REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM THROUGH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

16-18 January 2012
Dhaka, Bangladesh

REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS
Executive Summary


The Conference brought together 47 participants from Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Participants included civilian government officials, senior military officials and officials of law enforcement agencies. Seven plenary and five breakout sessions were held during the three days of the Conference. This report aims to provide a summary of the presentations, deliberations and key recommendations derived from the Conference. The Conference brought out a greater and clearer perspective of the extremist groups operating in South Asia and Thailand. It also facilitated a greater understanding of the various concepts and mechanisms related to strategic communications. Most importantly, the Conference facilitated the mooting of key recommendations on country specific as well as regional policies, best practices on countering radicalization and best practices in utilizing the media and the new media as part of strategic communication initiatives. Overall, this Conference was successful in the sharing of knowledge on countering violent extremism and, given the nature of the threat posed by violent extremism and terrorism, it should lead to further deliberation and analysis.
Introduction

The first day of the Dialogue included an inaugural session, at which the Chief Guest was Major General (Retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, Security Affairs Adviser to Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh. This was followed by two working sessions on the first day, three on the second and two on the third. Seven plenary and five breakout sessions were held during the three days of the Conference. Mr. Farooq Sobhan, President of BEI, Ambassador (retired) Humayun Kabir, Vice President, BEI, Dr. Paul Clarke and Dr. Tom Mockaitis from the Center for Civil Military Relations of the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School were the moderators of the three-day workshop.

The objectives of the Conference were to share best practices and explore ways to coordinate counter-radicalization efforts among the represented countries. The country presentations made by the participants highlighted that South Asian nations have begun adopting a more holistic approach in their counterterrorism strategies to counter the development of extreme attitudes and behaviors that can encourage acts of terrorism. This Conference particularly highlighted the importance of strategic communication as a tool to counter violent extremism. In the breakout sessions, participants deliberated in detail on the use of strategic communication by their respective countries to counter violent and radical narratives perpetrated by extremist groups. Participants discussed the need for strengthening relationships among the organizations and agencies involved in counter-radicalization efforts and areas of cooperation and collaboration. Throughout the course of the Conference, participants heard from experts and fellow professionals on the challenges facing the region and their experience in countering messages of violence.
The Conference facilitated the sharing of best practices in countering extremism through strategic communication, highlighted the need for a comprehensive strategy to counter extremism in each country and to strengthen oversight mechanisms. The Conference concluded with policy recommendations from the six countries and also the region.

This report aims to provide a summary of the presentations, deliberations and key recommendations made at the Conference.

**Day 1**

**Inaugural Session**

Major General (Retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, Security Affairs Adviser to Honorable Prime Minister, was the Chief Guest at the inauguration session. Mr. Farooq Sobhan, President of BEI, Dr. Paul Clarke, Program Coordinator of CCMR, and H.E. Mr. Dan W. Mozena, U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh, also spoke at the inaugural session.

Major General (Retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique stated that Bangladesh condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and that this had been reiterated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose administration had shown zero tolerance to terrorism. General Siddique stated that terrorists carried out attacks to attract attention and communicate their messages. Stressing on the importance of communication by terror organizations in the age of digital media, he mentioned that the number of terrorist related websites had increased from 4,000 in 2005 to around 10,000 at present. He mentioned that the 20th century technology and the 12th century radicalization could be a dangerous combination. Proactive efforts were required to identify the terrorists’ methods of communication. The Adviser stated that a counter-narrative to the violent ideologies spread by terror groups would greatly enhance counterterrorism efforts. Bangladesh was party to the 13 universal anti-terrorism instruments, various counterterrorism protocols under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and had been taking various efforts to bring the country’s counterterrorism efforts in
line with the four pillars of the United Nations (UN) Global Counterterrorism Strategy. General Siddique concluded by stating that Bangladesh had taken various steps to utilize strategic communication to counter violent extremism, particularly through the training of Imams and communicating with Madrassa teachers and students.

Mr. Farooq Sobhan stated that Strategic Communication is an important element of crisis management and that well coordinated policies, programs and plans within a well coordinated strategy, was required to effectively counter violent extremism. Mr. Sobhan expressed the view that despite concerted efforts by governments around the world, extremism remained a threat in South Asia and globally. Therefore, to effectively counter violent extremism, coordinated initiatives by governments outside traditional counterterrorism efforts, in particular addressing the factors which encourage terrorism, were required. Mr. Sobhan stated that Bangladesh had taken strong measures to counter terrorism that could be a role model for eliminating militancy. The six countries participating in the Conference had been successful in countering violent extremism but further efforts were required to develop capacity and government capabilities to counter violence and extremism. Mr. Sobhan mentioned that the Conference would highlight best practices on countering violent extremism through interactions among organizations and individuals and assist practitioners to learn about new and cutting-edge methods of doing so.

In his speech, Dr. Paul Clarke stated that CCMR had been working on the issue of violent extremism in various countries and had now taken the initiative to address this regionally. Dr. Clarke stated that an integrated, whole of government approach was required to deal with extremism and terrorism effectively. Hard power counterterrorism operations through the use of military power must be complimented by soft power methods, such as the promulgation of values. Dr. Clarke stated that the rhetoric around violence must be countered effectively through the use of Strategic Communication. The exchange of ideas by practitioners from different countries and agencies was thus extremely important to enhance a coordinated effort to counter violent extremism.
Ambassador Dan Mozena stated that the Conference was timely and important as all countries represented here had been subjected to extremism and terrorism. Terrorism remained a threat to freedom, prosperity, human rights and the future of a nation. Ambassador Mozena stated that the fight against extremism was a complex one, which involved the use of both soft and hard power. He contended that soft power was the most crucial element in CT activities. Hope was the key to prevent extremists from spreading violent ideologies. Ambassador Mozena stated that people could be given hope through a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Bangladesh and this would be supported by the government of the United States. He stated that Bangladesh had taken great strides in socio-economic development, security initiatives and brought hope to the people to counter violent extremism. The Conference would assist in coordinating efforts to counter the shared threat of terrorism and extremism.

Working Sessions

There were two working sessions on the first day of the Conference. One regional and one country presentation was made at the first session, while five country presentations were made in the second. Presentations were followed by open floor discussions. A summary of each presentation and pertaining discussion is given below:

CONFERENCE COURSE OVERVIEW
Dr. Paul Clarke, Program Coordinator, CCMR

In the first presentation of the Conference, Dr. Clarke introduced the goals, concepts and programme details. The goal of the conference was to investigate how governments could counter radicalization through the use of strategic communication. He stated that extremist ideologies could be derived from political philosophy, ethnic nationalism, religions and cults. Dr. Clarke contended that radicalization was a key element in the growth and spread of terrorism. Bad governance, foreign policy, frustration and humiliation were mentioned among several
root causes of terrorism. He mentioned several motivational factors of terrorism among which were divine command, self interest, glory and revenge. The presentation defined strategic communication as “A systematic series of sustained and coherent activities, conducted across strategic, operational and tactical levels, that enables understanding of target audiences, identifies effective conduits, and develops and promotes ideas and opinions through those conduits to promote and sustain particular types of behaviour”.

Salient Points

- If the government acted in a way that did not reflect the society’s values, strategic communication would not be successful. Thus, the needs of the society must be determined before developing strategic communication tools. The development of strategic communication mechanisms required a whole of government approach and a reflection of the society’s values;
- By definition, radicalization was a minority position. Thus, if radical sentiments were reflected among the majority, this would not be termed as radicalization.

VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN SOUTH ASIA: AN OVERVIEW

Mr. Mohammad Humayun Kabir, Senior Research Director, BEI

In his presentation, Mr. Humayun Kabir undertook a comprehensive analysis of the nature, consequences and root causes of extremism and violence as well as an evaluation of various counterterrorism measures in South Asia. The presentation provided a conceptual understanding of violence and terrorism followed by an overview of the trends in radicalization and terrorism in South Asia and evaluated viable strategies and mechanisms to counter this threat. Mr. Kabir stated that most countries of South Asia had been plagued by violent extremism of political and religious variety, often with inputs from neighboring countries and/or extra-regional sources. The low human development index of South Asia had generated deep grievances and made it one of the most volatile regions in the world. The presentation
listed three types of violent extremism in South Asia, namely, Ethnic Insurgency/Autonomy Movements, Religious Extremism and the Maoist Movement. Mr. Kabir contended that the four approaches for countering extremism that had been undertaken in South Asia were the Military Approach, the Democratic Approach, the Administrative Approach and the Counter-Insurgency Approach. The presentation also explored the various root causes of terrorism in South Asia. The induction of female members, dispersed leadership and online radicalization were mentioned among other contemporary trends among terrorist groups in South Asia. In regard to countering terrorism, he mentioned that, among other factors, it was important to gain a proper understanding of radicalization/terrorism and identify the methods, propaganda and conditions that push people to terrorism. The 3 Western CT models of the U.K., E.U. and U.S.A. were not necessarily applicable or replicable in the context of South Asia. Among other recommendations, Mr. Kabir, mentioned that CT activities in South Asia needed the whole of government approach and that socio-economic development could be an effective mechanism against radicalization and terrorism.

**Salient Points**

- Women empowerment was not the only way, but it was an important factor in de-radicalization efforts. Education and emancipation of women was thus an important part of counterterrorism strategies;

- The vulnerability factors were very much present in South Asia and these factors made people susceptible to ideologies of extremism from within the country and also from outside. Sufficient provision of public goods was very important as extremists often exploit the lack of good governance to further their agenda;

- In the context of South Asia, disenfranchised people were easy targets for recruitment by terrorist organizations.
COUNTRY PRESENTATION: BANGLADESH

Mr. Faiz Sobhan, Research Director, BEI

Mr. Faiz Sobhan undertook an analysis of the spread of violent extremism in Bangladesh, the use of Strategic Communication to counter this menace and the scope of strengthening these measures. In his presentation, Mr. Sobhan provided a geographic, political, economic and social overview of Bangladesh. He described in detail the rise of violent extremism in the country and provided a timeline of events between 1999 and 2005 during which Bangladesh experienced a series of deadly extremist attacks. The presentation described the activities and motivations of terror groups such as Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HUJI-B). Mr. Sobhan contended that Bangladesh had made concerted efforts to eliminate terrorism through the application of both hard and soft power and had achieved significant success in this regard. The SC tools used by the Government of Bangladesh to counter extremism had been the spreading of education, promoting public awareness, and campaigning for secular and moderate cultural values and civil society actions. The initiatives of the Ministry of Education and the new National Education Policy, 2010 were specifically mentioned. Mr. Sobhan stated that some of the most important SC activities were undertaken by the Islamic Foundation, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Religious Affairs that ran 7 Imam Training Academy Centers and 31 Islamic Mission Centers. In conclusion, he expressed the view that, despite the recent success of Bangladesh in countering terrorism and extremism, vigilance must be maintained and that the use of SC in CT effort must be enhanced.

Salient Points

- The root causes of terrorism in Bangladesh were unemployment, poverty and governance problems, among others;
• The Government of Bangladesh had taken the threat posed by terrorism very seriously and there was no scope of underestimating the dangers of extremism and violence;
• In Bangladesh terrorism remained a threat but this was not as daunting as in other countries.

COUNTRY PRESENTATION: INDIA

Mr. Manoj Abraham, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Trivandrum Chief of Police, State of Kerala

Mr. Manoj Abraham, in his presentation, gave a broad overview of the various strategic communication tools employed by the Kerala Police to curb extremism and violence in the community. He stated that the security policy employed in Kerala was a combination of traditional security policing and community policing. Community Policing was implemented to ensure that more information was available to assist CT efforts. The objectives of Community Policing were to prevent radicalization and terrorist incidents from happening. Mr. Abraham contented that SC was one of the best antidotes to terrorism and extremism where the mindset of the population was positively influenced. The various means of SC that were mentioned in the presentation were the direct on-the-spot communication in areas prone to radicalization, meetings with members of the community, one on one counseling with potential radicals and creating awareness on the evils of terrorism through pamphlets, print and electronic media. Mr. Abraham mentioned several local schemes as part of a wider CT effort, including police-security agency coordination scheme, tourist/hotels protection scheme, awareness classes for concerned stakeholders and an anti-terrorism helpline. The security vetting of premises and practices, pooling resources, sharing data and undertaking mock drills were mentioned among several methods of enhancing CT efforts.
Salient Points

- The armed forces were actively engaged in CT efforts. For example, the costal policing in Kerala was conducted by the Navy;
- Although terrorism and radicalization was a law and order problem, the root causes of terrorism must be examined;
- Most issues that might aggravate radicalization became known internationally due to global media coverage. Misinformation and misleading also played a role in exacerbating situations. But no specific local issues were aggravating radicalization in Kerala.

COUNTRY PRESENTATION: SRI LANKA

Major General L.W.C.B.B Rajaguru, Commissioner General, Rehabilitation Centre, Sri Lanka Army

In his presentation, Major General Rajaguru provided a case study of counter-radicalization methods, policies and programmes in Sri Lanka. He contended that the Sri Lankan government had made all efforts to settle the dispute with the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam) peacefully through negotiations that were unsuccessful. Following the successful military operation against the LTTE, the Sri Lankan government carried out extensive rehabilitation efforts under the auspices of the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR). General Rajaguru stated that since the end of the war against LTTE, there was a 2 year period during which voluntary rehabilitation took place and currently, the court designated persons were being rehabilitated. He expressed the view that, although the LTTE had been defeated, radicalization remained a threat and could be best addressed through focused counter-radicalization programmes. One way of doing this was to empower individuals and groups to build resilience against violent extremism and thus the national goal was the rehabilitation of ex-combatants, enabling them to become contributing members of society which in turn would lead to peace and prosperity. The rehabilitation process consisted of vocational, educational and spiritual methods, among others. Rehabilitation programmes
catered to children and adults of both sexes who were former cadres of the LTTE. General Rajaguru expressed the view that findings from questionnaires completed by former LTTE cadres before and after rehabilitation suggested that the rehabilitation programme was assisting these individuals to conform to civilian life.

**Salient Points**

- To ensure that LTTE did not reemerge, there was general deployment of army all over the country. Intelligence was very active and surveillance was undertaken on people of interest;
- The international community should assist in apprehending LTTE members who were citizens of other countries. Since Sri Lanka is a member of SAARC, the international community should cooperate in the elimination of terrorism;
- The flow of funds for the LTTE had stopped but funds in Europe still existed.

**COUNTRY PRESENTATION: NEPAL**

**Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) Purushottam Bikram KC, Nepalese Army**

Lt Col Bikram’s presentation was an overview of the violent extremism witnessed by Nepal and the measures taken to counter it. Lt Col Bikram stated that Nepal was currently going through a transitional period as the state was being restructured and the form of governance finalized. Nepal’s demography was diverse as many castes and ethnic groups were struggling to realize their rights and identify. Maoist leadership was mainly responsible for the spread of violent ideologies in Nepalese society. Some of the root causes of extremism in Nepal were the economic condition, social disparity and lack of effective strategic communication mechanisms, among others. Col Bikram contended that violent extremism adversely affected Nepalese society in a number of ways, which included hindering development activity, disruption of education, discouraging foreign investment and creating a crisis of trust. To counter terrorism
and violent extremism, Nepal had undertaken a number of steps which included bolstering security capacity through national and international assistance, declaration of a secular state and community policing. The presenter expressed the view that violent extremism threatened Nepal’s core values and principles and thus suggested several recommendations, including finding a common and effective response, a holistic approach by stakeholders in the government and international engagement.

Salient Points

- The function of the National Security Council of Nepal should be enhanced to counter violence and extremism effectively;
- Nepal was a land of great diversity and thus, in certain cases, conflicts needed to be resolved through compromise.

COUNTRY PRESENTATION: THAILAND

Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) Utasha Kaewkiriya, Royal Thai Army

Lt Col Kaewkiriya’s presentation gave an overview of violence and crime in Southern Thailand. He stated that Thailand had three major groups of people, namely the Melayu, Siamese and Chinese. The majority of people in Thailand were Buddhists. The presentation informed the participants that violent incidents were prevalent in Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and 4 districts of SongKhla. Several root causes of unrest in Thailand were identified, including distortion of historical facts, narcotics, smuggling and corruption. Col Kaewkiriya mentioned that initially illegal activities were confined to kidnappings but later, incidents took a more alarming nature and included the theft of weapons from security forces, attacking public utilities and infrastructure and the killing of civilians to cause fear. Two broad areas of preventing violent incidents were mentioned: the Civil Dimension and the Authority Dimension. The Civil
Dimension included such measures as encouraging education, promulgating national ideology and respecting human rights. The Authority Dimension comprised of such measures as increasing capabilities to influence the perceptions of the populace, supporting reasonable welfare and conducting operations in the areas susceptible to violent extremism. Col Kaewkiriya contended that the development of basic infrastructure, such as the paving of roads, and development of industrial centers, also assisted in the reduction of violent incidents. In his conclusion, he stated that there were several indicators that depicted the improvement of the situation in Southern Thailand, such as the construction of more residential buildings and greater enrollments in public schools, among others.

**Salient Points**

- The understanding and awareness of different cultures was important to counter the promulgation of extremist ideologies;
- The success of SC initiatives could be measured by the extent to which people were willing to communicate with authority.

**COUNTRY PRESENTATION: MALDIVES**

**Ms. Aishath Nooshin Waheed, Assistant Director, Intelligence Department, Maldives Police**

Ms. Waheed provided the participants with an analysis of the phenomenon of terrorism and radicalization in the Maldives. In her presentation, Ms. Waheed highlighted the salient features of the Maldives, including Islam being the sole religion in the country, political instability, the prevalence of crime and the proliferation of drugs. She contended that radical elements were first introduced in the Maldives in the 1990s by students who returned from overseas. These students had attended terrorist training camps while studying abroad and, by fashioning themselves as religious clerics, started the spread of radicalization. Ms. Waheed mentioned that, in addition to returning students spreading extremist ideologies, radicalization also took
place in jails of the Maldives. She stated that since jails were overcrowded, extremists often had access to communication with criminals and this assisted in promulgation of radicalization. A number of attempts had been made to create counter-radicalization programs but none had been followed through and a lot more remained to be done in this regard. In conclusion, she stated that there was a need to create and implement a counter-radicalization program in the Maldives, one aspect of which could focus on countering radicalization in jails. Supporting and funding moderate religious viewpoints were also mentioned as effective measures to counter extremist ideologies.

**Salient Points**

- The radical political parties that were reported in the media to be gaining in influence were not as powerful or influential as perceived. Despite this, the spas in the Maldives had to be closed down due to demands by Islamists. The ordered closure was lifted by the government after considering the damage to the tourism industry;
- The recent unrest in Maldives (prior to incidents that led to the resignation of Mohamed Nasheed) was not caused by radical groups but was mostly undertaken by secular political parties.

**Day 2**

**Working Session**

There were three working sessions on the first day of the Conference. The first session consisted of two plenaries and one break-out, followed by three plenaries in the second session and one break-out and one plenary in the third session. A summary of each presentation, break-out discussion and back-brief in plenary is provided below:
Dr. Tom Mockaitis, in his presentation, highlighted the salient features of militias in the United States (U.S.). He listed three genres of anti-government movements in the U.S., namely Christian Identity Movements, Patriot Militias and Sovereign Citizens. He stated that the common characteristics of these groups were that they were anti-government, racist and armed. The Christian Identity Movements comprised of 25,000-50,000 members and their ideology was based on racism against non-whites and mistrust of the U.S. government. Dr. Mockaitis drew a comparison between Al-Qaeda and Christian Identity Groups by stating that both these genres of extremist organizations consisted of groups, networks and individuals. Patriot Militias believed that their legitimacy was upheld by the U.S. constitution, which allowed for state militias. They engaged in paramilitary and survival training and espoused conspiracy theories. Dr. Mockaitis stated that members of groups classified as Sovereign Citizens rejected state, federal and municipal statutes and recognized only Common Law. Members of these groups also considered taxation illegitimate. The presentation stated that targets of American extremists had been places of worship, government buildings, law enforcement officials and minority groups. The tactics of these groups had been bombings and shootings and between 2005 and 2009 there had been 75 plots and incidents. Dr. Mockaitis stated that militia movements in the U.S. were countered through law enforcement, infiltration and countering bad theology with good theology. In conclusion, he stated that although the threat from Militias remained latent at the present time, the numbers joining these groups had increased significantly and thus vigilance, monitoring and education could be used to curb this threat.

**Salient Points**

- Conservatism should not be confused with militia movements. Neo-conservatives often took part in rational debates, which was not the case for racist groups;
• Countering an extremist religious ideology must be done through the religion and not through secularism. This was because secularist ideas would be immediately rejected by extremists groups and, in the case of extremist Christian ideology, liberal Christian ideology might be an effective means of mitigation.

COUNTERING TERRORIST IDEOLOGY

Dr. Tom Mockaitis, CCMR, DePaul University

Dr. Tom Mockaitis, in his presentation, gave an overview of the types of ideologies, their relationship with terrorism and effective mechanisms to counter terrorist ideologies. He also described the process of individual radicalization and ways to mitigate this. Ideology was described as a system of beliefs that defined a group and motivated its actions. Dr. Mockaitis contended that disaffected minorities which would have otherwise turned to crime and gang violence became involved in terrorism and insurgency after being indoctrinated into a certain ideology. Political philosophy, ethnic nationalism and religion were ideologies which motivated terrorists. The presentation provided a detailed analysis of the ideologies of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) of the Philippines, which is a blend of Marxism and the Bible and the Al Qaeda, whose ideology is centered on the creation of an Islamic Caliphate. Dr. Mockaitis expressed the view that ignorance and prejudice assisted terrorists to further their agenda and thus combating terrorist ideology required combating prejudice. Good governance, economic development and education were mentioned among some key mechanisms to counter ideological support for terrorism. Dr. Mockaitis stated that individual radicalization could happen through personal contacts, recruiters and the internet. Some of the methods for countering individual radicalization that were mentioned in the paper were identifying communities with individuals at risk and teaching parents and educators signs of radicalization. Dr. Mockaitis concluded by stating that countering terrorist ideology is extremely important but very difficult and that extremists could only be countered by moderates within the same ideological movement.
Salient Points

- Hope was the most important factor in CT efforts. Education and employment also reduced the spread of terrorism;
- There were distinct differences between terrorists of different religions and these similarities and differences should be analyzed;
- Curbing of terrorism required the mitigation of the root causes, the countering of extremist ideologies and greater economic development. Long-term comprehensive policies/strategies are required in this regard.

SHARING OF BEST PRACTISES IN COUNTER RADICALIZATION: COUNTRY MIXED GROUPS

The first break-out session of the second day of the Conference allowed small country-mixed groups to discuss the best practices in countering radicalization. Delegates shared their individual state’s experience and came up with a short list of best practices to present and discuss with the Conference in plenary. A summary of the deliberations in each group, followed by their recommendations, is given below:

Group 1: Thailand, Bangladesh, Nepal and the Maldives

Thailand

There was a lack of trust between the people and government officials. So in the last 7 years, laws had been amended. In addition to the police being a positive influence in society, people were also assisted to gain employment and make investments. Those who perpetuated violence were brought to justice and tried for their crimes.

Bangladesh

The government had implemented both soft and hard power to counter radicalization. Soft power initiatives had included the training of imams, reforming the madrassa education system
as per the new education policy and providing employment. Hard power was used through the police, RAB (Rapid Action Battalion) and other law enforcement agencies.

**Nepal**

Previously, Nepal was under the rule of the King and a huge number of people were poor, uneducated, frustrated and unemployed and supported the Maoists. Recently, the country became a Republic and this would go a long way to assist counter radicalization efforts.

**The Maldives**

To counter radicalization the Maldives had implemented the prevention of terrorism act and religious unity act. Every Imam must register with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and khutba/speeches could not be given without the approval of the Ministry. School syllabii are approved by the government. The current government had taken measures to work closely with the radicals and the hardcore elements.

**Recommendations**

- The main recommendation as best practice was the policy of zero tolerance;
- Engage with the community, create employment opportunities, and address the grievances;
- Use both hard and soft power.

**Group 2: Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Maldives**

**Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka succeeded in countering the LTTE insurgent movement in the country through the hard power approach. But now it was a problem to resettle the residents of Jaffna. Reintegration of the Tamils in wider society was a challenge.
Thailand

Majority population of this country was Buddhist. The Muslim insurgent/extremist problem in the South of the country was under control now. The people of Thailand do not support hard power/military approach for tackling this menace. Rather they are cooperative towards non-military/political approaches. Poverty alleviation in the southern area of the country was one of the challenges that the country was currently facing.

Nepal

The Maoists are in power in Nepal but the peace agreement was yet to be implemented. Reintegrating the Maoists in the society was a problem. The country was yet to draft a constitution.

Bangladesh

It was initially the task of the police to tackle the criminal/extremist activities in the country. But the capacity of police force was not sufficient that needed to be increased. Integration and coordination among the law enforcement agencies was very important in terms of operation and intelligence sharing.

Bangladesh had extradition treaties with only two countries and this should be expanded to have such arrangements with more countries. There was inadequate monitoring in the educational institutions. Although unemployed people were the most vulnerable to radicalization, no strategy had been taken to address this problem to ensure that this group of people did not get exposed to any kinds of criminal/extremist activities. No stringent measures had been taken to monitor or stop sea piracy and drugs/arms/human trafficking.

The Maldives

Law and order situation needed to be strengthened in the Maldives to effectively counter the rise of violent ideologies. Effective counter radicalization efforts, particularly in the field of prison radicalization, should be taken.
Recommendations

- The Sri Lankan army was very successful with the LTTE, but LTTE might still regroup at any moment, so vigilance was required;
- Bangladesh had been successful in countering radicalization, but there were rooms to improve, such as coordination among the security agencies, greater monitoring, and effectively countering money laundering;
- Prison radicalization must be countered effectively.

Group 3: Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka

Bangladesh

Though Bangladesh had successfully tackled the violent extremist groups in recent years, the country would need to use the tools of strategic communications against the terrorists, given the resilient nature of the threat. It is also necessary to promote coordination and cooperation among the officials of law enforcement and intelligence agencies, the members of civil society and the media.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka should start using the tools of strategic communications and the media to reintegrate the Tamil ethnic population into the mainstream society of Sri Lanka. This was important to inculcate the sense of trust into the minds of the Tamil population, so that they cooperated with the government. Participants informed that a major concern for Sri Lanka was activities undertaken by certain vested quarters to besmirch the image of the country.

Nepal

To counter the ideologies of the insurgency movements in Nepal, the government started using the tools of strategic communications. Participants stated that it was necessary to harness the
activities of law enforcement and intelligence agencies, the role of civil society and the media and other relevant stakeholders involved in countering violent extremism in Nepal.

**Thailand**

The Thai Royal Army should use the tools of strategic communication more effectively to counter the violent extremist groups. Insurgent groups in Thailand sometimes misused the power of the media by distorting information in order to draw people to their cause.

**Recommendations**

- Government should undertake a guideline and framework of how to best utilize the tools of strategic communications in countering violent extremism;
- The power of the media sometimes might be used by the extremist groups to generate sympathy for their illegitimate cause. Government, therefore, should be more active to counter any kinds of propaganda if it is done by them.

**Group 4: Thailand, Nepal, Bangladesh and India**

**Thailand**

The first step in public relations was to use communication and media to solve problems. It was very difficult to engage people in Southern Thailand as they were often unwilling to cooperate. The Thai military posted in Southern Thailand had language and cultural training, took part in civil-military operation and assisted in the development of infrastructure.

**Nepal**

In Nepal there existed a level of instability and lack of consensus among the political leadership which had hindered counter radicalization efforts. Poverty and unemployment needed to be mitigated effectively. SC efforts are very important initiatives that needed to be implemented in Nepal.
**Bangladesh**

Consensus must be reached on SC issues. Women’s empowerment and intelligence collaboration played an important role in countering radicalization. Social values must be reflected in SC efforts.

**India**

Community policing and education played an important role in countering radicalization. Lack of continuity harmed SC efforts and thus perseverance and assessment of current programs was required to counter extremist ideologies.

**Recommendations**

- Regular assessment of counter radicalization programs was required. Analysis and reform of programs and implementation of recommendations would make SC initiatives more successful;
- Most issues were not limited to a particular country and were constantly changing. Thus strategies also needed to be flexible;
- The focus of SC efforts must be on best practices and programs that had proved to be effective.

**Group 5: Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Nepal and Thailand**

**Sri Lanka**

Land integration, allocation of resources, education and employment for the Tamils were some major challenges that the country was facing. As many countries banned LTTE, the group lost its legitimacy. The government’s education policy was very effective in countering radical elements.
The Maldives

Any CT strategy should encompass all aspects of society and also focus on countering radicalization. Effective coordination between imams and government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs was important.

Nepal

Poverty, inequality and unemployment were a huge problem in Nepal, which contributed to the spread of radicalization. A lot depended on the outcome of the transition of the political system in Nepal. In Nepal, there were financial packages for radical groups. The government was also investing in agriculture and employment.

Thailand

As far as SC efforts are concerned, people were involved in community policing and taking part in meetings to share information. Previously the military was involved in these activities which proved ineffective. One positive trend had been a greater number of children being sent to regular schools instead of madrassas.

Recommendations

- Economic marginalization, minority marginalization and weak governance were reasons for the spread of radicalization and thus good governance and economic opportunity were required to counter radicalization;
- Coordination between the government and international agencies was required;
- Both hard and soft power was needed to counter radicalization.
MEDIA DYNAMICS, PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Dr. Paul Clarke, Program Coordinator, CCMR

Dr. Paul Clarke’s presentation was an excellent analysis of the constituents of SC, media and public affairs and the range of interactions between these constituents. He stated that SC mechanisms were a set of designed, sustained activities, the goal of which was to create behaviors unfavorable to radicalization. The three rules of SC were: perception was equivalent to reality, image and timing were important and information was power only if shared. The presentation described that public affairs was directed towards the domestic population, whereas public diplomacy involved influencing external actors. Dr. Clarke mentioned that in SC, it was important to identify the audience, which could be security officials and international media, among others. The roles of the media in a democracy were to inform, educate and entertain. Dr. Clarke contended that in addition to undertaking the three roles of the media, public affairs and public diplomacy had additional roles that were to persuade and influence behavior. He expressed the view that good media relations empowered public affairs and diplomacy. The media and the government often shared an adversarial relationship due to their conflicting objectives. Dr. Clarke stated that the new/social media was visually oriented, had less editorial influence and was critical of governments. By citing examples, such as the Wikileaks Website and the role of social networking sites in the Jasmine Revolution, the presentation depicted that the new media was changing people’s lives.

Salient Points

- Language of the media must be understood easily;
- Both the Media and Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy were important tools in a comprehensive strategy to CVE through SC.
THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN COUNTERING RADICALIZATION

Dr. Paul Clarke, Program Coordinator, CCMR

In his presentation, Dr. Paul Clarke described in detail the components of a SC program and how they could be utilized along with the media and public affairs to counter radicalization. He differentiated between one good and one bad example of working with the media and public affairs, namely the Exxon Valdez case and the Tylenol poisoning case. Dr. Clarke contended that a SC campaign involved three components that were planning, strategic inputs and crafting the message. Under the planning component, building a relationship with the media was given priority. Strategic level inputs included indentifying the situation, publics and objectives. Finally, when crafting the message, each state had to determine the threat and craft a unique strategy. Dr. Clarke stated that the four basic rules while dealing with the media were to state the issue, define problem areas, identify new issues and keep moving ahead. Tailoring to audiences and sharing information were mentioned among several message management tactics. Dr. Clarke expressed the view that the new media could be properly utilized to counter radicalization. Crowdsourcing was an effective method of communication and information dissemination. The presentation provided several examples of the use of social media by government officials and departments around the world. Risk of site corruption and loss of message control were mentioned among other challenges faced by governments in the use of new media.

Salient Points

- Public would not accept denial of responsibility by governments and corporations through excuses;
- Social media should be used more extensively by military organizations to communicate with the masses.
THE INTERNET AS A TOOL OF TERRORIST RADICALIZATION

Dr. Tom Mockaitis, CCMR, DePaul University

In his presentation, Dr. Tom Mockaitis contended that terrorists made use of the internet for undertaking fundraising, communications and other activities and also for spreading radical ideologies. He highlighted the great increase in the number of terrorist related websites in recent years by stating that from 12 in 1998, the number increased to 2,930 in 2009. These websites particularly targeted children, young adults and women. The various platforms used to spread radical ideologies via the internet included information sites, chat rooms, cartoons, video games and videos. Dr. Mockaitis stated that the radical information spread through these platforms particularly targeted children and women. Terrorist related websites tried to attract people through a combination of rational and emotional elements. Dr. Mockaitis expressed the view that there was no statistical evidence of self radicalization through the internet and the extent to which this occurred was not understood. He mentioned that countering radical information on the internet could be done through the MUD strategy, which is abbreviation for monitoring the websites, using them to gather information and disrupting them through hacking. Creating a counter narrative to the radical information, such as setting up alternative websites, could also form part of efforts to counter the threat of radicalization in the virtual world. In conclusion, Dr. Mockaitis stated that, although an internet CT strategy could assist in countering radicalization, it was not a substitute for addressing the root causes of unrest in the real world which often resulted in alienated youth seeking answers in cyberspace.

Salient Points

- Terrorists used the internet to plan, organize and radicalize. Activities were no longer isolated due to the interconnectedness of the virtual world.
SHARING OF BEST PRACTISES IN UTILIZING THE MEDIA AND THE NEW MEDIA AND CONCEPT OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS: COUNTRY MIXED GROUPS

The second break-out session of day two of the Conference allowed small country-mixed groups to discuss the best practices of utilizing the media and the new media and the overall concept of strategic communication. Delegates shared their individual state’s experience and came up with a short list of best practices to present and discuss with the Conference in plenary. A summary of the deliberations in each group, followed by their recommendations, is given below:

Group 1: Thailand, Bangladesh, Nepal and the Maldives

Thailand

The internet was a more popular source of information in Thailand than newspapers and thus the cyber world should be used to achieve SC objectives. To lessen the gap that existed between the masses and the King, local television channels showed documentaries on the activities of His Majesty.

Bangladesh

Interactions between the media and the government were a two-way process. However, the media could be partial and is susceptible to interference by the government. Initially, the government denied the existence of terrorism in the country and this was only brought forth to public knowledge by the media. Due to pressure from the media and civil society, the government was compelled to take action against terrorism.
Nepal

The media had always mentioned the pros and cons of the Maoist issue in Nepal. The radio played a major role in disseminating information. A National Security Council was in place to oversee the safety and stability of the country.

The Maldives

The police in the Maldives communicated with the public by maintaining a website. International media was also active in the country to publicize any radicalization or terrorism issues. Maldives mainly focused on youth promotion programs to prevent radicalization. The media also promoted moderate views.

Recommendations

- Proper interpretation of the Quran should be propagated through various media. Free text books should be issued for school children;
- Youth promotion programs and promotion of moderate views by the media.

Group 2: Bangladesh, Thailand and the Maldives

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh the media was essentially free. There were a number of media outlets, both print and electronic, as well as foreign media. Despite this, sometimes the media reported incorrect information that created confusion among people.

Thailand

In Thailand, television content was overseen by the Ministry of Information. The internet was also under constant monitoring. The leaders of the communities were informed about the government’s activities. The main focus of the SC efforts was on promoting a ‘Thai’ identity.
Maldives

The government focused on television, internet and radio to undertake SC objectives. Most of the time television channels were used to promote moderate views. The media was free, but was answerable to the Ministry of Information.

Group 3: Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Thailand

Bangladesh

The media had played a significant role in generating consensus against terrorism in Bangladesh in the last few years. The media had published many reports regarding recruitment, training and financing patterns of terror groups. The media sometimes exerted pressure on the authorities to take immediate steps against militancy in Bangladesh. The members of civil society in Bangladesh had also played a constructive role along with the media.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka had successfully utilized the strategic communication mechanisms in its efforts to counter LTTE. Representatives from Sri Lanka, however, informed that the Sri Lankan government sometimes failed to respond to the appeal of the international media. But at the domestic level, media along with civil society had played a constructive role during the protracted struggle against the LTTE.

Nepal

The Government of Nepal was yet to develop the tools of strategic communications. Nepal, however, successfully incorporated the Maoist insurgents into the constitutional framework of politics. This step had significantly decreased the scale of violent extremism in Nepal. Media in Nepal did not play as much significant a role as was expected.
**Thailand**

Law Enforcement and Intelligence Agencies had been successful in countering violent extremist groups in Southern Thailand through the building of partnership at various levels with a number of stakeholders. However, the country needed to take appropriate steps to undertake more concrete steps by employing the tools of strategic communications against violent extremist groups in Thailand.

**Recommendations**

- Need to synchronize the power of new media with the tools of strategic communications in order to develop a more effective counter terrorism regime;
- Need to develop a counter narrative against violent extremist groups through the use of new media.

**Group 4: Thailand, Nepal, Bangladesh and India**

**Thailand**

Thailand undertakes SC initiatives through the use of face to face communication, the internet and media. The three components of the strategy used were the understanding of cultural and religious factors, accessing people and regions and development through education.

**Nepal**

The army maintained liaison with the media. In addition, the police organized press briefings about their activities and goals to sensitize people. Both the army and the police maintained websites.

**Bangladesh**

The police and RAB both had media wings and regularly held press briefings. The Armed Forces also had a media wing and a public relations officer who regularly informed the media about
the organizations activities. The National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention was responsible for collaborating with imams and religious scholars and building public awareness against terrorism.

India

After the Mumbai attacks in November 2008, responsible reporting by the media was encouraged while still respecting media freedom. The most effective medium of communication in India was television.

Recommendations

- It is important to go speak to people in target areas and generate employment;
- All government organizations should have media wings and websites to publicize their objectives;
- Since religion is one of the most important aspects in society, a comparative study of all religions must be organized and messages should be delivered to the root level so people gained an understanding of other religions.

Group 5: The Maldives and Bangladesh

Bangladesh

Every TV channel showed programs that discussed Islam. The implementation of an internet strategy was important as it was very difficult to restrict radical websites. The Ministry of Information was responsible for the administration of radio and television and other broadcasting matters. The government had taken many steps, such as the Right to Information Act. However, although the civil society was very vibrant, they had not been very active on the issue of radicalization.
The Maldives

Many radio channels broadcast interactive programs, where people can reach some specific scholars. The media had to be responsible and could not promote anything that would encourage violation of human rights or damage to property. The government enacted a law banning clerics who do not have expertise on Sharia Law from speaking to the media.

Recommendations

- Governments could enact laws which would prevent clerics who did not have sufficient expertise from speaking to the media;
- The training of imams, empowerment of women and their recruitment in the police, army, and navy would assist in de-radicalization efforts. The role of the civil society was extremely important for SC objectives.

Day 3

Working Session

There were two working sessions on the third day of the Conference. The first break-out session allowed five country groups and one regional group to discuss gaps in national and regional efforts and future counter radicalization efforts through strategic communication. In the second session, delegates came up with a list of policy recommendations through country groups and a regional group and presented the findings in plenary. A summary of the presentations in each group, followed by their policy recommendations, is given below:
Regional

Participants in the regional group expressed the view that there were three types of radical organizations in South Asia. The first type included religion based radical organizations; the second types were left wing separatists and those who wanted to bring a systemic change to the governance system of countries. Participants agreed that militant organizations, based in Pakistan, particularly the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), had become one of the most dangerous Islamist militant organizations in South Asia. In the last few years, it orchestrated a number of significant lethal attacks including the attack in Mumbai in 2008. Participants then identified the southern separatists in Thailand, Harkatul Jihad Al-Islami and Hizbut Tahrir in Bangladesh, Indian Mujahedeen and Joint Madeshi Janamukti Party, Limbuvan, Khumbuvan in Nepal, LTTE in Sri Lanka as groups that were involved in fomenting radicalization in South Asia.

Participants said that these radical organizations had become successful in recruiting disgruntled youth, students of Madrassas and universities, specialists including cyber experts, counterfeiteers, electronics experts, IT professionals, financiers including businessmen and financially well of non-residents, intellectuals, ex-soldiers, former criminals and women and children. In order to justify their cause to the common people, they had been propagating radical ideologies and narratives to generate rational explanations for undertaking mindless violence across South Asia. These propagandas included the following:

- Secular system, in any Muslim majority country, was not resolving the problems of the Muslim community. Therefore, a theocratic regime in such a country based on Sharia Law must be essential to resolve the challenges emanating from the global order;
- As Muslims were a minority in India, Myanmar and Thailand, they were being subjected to discrimination and political subjugation. It was the duty of all Muslims across the world to assist them;
- Jihad meant waging of war to establish Islamic regime. Every Muslim needed to follow the jihadi ideology;
- Maoists in India and Nepal spread the idea that they could establish a people’s regime by transforming the present discriminatory system in their countries.
Participants identified many gaps in strengthening de-radicalization process across South Asia and Thailand. They held the view that radical groups were very keen to exploit porous costal zones of these countries. They had been using gray areas as bases for transporting weapons and for operating training camps for the radicals. They further added that many radical groups, in association with mafia and drug syndicates, had been involved in money counterfeiting and drug smuggling to financing their activities. They identified the lack of intelligence sharing and coordination among the key regional agencies as the main barrier in developing meaningful strategic communication mechanisms in South Asia.

They agreed that only active engagement among the countries could promote a platform for developing strategic communication mechanisms to counter violent extremism across South Asia and Thailand. They, moreover, considered the role of civil society, media and NGOs, the establishment of regional study centres, the constructive role of SAARC and BIMSTEC and the assistance of the international community as important steps in countering violent extremism in South Asia. Another challenge identified by the governments of this region was to develop a common understanding on countering violent extremism in South Asia and Thailand. Building up consensus on divergent perspectives would be crucial in countering violent extremism through strategic communications, as these perspectives are emanating from their respective experiences in the region.

**Regional Policy Recommendations**

- Promoting a regional identity for a “Terror Free South Asia”;
- Support the states narrative to promote the correct form of each religion;
- Getting radicals to realize the high price they pay for indulging in terror;
- War against terror to be fought without borders and without religious connotations;
- Respect for all humans, irrespective of religion, ethnicity;
- Enhancing education and awareness;
- Supporting academic research;
• Setting up of a SAARC University;
• Outreach beyond South Asia;
• Use of technology extensively;
• Working together with media organizations in the region;
• International Visitors Exchange Programme;
• Scholarships for students.

Bangladesh

The Bangladesh participants stated their country had become a role model in countering violent extremism in the present political context of the world. They said that law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh had been involved in countering four kinds of violent extremist groups for a long time. These were as follows:

• Islamic Militant Groups including JMB, JMJB, HUJI, Hizbut Tahrir and Hizbut Tawhid.
• Ultra Leftist Groups such as Sarbahara, Purba Banglar Communist Party
• Insurgent Groups such as Parbatty Chattagram Jano Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) and the United People’s Democratic Front (UPDF)
• Criminal Gangs and Mafias

Participants claimed that Bangladesh had successfully neutralized most of the groups. They, however, informed that the militants of Jamatul Mujahiddin Bangladesh and Hizbut Tahrir were still trying to re-group and had been storing explosives in different places across the country. Therefore, the initial success on curbing terrorism in Bangladesh should be strengthened by undertaking hard and soft power approaches. Participants specifically mentioned about the role of the National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention (NCMRP), the establishment of Combined Threat Assessment Centre (CTAC) under the National Security Intelligence (NSI), Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of Bangladesh Bank and the National Committee for Intelligence Coordination (NCIC), headed by Prime Minister, as effective measures against terrorism.
The Bangladeshi participants highlighted a number of gaps in the counter terrorism efforts of Bangladesh which were the lack of coordination among the stakeholders, the absence of extradition treaty, weak border management and weak oversight mechanism to monitor fund transactions of the violent extremist groups. They, therefore, recommended for active strategic engagement at the regional and global levels as well as undertake an integrated approach including all stakeholders by using the tools of strategic communication.

**Bangladesh Policy Recommendations**

- Enhance diplomatic relations at the regional and global levels (strategic engagement);
- Integrated approach by all stakeholders through strategic communication;
- Formation of an Action Plan;
- Cyber Space Management.

**Nepal**

Participants from Nepal mentioned about three major layers which were involved in countering violent extremism in Nepal. These layers were the government agencies/political entities, the media/civil society/major stakeholders and the people. They stated that government agencies and political entities did not have proper understanding and skills and lacked political will to undertake appropriate measures against extremist groups. Lack of coordination among law enforcement and intelligence agencies, gaps between policy and operational levels were also the drawbacks in countering the violent extremist groups in Nepal. The participants stated that the role of the media and civil society in countering terrorism in Nepal was not coherent. They also informed that there was no mechanism to develop a relationship between these groups and the government to counter violent extremism jointly. They informed that Nepal did
not have any community outreach programs or awareness campaigns to build up rapport with the grassroots community.

The radical organizations in Nepal were well connected with a number of insurgent and terrorist groups to harness arms and ammunitions, IEDs and other necessary expertise to carry on subversive activities. The Nepalese delegates were of the view that open and porous borders and ethnic diversity had created a safe haven for the insurgents from where they were launching operations against the state apparatus.

**Nepal Policy Recommendations**

- Developing a coherent strategy to foster cooperation as well as to reduce gaps between policy and operational levels;
- Promoting consensus among political parties for a sustained action against violent extremist groups;
- Developing a system of coordination in order to form an information sharing mechanism among the intelligence and law enforcement agencies, other relevant government stakeholders, the media, NGOs, civil society members and grassroots institutions;
- Developing a counter narrative to understand the nature of violent extremist groups in coordination with Civil Society, NGOs/INGOs and other stakeholders undertaking research projects through independent agencies;
- Establishing regional cooperation and increasing the capabilities of the law enforcement agencies.

**The Maldives**

Participants from the Maldives informed that to date, Maldives had not experienced any terrorist activities by Islamist militant groups. However, a number of Islamist organizations like Jamiyath-ul-Salaf, Islamic Foundation, Adalath Party were involved in promoting radical
ideologies and had branded the existing governance as un-Islamic. They had undertaken a number of strategies which included the distribution of radical literatures and holding meetings in places like schools and madrassas targeting young people. Participants from the Maldives stated that the objective of Islamist organizations was to consolidate their influence among the common people in the country by continuing their current efforts.

The Maldives delegation stated that the members of civil society had been protesting against this present trend of radicalization but they did not get government protection when they faced attacks from religious extremist groups. They thought that, though electronic media had been playing a significant role in countering violent extremist groups, the print media did not raise enough awareness against this menace. Another trend emerged in the politics of Maldives was that that the opposition political parties had been using religion as a tool to capture the voter’s attention.

**Maldives Policy Recommendations**

- The government needs to be more active in undertaking focused strategies to counter those groups who are fomenting radical ideologies and identifying the causes of radicalization;
- Provide protection to those who work/are vocal against radicalization;
- Improve prison conditions and take necessary steps to rehabilitate prisoners to curb prison radicalization;
- Take more appropriate steps to counter terrorist financing. Money Laundering Act should be enacted immediately and the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1990 needs to be updated and amended;
- Form a National Counter Terrorism Task Force (NCTTF) comprising various relevant ministries, law enforcement agencies, intelligence agencies to formulate policy, strategy and coordination for joint actions;
• Formulate a guideline for Media and civil society to undertake a coordinated effort incorporating community based organizations in building public awareness and a counter narrative;
• Promote cooperation on countering terrorism at the regional and international levels;
• To provide training for Islamic scholars and Imams to disseminate a liberal view of Islam.

Sri Lanka

Participants from Sri Lanka claimed that Sri Lanka had successfully implemented the tools of strategic communications in countering violent extremism. Despite their success against LTTE, they identified some challenges and weaknesses in the ongoing strategies of Sri Lanka. They stated that challenges were emanating from two fronts:

- **Domestic:** This included some Parliamentarians and radical organizations who were the supporters of LTTE;
- **International:** On the international front, the Tamil diaspora and many criminal gangs were also involved in extending support towards transitional government of LTTE.

The Sri Lankan delegates stated that the main challenge for the government was to integrate the misguided segment of Tamil people into the mainstream of Sri Lankan society. The government should undertake a pragmatic approach to remove their sense of suppression and alienation. They opined that the overall development of the Tamil people and their access to justice would play an important role in promoting a sense of belonging among the Tamil community.

Participants from Sri Lanka informed that three ministries - the Ministry of Constitution & Reconciliation, the Ministry of Rehabilitation and the Ministry of Resettlement, had been involved in the repatriation process of the Tamil people. The government of Sri Lanka also formed a Presidential Task Force to expedite the reconstruction, resettlement and reconciliation process of the Tamil people. This task force had also appointed an independent
committee named ‘Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission’ (LLRC) to harness the support of the Diaspora. The government of Sri Lanka had also set up a Human Rights Commission.

They informed that the Presidential Task Force (PTF) had been coordinating and monitoring with all UN and other foreign agencies to promote the rehabilitation and resettlement process of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Local agencies involved in rehabilitation and resettlement process were also working under the supervision of the PTF. The Ministry of Public Affairs in Sri Lanka was coordinating the activities of the Civil Society and the media.

Participants emphasized the importance of the continuation of the present initiatives for countering violent extremism. However, they highlighted the necessity of reassessing the affectivity of Strategic Communication mechanisms and recommended the introduction of any required changes and modifications in the ongoing counter radicalization efforts of Sri Lanka.

**Sri Lanka Policy Recommendations**

- Continuation of the present programme with greater emphasis on strategic communications with the international community;

- Need concerted efforts to counter terrorism.

**Thailand**

Representatives from Thailand informed that the Barisan Revolusi Nasional – Koordinasi (BRN-K), an organization of Islamist Militants, and Bersatu, an umbrella organization, including criminal-related gangs, were the two main terrorist groups responsible for spreading radical ideas in Thailand. These groups wanted the restoration of the Kingdom of Pattani as an independent Islamic State comprising the provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and the four districts of Songkhla. Participants said that the members of the terrorist groups were from small minority communities confined to a certain geographic location. Their targets were innocent civilians and military personnel. In their pursuit of achieving this goal, these radical groups
distorted the history of Thailand, distracted ethnic Malay Muslims, operated terror training camps and created tensions between Buddhists and Muslims. These groups have been trying to make cultural and religious barriers with an intention to freeze the culture of Thailand and are desperate to capitalize on the existing rifts in the society.

The government of Thailand had already undertaken an inclusion policy to mitigate the sense of alienation of the Malay Muslims. This policy included the offering of employment and educational opportunities outside the local areas, the changes of educational curriculum through introducing vocational subjects and the national language and the increase of investment in afflicted areas.

Participants from Thailand said that the government needed to take steps to alter the deep-seated radical elements of Southern Thailand. These steps might include the constructive role of the civil society and media, the promotion of secular education among Malay Muslims, the encouragement of moderate Muslims and leaders to preach their ideologies and enhancing women empowerment.

Government of Thailand had already set up some security outfits to maintain the law and order situation in this insurgency prone area. The Internal Security Operations Center (ISOC) oversaw the security issues in Southern Thailand where the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) was a policy making body that monitored and implemented the government policies through strategic communications. The Thai Army was also employing hard and soft power approaches in this area.

**Thailand Policy Recommendations**

- International cooperation would be pivotal to tackle this problem as many insurgents had been operating in Thailand from outside;
- Coordination and cooperation among the law enforcement and intelligence agencies along with other relevant stakeholders;
Specific collaboration with the OIC and the Government of Malaysia.

**Conclusion**

The conference facilitated the sharing of best practices in countering extremism through strategic communication, accentuated the need for a comprehensive strategy to counter extremism in each country and strengthening oversight mechanisms. In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Farooq Sobhan, President of BEI, thanked the CCMR, the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka, particularly the Information Support Team, and all the participants for their valuable efforts in making the Conference a success. The conference ended with policy recommendations for follow up actions and the awarding of certificates to participants. The key outcome of the conference was country and regional policy recommendations, as well as recommendations on topics related to countering violent extremism through strategic communications. These are outlined below:

**Summary of Recommendations**

**Sharing of Best Practices in Counter Radicalization: Country Mixed Groups**

- The main recommendation as best practice was the policy of zero tolerance;
- Engage with the community, create employment opportunities, and address the grievances;
- Use both hard and soft power;
- The Sri Lankan army was very successful with the LTTE, but LTTE might still regroup at any moment, so vigilance was required;
- Bangladesh had been extremely successful in countering radicalization, but there were rooms to improve, such as coordination among the security agencies, greater monitoring, and effectively countering money laundering;
• Prison radicalization must be countered effectively;

• Government should undertake a guideline and framework on how to best utilize the tools of strategic communications in countering violent extremism;

• The power of media sometimes might be used by the extremist groups to generate sympathy for their illegitimate cause. Government, therefore, should be more active to counter any kinds of propaganda if it is done by them;

• Regular assessment of counter radicalization programs was required. Analysis and reform of programs and implementation of recommendations would make SC initiatives successful;

• Most issues were not limited to a particular country and were constantly changing. Thus, strategies also needed to be flexible;

• The focus of SC efforts must be on best practices and programs that had proved to be effective;

• Economic marginalization, minority marginalization and weak governance were reasons for the spread of radicalization and thus good governance and economic opportunity were required to counter the menace;

• Coordination between the government and international agencies was required.

Sharing of Best Practices in Utilizing the Media and the New Media and Concept of Strategic Communications: Country Mixed Groups

• Proper interpretation of the Quran should be propagated through various media. Free text books should be issued for school children;

• Youth promotion programs and promotion of moderate views by the media;

• Need to synchronize the power of new media with the tools of strategic communications in order to develop a more effective counter terrorism regime;
• Need to develop a counter narrative against violent extremist groups through the use of new media;
• It is important to go speak to people in target areas and generate employment;
• All government organizations should have media wings and websites to publicize their objectives;
• Since religion is one of the most important aspects in society, a comparative study of all religions must be organized and messages should be delivered to the root level so people gained an understanding of other religions;
• Governments could enact laws which would prevent clerics who do not have sufficient expertise from speaking to the media;
• The training of imams, empowerment of women and their recruitment in the police, army, and navy would assist in de-radicalization efforts. The role of civil society is extremely important for SC objectives.

Regional Policy Recommendations

• Promoting a regional identity for a “Terror Free South Asia”;
• Support the States Narrative to promote the correct form of each Religion;
• Getting Radicals to realize, the high price they pay for indulging in Terror;
• War against terror to be fought without borders and without religious connotations;
• Respect for all humans, irrespective of religion, ethnicity;
• Enhancing education and awareness;
• Supporting Academic Research;
• Setting up of a SAARC University;
• Outreach beyond South Asia;
• Use of Technology extensively;
• Working together with Media organizations in the region;
• International Visitors Exchange Programme;
• Scholarships for students.
Bangladesh Policy Recommendations

• Enhance diplomatic relations at the regional and global levels (strategic engagement);
• Integrated approach by all stakeholders through strategic communication;
• Formation of an Action Plan;
• Cyber Space Management.

Nepal Policy Recommendations

• Developing a coherent strategy to foster cooperation as well as to reduce gaps between policy and operational levels;
• Promoting consensus among political parties for a sustained action against violent extremist groups;
• Developing a system of coordination in order to form an information sharing mechanism among the intelligence and law enforcement agencies, other relevant government stakeholders, media, NGOs, civil society members and grassroots institutions;
• Developing a counter narrative to understand the nature of violent extremist groups in coordination with Civil Society, NGO/INGOs and other stakeholders undertaking research projects through independent agencies;
• Establishing regional cooperation and increasing the capabilities of the law enforcement agencies.

Maldives Policy Recommendations

• The government needs to be more active in undertaking focused strategies to counter those groups who are fomenting radical ideologies and identifying the causes of radicalization;
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• Take more appropriate steps to counter terrorist financing. Money Laundering Act should be enacted immediately and the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1990 needs to be updated and amended;
• Form a National Counter Terrorism Task Force (NCTTF) comprising various relevant ministries, law enforcement agencies, intelligence agencies to formulate policy, strategy and coordination for joint actions;
• Formulate a guideline for the Media and civil society to undertake a coordinated effort incorporating community based organizations in building public awareness and a counter narrative;
• Promote cooperation on countering terrorism at the regional and international levels;
• To provide training for Islamic scholars and Imams to disseminate a liberal view of Islam.

**Sri Lanka Policy Recommendations**

• Continuation of the present programme with greater emphasis on strategic communications with the international community;

• Need concerted efforts to counter terrorism.

**Thailand Policy Recommendations**

• International cooperation would be pivotal to tackle this problem as many insurgents had been operating in Thailand from outside;
• Coordination and cooperation among the law enforcement and intelligence agencies along with other relevant stakeholders;
• Specific collaboration with the OIC and the Government of Malaysia.