

# Alarm sounds over number of female jihadists in Bangladesh

Nearly 100 have been arrested or killed since deadly attack on Dhaka cafe in 2016, special conference told

UCA News (11.12.2019) – <http://bit.ly/2GV014d> – A growing number of Bangladeshi women taking up Islamic extremism and militancy is causing concern in the Muslim-majority South Asian country.

Dozens of female jihadists have been arrested and others killed since a terrorist attack on the Holey Artisan Café on July 1, 2016, left 20 people – including 17 foreigners – dead, according to a recent gathering in capital Dhaka.

The first National Conference on the Prevention of Extremism was held on Dec. 9 and brought together government officials, diplomats, security experts, academics and researchers.

A total of 85 female militants were arrested, while 11 others either committed suicide or were killed in shootouts during raids since the Holey Artisan tragedy, Abdul Mannan, deputy commissioner of the Bangladesh police's Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime Department, told the gathering.

He presented a research study that he said outlined the reasons why women were being radicalized.

“Our women are mostly loyal to their husbands, so if their husbands turn radical they follow suit,” he told ucanews.

“Additionally, there is a lack of socioeconomic empowerment, extreme poverty and discrimination, while radical influences in the name of religious education are fueling extremism among women.”

“Sometimes educated and qualified women are becoming radicalized out of frustration at not being able to fulfill their potential.”

Social and economic empowerment can keep Bangladeshi women away from the clutches of extremists, according to Rita Roseline Costa, a women’s rights activist and convener of the women’s desk at the Catholic bishops’ conference.

“Women need to be allowed to play their role properly – in decision making, economic activities and entitling equal rights. Only a few women are radicalized out of curiosity, but most do it after being influenced by family members they are dependent on,” Costa told ucanews.

“Many women are not allowed to participate in social activities, and this exclusion makes them vulnerable to negative activities. Participation of women in social and cultural activities can reduce the risk of them getting involved in extremism.”

### Religious identity at forefront

Prof. Shantanu Majumder from Dhaka University’s political science faculty presented a study paper, “Identity, Identity Politics and Elections in Bangladesh,” at the conference. According to the study, more people in Bangladesh are “putting religious identity before national identity.”

Majumder said he interviewed 208 people around the country and 148 put religious identity before national identity.

“When more people are concerned about their religious identity, there is a decline in people with a liberal and secular mindset,” he told ucanews.

“Generally, Muslims believe they are victims of injustice and persecution all over the world. About 45 percent think they are victims of a conspiracy perpetrated by other religious

groups, while 48 percent think their misery results from a lack of unity in their community.

“There is a common tendency among believers of all faiths to keep silent when members of the same faith commit a crime but are critical when crimes are committed by those from other faiths.”

Long known as a moderate Sunni-majority Muslim country, Bangladesh has seen a sharp rise in Islamic militancy in recent years.

Since 2013, homegrown militants, pledging allegiance to global jihadist outfits such as Islamic State and al-Qaeda, have murdered at least 50 atheist writers, publishers, liberal academics, LGBT activists, members of religious minorities and foreigners.

A Catholic priest and a Protestant pastor survived recent assassination attempts, while an elderly Catholic grocer was hacked to death. Meanwhile, dozens of Catholic priests, Christian leaders and aid workers have received death threats from militant groups.

In response, the government launched a massive anti-militancy drive that saw dozens of militants killed during raids and hundreds of leaders and members of militant outfits arrested and put on trial.