of vegetable; 145.48 grams of pulse; 14.58 grams of date-palm; 36.45 grams of meat or fish every day. The research made by Odhikar's team underlines that food



provided in jail is often less than the amount described in the Government rule. As a result, inmates suffer from malnutrition and become victims of infectious disease. Without proper treatment, proper food and decent living conditions, prisoners fall ill and weak, while those who can afford to pay, enjoy basic services” (Odhikar, 2014).

#### **5.4 Physical persecution and Violence**

The practice of corporal punishment on the prisoners by the prison staff is very common in the prisons of Bangladesh. Leg irons, fetters, shackles, and chains are characteristically used. The weighty bar irons used in Bangladeshi prisons turn simple daily movements into agonizing ordeals. Physical maltreatment of prisoners by guards remains as a chronic complexity. In most prisons, unnecessary beating is so common as to be an essential part of prison life. Inmate-on-inmate violence is a common practice mainly due to the official slackness. By neglecting to take charge of the inmates within their facilities, by failing to act in response to incidences of violence, by wickedly allowing the entry of armaments into the prisons, and by generally abetting the domination of the strongest prisoners over the weakest, prison authorities are directly liable for the violence.<sup>3</sup>

#### **5.5 Condition of Women and Juvenile Prisoners**

The condition of female prisoners is very worse, while the number is increasing. The number of women inmates is 3627, which makes up 4.1% of total prison population as of May 2019. They are for the most part exposed to custodial sexual abuse. The male guards and inmates overpower the female inmates. The confinement of male and female prisoners in the same jail without separate areas is harmful to women who are more easily subjected to physical and sexual torture. The Juvenile prisoners are forming 0.7% of total prison population and that is 617 as of May 2019, while a number of children are kept in the correction centers. Juvenile inmates are often held together with adults violating the international standards. Children in such circumstances frequently fall victim to bodily abuse, including sodomy and rape by adult inmates. US department of State report said that:

“While the law requires holding juveniles separately from adults, many juveniles were incarcerated with adults. Children were sometimes imprisoned (occasionally with

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3- Authors interview with the prisoners who released recently.

their mothers) despite laws and court decisions prohibiting the imprisonment of minors. Authorities routinely housed female prisoners separately from men. Although the law prohibits women in “safe custody” (usually victims of rape, trafficking, and domestic violence) from being housed with criminals, officials did not always provide separate facilities” (US Department of State, 2014).

## 5.6 Corruption

Corruption of the officials and guards is a very common practice in the prisons of Bangladesh. The poorly paid guards try to increase their regular earnings by exploiting the prisoners as bait for their friends and relatives. A prisoner in Dhaka Central Jail has to spend a minimum of around taka 30,000 a month for food and other services which the state is supposed to provide for free (The Daily Star, 2016). According to a former inmate, “they can get any undue and illegal privileges by bribing the guards. For example, using mobile phone inside the prison or getting alcohol or narcotics, like marijuana or methamphetamines are not a problem at all” (Rahman, 2017: 163). In exchange for smuggled goods or special treatment, inmates have to pay bribes to the guards or officials. Powerful and rich inmates often enjoy rich diets and comfortable lodgings, while the poor prisoners live in nastiness. There are evidences that some criminals, in collaboration with the prison staff, keep on operating and networking their gang activities outside while being locked up inside the prisons.

## 5.7 Delays in the Proceedings of Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system in Bangladesh operates with wide-ranging problems that have resulted in an enormous backlog of cases in the courts, while the prisons remain severely overcrowded with inmates. Consequently, pre-trial detainees are increasing and they forming 81.3% of total prison population as of May 2019 (World prison brief, 2019). A report referred to Judge Abu Ahmed Jamadar, Joint Secretary (Opinion) in the Law and Justice Division of the Bangladesh Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, who made following comment about the dire situation of Bangladesh’s criminal justice system. “In my five years at the Ministry, I have watched the court case load increase day by day. At the end of 2011, there were 2.13 million cases pending before the Bangladesh Supreme Court and subordinate courts; at the end of 2012, that number rose to 2.45 million; end of 2013, it was 2.8 million” (Rahman, 2018: 162).

## 5.8 Problems with the Prison Administration

The administration officials of prison, namely, the jailors, superintendents, warders and guards on their part, are generally rough and tough with the inmates (Tamim, 2016). Some of them are engaged in corrupt practice and extend undue favors to certain inmates in exchange of petty gains.<sup>4</sup> Prison services are quite inadequate which is geared towards punishment of prisoners, and does not facilitate their correction. Prison officers and staff are neither recruited with appropriate skills nor trained adequately to encourage reform. The major problems of prison administration system of Bangladesh may be summarized as involvement of officials and guards in corrupt practices; lack of proper training program of prison officials and staff; inadequate facilities inside the prisons; overcrowded prisoners against limited facility; lack of proper monitoring; lack of reform programs and welfare measures; inadequate attention to women and juvenile prisoners; and inadequate vocational training facilities etc.

The UN Standard Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoners provides guidelines for the fair treatment of prisoners and the management of prisons. It requires states “to observe the fundamental principles of security of life, health and personal integrity, non-discrimination in the treatment of prisoners, and to create conditions that allow prisoners on release to adjust and integrate into normal community life” (UNSMRTP, 2019). It further requires “the jail administration to respect prisoners’ right to information regarding jail regulations, as well as rights to religious belief and communication with the family, and to notify the family of a prisoner’s death on illness.” Bangladesh has not yet been able to implement all the recommended reforms set by the UN. Failure to improve the conditions of the prisons in Bangladesh can possibly lead to radical anguish among the prisoners.

## 6. Threat Perception of Prison Radicalization in Bangladesh

The threat of prison radicalization has mostly been found in the prisons where the services and facilities provided to the prisoners are inadequate combining with the presence of radical and extremist elements in the prisons. With the prevailing dissatisfactory perspectives in the prisons, the prisoners of radical and extremist groups try to influence and motivate the general inmates to their radical ideologies. Lax oversight, overcrowding prisoners, desegregated living conditions where the inmates of radical groups get to mix freely with other prisoners, and untrained prison staff, together contribute to the prison radicalization

4- Authors interview with the prisoners who released recently.

(The Daily Star, 2018). The dissatisfied, disadvantaged and frustrated young, student and uneducated prisoners could easily be the vulnerable community by prison radicalization. These could easily be happen in the prisons of Bangladesh, where the facilities of prisoners are extremely poor, while there is presence of good number of prisoners of different extremist and radical groups. On the other hand, the majority people of Bangladesh are poor and illiterate and thus, it could easily be said that the majority inmates are also of same group. Radical ideologies could easily be disseminated among the people who suffer from poverty and illiteracy. So, taking into account all of these indicators together, it can be said that Bangladesh remains at a very high risk of prison radicalization threat.

According to an intelligence report, the militants of same ideology manage to communicate with one another through various means in the prison for long time. The identities of the persons, who meet the militants claiming to be family members, are not properly verified. The report showed, "Gaining unfair advantages, the militants are keeping their networks operational beyond the prison walls." It means that prison walls are failing to contain a thriving terror web as militants behind bars apparently take advantage of lax surveillance to discuss ideas and make plans and keep their networks operational outside through visitors. There are over a hundred accused militants in Kashimpur jail, and more than 50 of them remain in the high-security unit (The Daily Star, 2016).

Prisons system of Bangladesh is managed following the Jail Code consists of the provisions of Prisons Act 1894, Prisoners Act 1900, Identification of Prisoners Act 1920, Rules made under Section 59 of the Prisons Act 1894 and Rules made under Section 60(a) of the said Act of 1894 for the superintendence and management of jails and subsidiary jails respectively (Bangladesh Prison, 2019). All these laws bearing the colonial legacy, framed in the 19th century with the objective of confinement of prisoners through suppressive and punitive measures. There has been no significant up-gradation in the jail code complying with the global standard and to reduce the radicalization threat. Although, Jail Reform Commission was formed in 1980, but the vital recommendations of the Commission have not been implemented yet. With this reality, many prisoners of radical groups can easily conduct their radicalization program inside the prisons.

On the other hand, the inmates of different radical groups can easily come out of jail due to the weakness of law, insufficient witness and evidence come out of jail on bail and re-involve in radical activities. Reportedly, Some 800 militant suspects arrested in anti-militant drives in the last five years (up to April 2016) have secured bail from different courts. Most of them were members of banned militant outfits such



as Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, Ansarullah Bangla Team and Hizbut Tahrir. After getting released on bail, they not only continued radicalization activities, rather carried out gruesome attacks in different parts of the country (The Daily Sun, 2019).

## **7. Rehabilitation as a Deradicalization Program in Bangladesh**

The concept of rehabilitation has now widely been used as a deradicalization program in different countries of the world. Singapore has established the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) as a result of their rehabilitation efforts of extremist prisoners (Hassan and Pereire, 2006: 461). Since 2004 some 2,000 prisoners have participated in the Saudi Arabian rehabilitation program, of whom roughly 700 have been released. Yemen created a program called the Religious Dialogue Council (RDC) and some 364 extremist prisoners were released as an outcome of this rehabilitation program (Hannah, 2008: xi). These rehabilitation initiatives encompass several programs. It emphasizes on counseling the extremist prisoners that seeks to engage them in theological debate and psychological development. The counselors (made up of religious scholars, psychologists and social scientists) influence the prisoners to participate in religious debate, and "attempt to persuade them that their religious justification for their actions is wrong and based upon a corrupted understanding of Islam" (Boueck, 2007: 2). Efforts are also made to address the needs of the prisoners and their family; such as providing financial support, and help their children with schooling, finding jobs etc. (Boueck, 2007: 3).

In Bangladesh, the concept of rehabilitation of prisoners as a means of deradicalization program is relatively new and has neither explicitly been mentioned in the concerned laws nor initiated by concerned agencies. Though, article 14 and 35(1) of the Rules for the Superintendence and Management of Jails in Bangladesh mentioned the word –'rehabilitation' several times, but there has not been seen any significant progress to take rehabilitation program for the prisoners of extremist groups. Rehabilitation concept may bring success, where punishment fails to combat prison radicalization in the country. However, some such kind of programs, though not fully targeted the extremist prisoners, were initiated in some prisons of Bangladesh. In Moulavibazar Central Jail, Some income generating, skill development and education programs were initiated. A garment factory having 26 knitting machines was established in the Dhaka Central Jail aiming towards skill development and rehabilitation of the prisoners. This strategy could be developed into a complete rehabilitation program as a means of deradicalization.

## **8. Conclusion and Suggestions**

Prisons are not only a place of confinement, but also an institution of correction, where a criminal could be transformed into a good human being. The radicalization threat can be reduced by an effective good prison system, while a bad prison system can boost radicalization threat. The study found that the prisons of Bangladesh are extremely vulnerable for radicalization. The vulnerable condition of the prisons accompanying with the presence of extremist inmates poses prison radicalization threat to the national security. The study also found that the present criminal justice system which is suffering from a number of problems, is not only unable to reduce radicalization, but also instigates the victims, in some cases, to radicalization. There is no existence of effective deradicalization program. Only reform of prison system, without resolving the problems, reorganizing the criminal justice system and implementing effective deradicalization program, will have very little impact in reducing radicalization in the prisons. The prison system should be too effective to identify the root causes of radicalization in the prison and then launch proper programs for deradicalization. This study suggests the following recommendations to reduce the threat of prison radicalization in Bangladesh.

- To ensure logistic facilities and basic human rights for the prisoners i.e. food, medical service, living condition etc. following the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (UNSMRTP) as a means to reduce dissatisfaction among the prisoners. To make the prisoners realize the necessity to abide the law, it has to be ensured that they are enjoying all their lawful rights and all the laws are maintained properly.
- To allow the prisoners to practice their own religious rituals. They should be given the right to participate in cultural and educational programs directing to the full advancement of human potential.
- To increase the scope of the engagement of the prisoners in vocational and wage-earning jobs inside the prisons. It will help them to contribute to their own financial support and to that of their family members.
- To Standardize the rules and procedures relating to prison administration and enforcing them efficiently to ensure effective prison management, supervision, and accountability;
- To improve the skills of prison personnel by training and education to address prison radicalization scientifically. They need to be trained perfectly to treat prisoners with due respect for their intrinsic self-respect and value them as human beings.

- The prison administration should be kept free from political pressure and corruption.
- To develop such an environment and system to identify potential violent radicalization early and recruiters find no opportunity to target the vulnerable inmates;
- To monitor all forms of communication in prisons intensively to detect any radicalization activities, increase surveillance and restrict their meetings with outsiders;
- To initiate rehabilitation and deradicalization programs in the prisons in order to motivate the prisoners of radical ideologies positively. The religious extremists' ideologies should be countered with original religious interpretation to make them understand that they are on wrong understandings. In this case, the experience of such successful programs in different countries such as Singapore, Saudi Arabia and Yemen could be shared;
- To continue keeping oversight the radical prisoners after their release;
- To ensure the proper punishment of the criminals and extremists regardless of political identity, ethnic identity or socio-economic status. It will de-motivate the inmates to join radical groups.
- To incorporate necessary amendments into the existing law to reduce prolonged operational procedures of criminal justice system and to ensure its implementation. The study found that the existing laws have rarely been implement perfectly;
- To facilitate further in-depth study on radicalization, extremism, prison radicalization, deradicalization and rehabilitation in the country with access to prison. A viable and effective strategy incorporating short-term, mid-term and long-term goals should be explored incorporating the prevention, intervention and enforcement measures. Innovative approach towards rehabilitation and deradicalization efforts should always be continued.

By only using 'hard power' without using 'soft power' and without paying due attention to the root causes of prison radicalization, the overall deradicalization efforts to combat extremism would not bring expected success.

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