RESILIENCE BUILDING AFTER VIOLENT ATTACK ON BUDDHIST COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF RAMU IN COX'S BAZAR DISTRICT OF BANGLADESH

Md. Touhidul Islam[1]
Fahima Durrat[2]
Mahabuba Islam Meem[3]
Md. Raqibul Hasan[4]

Abstract

This study delves into the analysis of communal violence in Bangladesh, focusing on the 2012 violent attack on the Buddhist community in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. It examines the extent to which the attack affected the social cohesion of the local Muslim and Buddhist communities and evaluates the efficacy of post-violence responses for strengthening social cohesion and building resilience. We applied a mixed-method approach by using descriptive statistics from a survey of 300 local people and qualitative data from Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews. Based on an analytical framework of communal violence and resilience-building, this paper argues that communal violence is an ideologically motivated phenomenon that endangers inter-community relations, which cannot be fully recouped as various inadequacies undermine post-violence initiatives. The violent attack on the Buddhist community in Ramu was, in this vein, instigated by rumour and misinformation, igniting communal sentiment using a questionable Facebook post/tagging, intentionally used to mobilise locals and outsiders. Besides immediate consequences such as the destruction of property and the desecration of ancient religious places, it damaged inter-community relations by creating trauma, mistrust, and fear, which ruptured social interaction. The authorities could not prevent the attack due to their inability to understand the gravity of the issue. The immediate recovery support was quick and sufficient. However, it remained limited to reinstating the structures destroyed by the attack. Steps undertaken by different authorities for resilience-building were restricted. Therefore, grassroots people remain unattached in social cohesion building and coexist in subtle discomfort, if not anxiety.

Keywords: Communal Violence, Ramu, Social Cohesion, Resilience-Building

[1] Md. Touhidul Islam, Associate Professor, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. Email: touhid.pacs@du.ac.bd

[2] Fahima Durrat, Assistant Professor, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. Email: fahima.durrat@du.ac.bd

[3] Mahabuba Islam Meem, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. Email: meem.mahabuba@gmail.com

[4] Md. Raqibul Hasan, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. Email: raqibhasan929@gmail.com

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the world has experienced a rise in social polarisation and the concomitant rise of social conflicts and violence at the micro-level. Bangladesh, a country founded with 'the inherent spirit of Bengali nationalism' wherein secularism is an integral principle (Khatun, 2010), rejected the role of religion in politics through the constitution it adopted in 1972 (Riaz, 2022). However, several large-scale communal attacks occurred over the decades, primarily against ethnic and religious minorities in Bangladesh. Those attacks were on various scales, destroying houses, shops, and businesses and vandalism and arson on minority communities, families, properties, and temples (The Daily Star, October 19, 2021). Such attacks hamper the enjoyment of the constitutional rights of the citizens of Bangladesh. Buddhists, the third majority, with about 0.63% of the total population in Bangladesh, had hardly been targeted before 29 September 2012, when the Buddhist community living in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, survived a large-scale attack on their property and religious institutions. Since then, they experienced four attacks between January 2013 and September 2021 (The Daily Star, October 19, 2021). However, the case of the Ramu attack has received inadequate scholarly attention, except for Barua's (2013) compilation of news and various write-ups on Ramu violence and its aftermath. A group of Bangladeshi-conscious citizens who visited Ramu wrote a collection of essays pointing to the violent incident's planned nature and argued for the deeper-than-religion causality of communalism (Sen and Barua in Barua, 2013). Some focused on the role of digital disinformation, media, and social media in mobilising violent actors (Al-Zaman, 2019; Rashid I Islam, 2013; Minar and Naher, 2018).

Communal violence indicates a sub-national violent conflict between communities or one-sided violent attacks against non-state groups organised along a shared communal identity (Brosché, 2015). Despite being a frequent incident since the British period in India, communal clashes were more sensationalized than studied systematically. Exceptions include Brosché and Elfversoon (2012), Najar (2014) and Brosché (2015), Kaur (2005) and Chandra (1992). While the source of the term was India, communal violence in South East Asia and Africa has recently received scholarly attention (Juan, Pierskalla and Vullers, 2015; Qurtuby, 2016; Krause, 2018, 2020; Watson, 2023). Najar (2014), however, argues that communal violence, be it a riot or attack, dramatically draws attention, but its causes often go unnoticed. The underlying and proximate causes of violence spread from a sense of community-based solidarity, i.e., communalism is at the heart of communal violence. However, communalism is a broad phenomenon that develops as a long-

term process. As an ideology, it consists of a belief that people who follow the same religion have common secular interests since they have the same political, economic, and social interests (Chandra, 1992).

The notion is that the secular interests of different religions or faith-based groups are dissimilar and divergent from each other. As a result, followers of different religions develop communities with completely incompatible interests and grow antagonism and hostile behaviour towards each other. However, communal politics and ideology are like diseases and can be exposed through violent community interactions (Najar (2014). Communal ideology, however, can prevail even without violence, but communal violence cannot exist without communal ideology (Najar, 2014). Communal violence not only takes away lives and causes property damage but also divides and polarises society, gives rise to vicious political debates, and thus threatens the existing social harmony of society.

Within this purview, this paper explores an under-researched topic and answers a research question: how has the resilience-building process after the Ramu attack progressed to strengthen social cohesion and unity among the Buddhist and Muslim communities? In answering this question, we, with the perception of local people, also explore the causes and consequences of the attack. The following section briefly introduces the case of the 2012 violent attack on the Buddhist community in Ramu. The next section elucidates the research methodology that we have used. The fourth section is devoted to the conceptual framework that explains the concept of resilience-building and its components in the context of a post-violence situation and guides our research. This paper's findings and analysis section is organised around the themes developed in the framework to understand the causes and consequences of violent attacks on the Buddhist community and assess the post-attack resilience-building process in Ramu of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Violent Attack on Buddhist Community in Ramu: An Overview

Ramu, an upazila of Cox's Bazar District, is located in the southeastern part of Bangladesh. The century-old Buddhist temples, houses, and community in Ramu experienced a violent attack on September 29, 2012. The violence originated from a Facebook post of a fake ID that tagged a Buddhist person (The Daily Star, October 1, 2012). The claim was that the Facebook post and the image depicting the desecration of the Quran were a basis for an outburst and hateful campaign against the Buddhist community. Eventually, their worship places were attacked, vandalised, and looted by a group of Muslim people, primarily unidentified (The Daily Star, October 1, 2012). The attack was not limited to

Ramu; it spread to Ukhia, Teknaf and Cox's Bazar Sadar district, targeting Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples (Sarkar, 2022). The violent attack that vandalised 12 Buddhist temples and monasteries and 50 houses was a serious blow to the secular stance of Bangladesh. However, the government quickly acted to regain the confidence of the victim community (Hossain, 2019). With the changes in vandalism, arson attacks and destroying religious harmony in Ramu, Ukhia and Teknaf areas, 19 cases were logged against 682 people. Some people were arrested immediately after the attack, although not much progress has happened in the judicial aspect (Sarkar, 2022).

Immediately after the attack, the government undertook a mega reconstruction project for rebuilding devastated religious sites and temples, like Ramu Kendriya Sima Bihar, Ramu Moitree Bihar, and Ramu Bimukti Bidarshan Bhavana Kendra. Once this project was completed under the supervision of Bangladesh army, the Prime Minister inaugurated them in September 2013. It was crucial for healing the damage of victim communities and ensuring the significance of inter-community harmony (The Daily Star, September 03, 2013). Besides providing immediate police protection of the Buddhist temples and community, the government increased the security mechanism of the region. For example, a new cantonment and a new regional headquarters of Border Guard Bangladesh were established in Ramu in 2014 and 2018, respectively, not only to look after the border issues but also to diffuse communal tensions (Dhaka Tribune, April 18, 2014; November 08, 2018).

Research Methodology

This study followed a mixed methods approach, which included a survey, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). In May 2022, we conducted a household survey of 300 local individuals living in two unions of Ramu Upazilla, Fotekharkul and Joarianala that experienced most attacks during the 2012 mayhem to understand their perspectives and perceptions regarding the attack and its aftermath.

We used a formula, , to determine the sample size of the population of these unions, which is 57,892, according to the 2011 population census. With a 90% confidence level (Z-score is 1.65), 50% population proportion (= 0.5), and 5% margin of error (0.05), we found a minimum sample of 271, which we increased to a modest sample size of 300. Beginning from the epicentre of the attack, we surveyed respondents from every other household of these unions. About 20 percent of the respondents were Muslim, and 70 percent were Buddhist. The rest were Hindu.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of survey respondents in Ramu, Cox's Bazar.

Variables	Statistics		Variables	Statistics	
	Frequencies	Percentage		Frequencies	Percentage
Gender			*Religion*		
Male	111	37%	Muslim	62	20.7%
Female	187	62.3%	Hindu	17	5.7%
Total Responses	298	99.3%	Buddhist	213	71%
Age			Other	3	1%
18-27 years	34	11.3%	Total Responses	295	98.3%
28-37 years	83	27.7%	*Marital Status*		
38-47 years	89	29.7%	Married	239	79.7%
48-57 years	45	15%	Unmarried	40	13.3%
58-67 years	33	11%	Divorced	1	.3%
68-77 years	12	4%	Widowed	16	5.3%
78-87 years	4	1.3%	Total Responses	296	98.7%
Total Responses	300	100%	*Profession*		
Educational Background			Housewife	159	53%
No formal education	79	26.3%	Farmer	7	2.3%
Class: 1-5	50	16.7%	Business	18	6%
Class: 6-10	104	34.7%	Student	11	3.7%
Class: 11-12	32	10.7%	Unemployed	4	1.3%
Graduate	25	8.3%	Service holder	67	22.3%
Postgraduate	7	2.3%	Religious leader	6	2%
Total Responses	297	99%	Day labourer	15	5%
			Total Responses	287	95.7%

Nearly two-thirds of the survey respondents were female, and about 80% were married. (Table 1). Over one-fourth (26.3%) had no formal education, and 34.7%

had studied up to class 6-10. About 22% had educational qualifications above class ten. In terms of profession, more than half of the respondents were homemakers, and about one-fourth were service holders.

A group of trained local college and university-going enumerators who understood native socio-economic dynamics and regional dialect helped us collect household data. With the villages that directly experienced violence as the centre point, the enumerators spread to different villages and paras within a specific range and went door to door. The available person in the household was asked to join the survey with informed oral consent. The team of enumerators was instrumental in data collection, while the research team supervised and monitored them to execute the survey instrument correctly and respectfully to local realities.

Besides the survey, we conducted seven KIIs, including socio-religious leaders, community leaders, teachers, NGO professionals, government employees, and three FGDs with local communities, whom we approached at their convenience. This convenience approach allowed them to share their independent opinions and perspectives that helped in understanding critical aspects of the attack and post-attack resilience-building process. The FGDs were designed to engage with specific groups - one with male and another with female respondents, and the third one with mixed-gender members of the victim community. We organised it this way to develop complex understandings of the violent attack on minority communities and post-attack issues of resilience building. Several gatekeepers helped us in arranging FGDs and reaching interviewees. However, for ethical purposes, we maintain complete anonymity and confidentiality of data so that our research does not affect anyone negatively. We have taken a descriptive analysis approach, using statistics from the survey and qualitative data that complement each other and help analyse the complexities of violent attacks and the social harmony-building process.

Violent Attacks on Minorities and Post-violence Resilience Building: A Conceptual Framework

Various elements could drive communal violence, hindering social unity and cohesion. Although religion is often considered a vessel for peace, it could be a source of violence in different forms. Communal violence involves people belonging to two or more different religious communities that are mobilised against each other while carrying feelings of hostility or fury, exploitation, social discrimination, and social neglect (Tapiawala, 2019). It does not occur spontaneously and is rarely

caused only by religious animosity. For example, conflicting political interests, often linked to economic interests, can contribute to it (Shaikh, 2015). Riots and disputes may occur for various reasons, such as political representation and control of or access to resources and power (Shaikh, 2015). The proximate reasons behind communal violence can be insignificant and trivial, but the underlying causes run deeper inside society. However, a sentiment of communalism works as a catalyst or accelerator of violence between communities or against a community.

The sentiment of communalism suppresses distinctions within the community and emphasises the essential unity of one community against others. It promotes the superiority of one's own religion and hatred of other's beliefs, thereby dividing society along religious identity. This process encourages a religious group to promote its interests at the expense of others (Chandra, 1992). Moreover, it may create a distorted social reality among members of one group who perceive others as the cause of their woes (Mukhiya, 1972). Nevertheless, communal violence weakens societal harmony and even destroys social cohesion as it is preceded and followed by real and perceived, organic as well as constructed, mistrust and grievances between social groups. It threatens people's human security and could be a source of collective violence leading to civil war (Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz 2012; Fearon and Laitin 2011).

Resilience-building to develop social cohesion and address communal problems

Since communal violence originates from an ideological perspective, only the application of force cannot prevent it. Besides the institutional approaches to preventing violence, various other strategies could contribute to creating and strengthening social cohesion. It includes various coping mechanisms through which communities can develop the capacity to come to terms with past trauma, collectively prevent communal issues before they develop, and collectively tackle them if they happen. This process, which we called resilience-building, indicates restoring the relationship between affected communities after violence and re-strengthening their social cohesion.

It highlights communities' interdependence in everyday life and focuses on their collective efforts in all settings—formal and informal, community and state—towards constructing peaceful coexistence. We develop a contingency model for complex resilience-building with three interrelated elements—preventive measures, inbuilt protection mechanisms and promoting social cohesion and relationship building (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Interrelated elements of resilience building after violent attacks
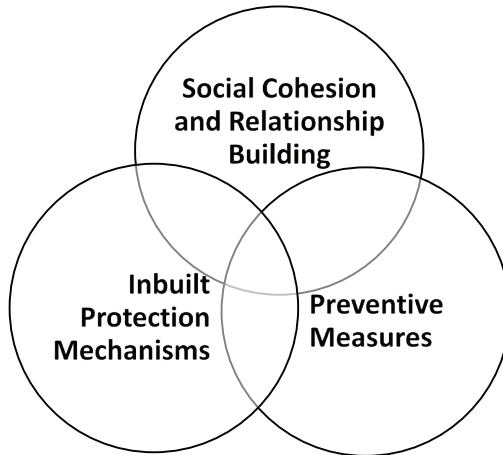
Preventive measures for a crisis

The causes of communal violence are deep-rooted; therefore, without actions and commitments from the authority (*e.g.*, the state and its institutions), they may not go away automatically. As the state has legitimate authority to apply power when required for law and order, it engages force to address proximate causes leading to violence. Therefore, preventive measures mean any reasonable measures undertaken by any authorities, including responsible institutions and persons responding to an incident, to prevent its escalation and minimise damages of a violent event. Communal conflicts are fundamentally political; without political commitment, nothing moves towards the problem mitigation process (Krause, 2020). However, a comprehensive response mechanism includes every sector of society and the state's security apparatus to play essential and pragmatic roles in preventing an escalation of a situation.

Hossain and Hasan (2013) have identified some strategic actions that can either deter or prevent violence. These include undertaking prior preventive administrative measures in a vulnerable situation to prepare and engage law-enforcing agencies so that people in the community feel that there are initiatives for their protection during the period of duress. The engagement of local confidence builders, such as local government representatives and religious and social leaders, could try to dismantle aggrieved groups and protect vulnerable communities at the early stage (Odak, 2021). Nevertheless, the application of preventative coercive means,

when required as a last resort, must be well-crafted to reduce the intensity of violence. Intervention without adequate information and inadequate contextual knowledge could complicate the relations between law enforcement agencies and communities. Nevertheless, bringing the perpetrators to accountability is vital for victims' justice, which often works as a deterrence to prevent future attacks (Kritz, 2013). Fair investigation of any violent communal event is fundamental for understanding the causes and consequences of social (dis)harmony and letting people know about the facts of violence.

Inbuilt protective initiatives to prevent potential attacks

Communalism and fundamentalism, two major evils of human society, destroy vital human values and worsen underlying causes of violence. Therefore, risks of repetition of similar violence remain, which needs attention. Some embedded instruments and approaches can play a preventative role (Haque, 2014). Inbuilt protective measures refer to the mechanisms and strategies developed to detect a problem in the early stage and take steps to stop the smoke before it turns into a wildfire. It is an embedded early warning system that allows the state, its institutions and other formal and informal bodies to work collectively, when necessary, to prevent evolving communal issues (Clingendael Institute, 2004).

Quick and appropriate decisions by the administration are fundamental to addressing an evolving crisis (Chahal, 2015). The administration must keep vigilance to identify issues that can undermine social harmony in multi-ethnic/religious societies. Once potential issues, their types, stages and gravity are understood better, authorities can devise action plans and mobilise resources to deter the proactive behaviour of actors causing disturbance to social harmony (Clingendael Institute, 2004). Besides the law enforcement aspect, people of a locality have roles in detecting and addressing issues of hatred, grievances and consequential violence. People who are aware of their society and regularly monitor social developments do not allow a problem to aggravate the situation further. Some inbuilt social networks work to maintain harmony, based on which locals can develop strategies for managing any evolving communal crisis (Chahal, 2015).

As the preventive and protective aspects are interdependent in complex societal contexts, they could be constitutive to generating a fresh case of violence, not in the repetitive context of attacks due to the engagement of the local social forces and actors who have had the experience of violence and its consequences that shattered the social harmony. There is a space for a whole-of-society approach involving the state and every sector of society—including informal institutions

and local networks, which have good connections with people on the ground. Hence, the roles and engagements of community-based originations and networks are crucial in preventing the development of communal tensions (Mohsin, 2004**)**. In comparative studies in India, Varshney (2002) argued that local civic institutions are instrumental in easing communal tension by promoting inter-group communication and interactions.

Local forums and networks, such as religious leaders as trust-builders, are often supported by Non-government Organisations (NGOs) who work in close cooperation with the formal structure of a society to defuse embryonic tensions leading to communal disharmony (Mahmud, 2020). Religious institutions in Indonesian villages were instrumental in pacifying relations between the Muslim and Christian communities (Juan, Pierskalla and Vullers, 2015). These actors could make people aware of social peace and are strengths for early deterrence of any repetitive, unwanted situation (Peinado, 2011). Through various community events like seminars, dialogues, and workshops, people could be aware of respecting differences, promoting secular values, and thus addressing underlying societal tensions (Mohsin, 2004; Haque, 2014). Religious leaders who are supposed not to be political have roles in coming forward with proper explanations of religions, required to promote inter-religious dialogues and strengthen inter-community relations (Mahmud, 2020).

Social cohesion and relationship building

Defining social cohesion is a daunting task. It indicates the capacity of a society to ensure welfare of all its members, overcome disparities and avoid polarisation and marginalisation so that people, irrespective of their differences, can enjoy equal rights and entitlements (Europe, 2007). Nevertheless, no society is fully cohesive, but cohesion means identifying the 'bonds' and 'glue' that could bring them closer when there are diversities (Schmeets, 2012:128). Therefore, social cohesion after attacks is an ideal that must constantly be nurtured to improve relationships.

Strengthening social cohesion is the process of shifting disequilibrium, which encourages people to adapt to changes in the socio-economic environment, technology, and national and international politics to create or sustain an equilibrium where the society can ensure all its members' welfare (ECSC, 2004). Welfare implies not only equity and non-discrimination but also:

- The dignity of each person and the recognition of their abilities and their contribution to society, fully respecting the diversity of cultures, opinions,

and religious beliefs,
- The freedom of everyone to pursue their personal development throughout their life,
- Each person can participate actively as a full member of society.

Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) recognise three typical components of social cohesion: social relations, connectedness, and orientation towards the common good of society. The more people participate in sociocultural and civic activities, the more they feel belonging. As a result, an attitude of accepting others and diversity develops, contributing to a sense of solidarity and cooperation among people in different communities and enhancing their social responsibilities for greater societal welfare (Schiefer and van der Noll, 2017). However, when formal and informal institutions are weak, social capital cannot contribute to social cohesion, trust, and relationship-building in post-violence contexts (Langer *et al.,* 2017).

Programmes for building confidence and trust between groups and tolerance for diversity are vital for social cohesion. These assist in re-building and re-strengthening the social relations of diverse communities and building trust between the state institutions and communities. The state and its institutions alone cannot work; other formal and non-formal social institutions and networks collectively play roles in this process, either as early warning agents or post-violence relationship-building actors. NGOs and community-based intuitions with connections with grassroots people can be more effective than the top-down application of a state-centric approach to overcoming the post-violence challenge (Peinado, 2011). Addressing societal needs for uniting people of various communities to a common cause—harmony of the locality, is a common way to build the resilience of local people.

Narratives: Ramu attack and post-attack resilience-building process

The Ramu attack in 2012 had some causes and short and long-term consequences for the communities. There were various initiatives for violence prevention and post-violence resilience building that this section presents, using both qualitative and quantitative data.

Causes and consequences of the Ramu attack

We begin by presenting the findings on the causes and consequences of the 2012 communal attack, which enables one to understand the impact of the incident on social life and the effectiveness of the measures undertaken after the incident. While considering how local people perceive the 2012 violent incident, the survey data of an open-ended question categorised the responses in the following way.
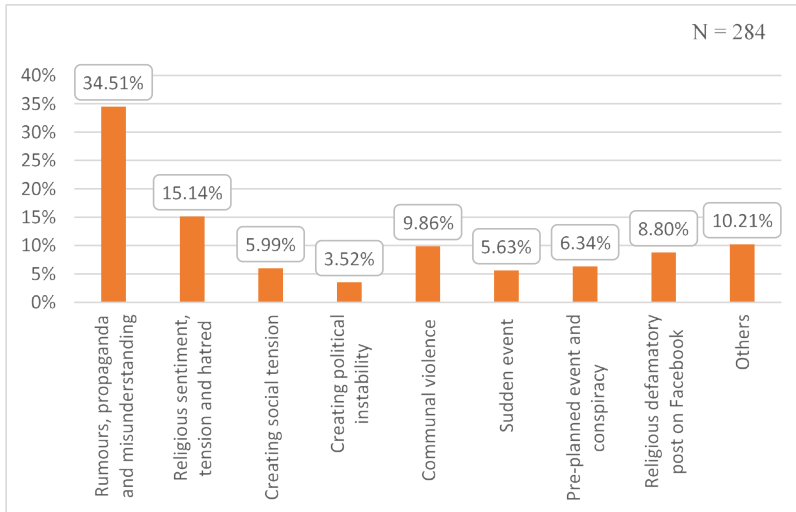
**Figure 2: Perception of the 2012 Ramu violent attack by the local respondents**

Figure 2 shows the largest number of the respondents (over 34%) think that the incident resulted from rumour, propaganda, and misunderstanding of information. Another 15.14% believe it resulted from hurting religious sentiment, which created tension and hatred of the Muslim community over the Buddhist community. Only 9.86% of the respondents perceive the incident as an event inspired by communalism. However, qualitative data suggest that the attacks surprised many locals, who did not expect such a heinous occurrence in their community since Buddhists and Muslims have lived in peace without any longstanding grievance for centuries.

According to some Buddhist respondents, the unfolding of the event points to a case of premeditated and organised action targeting their community. The structured survey data regarding the causes and intentions behind the 2012 Ramu violence event shows that nearly 35% of respondents identify rumour and propaganda as the primary causes, closely aligned with their perception, as noted above. Another one-third of the respondents, 30.60%, see it as an insult to religious sentiment that instigated violence, and 12.70% blame abuse of modern technology, *e.g.* Facebook (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Causes and intentions of the 2012 Ramu attack
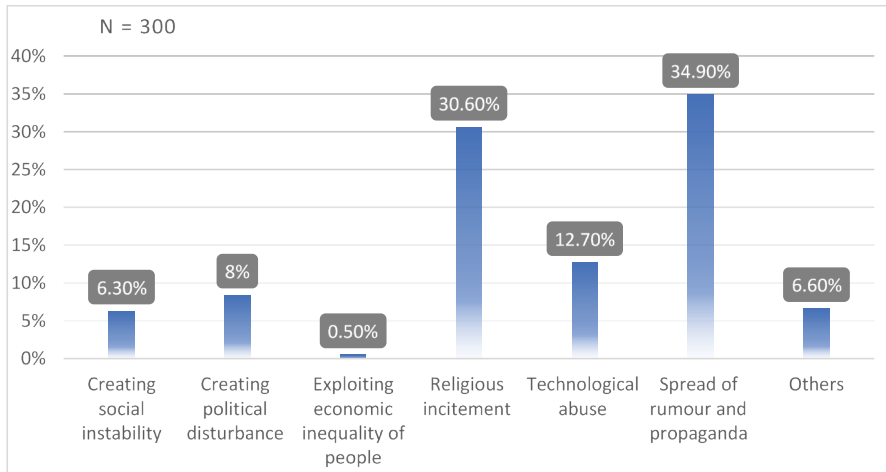
While exploring the triggering factor of the violent spree, more than half, 51.10% of the respondents, identify a Facebook post, and more than a quarter perceive rumour and propaganda generated it (Figure 4). Qualitative data validates the survey findings. Everyone acknowledged that the incident began when a Buddhist person was tagged to a Facebook post containing a derogatory photo of the Quran, which later proved to be manipulated. Besides online share, a Muslim mobile shop owner printed and shared the post in Fakira Bazar in Ramu. Through such widespread circulation, the fake post and related propaganda triggered religious sentiments of the Muslims and motivated some demonstrations and a procession against the local Buddhist community. Nevertheless, the people of Ramu remain unclear about the motives of insiders and/or outsiders who actively worked behind the propaganda campaign and consider this sort of activity unprecedented.

Figure 4: Opinion on triggering factors of the 2012 Ramu violent attack
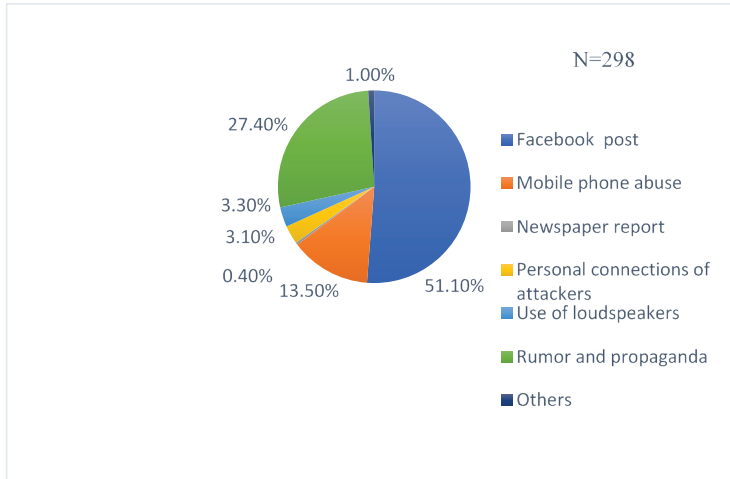
The qualitative data also suggests that the Facebook post was at the heart of the development of the attack. There was no disagreement among the respondents that the post and its share, not any previous animosity and grievances, directly created a condition for developing the violent attack. However, how the post was created and circulated amongst the locals indicates embedded structures. Whether the post was real or fabricated, the rumour and propaganda visibly made the violent attacks possible. Some people speculated about the role of political enmity behind this campaign that allowed it to interplay with religious sentiments. However, despite the presence of different political groups, Ramu was a place with very few disputes within and between opposing parties. To orchestrate an attack of this magnitude over several days in a society with no previous history of communal hatred and tensions indicates the presence of pockets of communalism and a weakness of existing social mechanisms and institutional preparedness to tackle events of such a nature.

Consequences of the communal violence in Ramu

The 2012 violent attack in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, left a substantial and far-reaching impact on almost every aspect of the community. Consequences of the event include the destruction of sacred places and their belongings, destruction of property, physical assault, mental trauma, cracks in social relationships and communal interactions, economic conditions, etc. There has been a significant shift in inter-community harmony and peace, both in the immediate and long-term phases.

Immediate impact of the violent attacks

Desecration and damage to religious places were the most frequently identified outcomes of the event. The majority of the respondents, 42.20%, identify it as such. Also, 19.60% of the respondents point towards property and economic asset damage. Over one-fifth of the respondents perceive that affected people left their homes due to violence. Only 3.50% opine that people of the affected community had sold their lands due to the attack, whereas 4.10% express concerns about similar attacks.

**Figure 5: Opinion on immediate impacts of the 2012 Ramu attack**
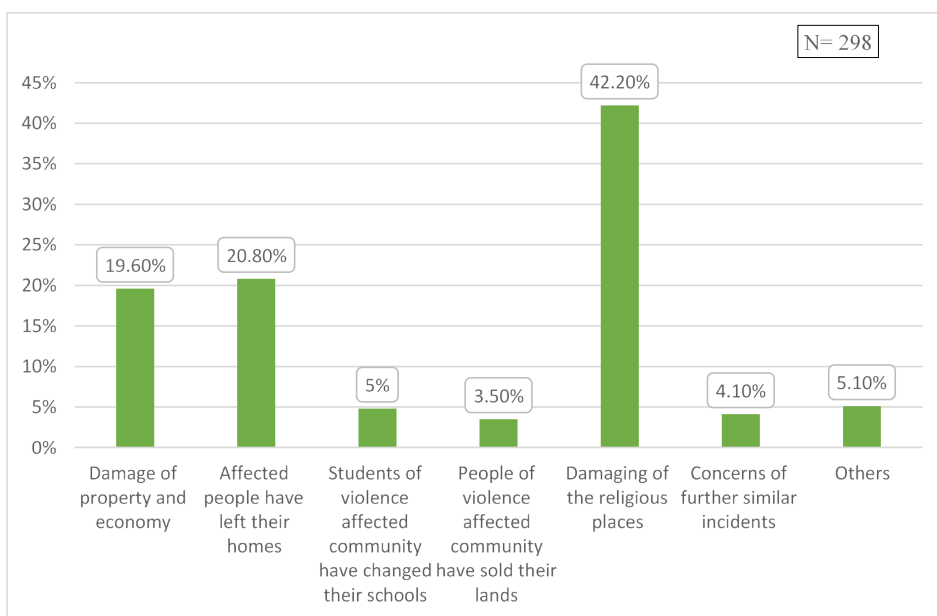
Qualitative findings highlighted the socio-economic damage and psychological distress of the victims. Members of the Buddhist community were devastated and terrified immediately. Respondents from Buddhist and Muslim communities expressed grief about the irretrievable nature of the losses of architectural heritage and interfaith harmony. The social fabric of harmony and community unity was fractured and lost as people from different communities could not trust each other. Social interactions and engagements, such as participating in each other's social programs, were hampered. Both communities suffered from the fear of further unwanted consequences of the event in the following months.

Long-term consequences of the 2012 attack

The long-term impact of the attack was most notable in the social and psychological aspects. About 29.20% of the respondents believe the violence has created mistrust between the communities, whereas 23.50% think a sense of insecurity has been created among the locals by the violent attack. What is more worrying for them is that 16% of the respondents opine that people from violence-affected communities feared going out after the traumatic event.

Figure 6: Long-term consequences of the 2012 attack in Ramu
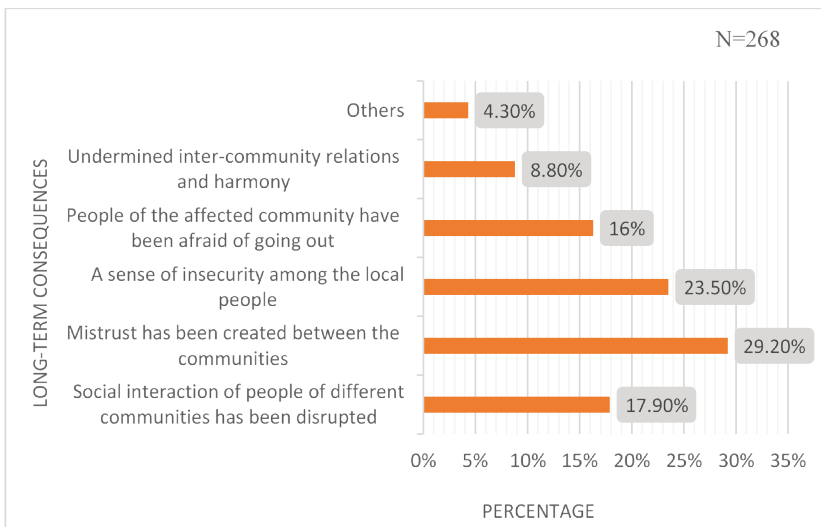
Qualitative data helps identify three significant long-term effects of the violent incident: Fear among affected people, unreasonable harassment faced by people without any connection to the event, and damage to overall communal harmony and social unity. Besides the enduring loss, the victim community fears being attacked again as social interaction is disrupted between the communities. Although most of the attackers are identified as outsiders by both communities, the fact remains that Muslim-identified people carried out the attacks on Buddhist-owned places. It created a specific image of Muslims, who lived alongside the Buddhists for centuries. Muslims have also been affected in the long run, as numerous arguably uninvolved people suffered unreasonable police harassment due to lawsuits filed against them and socio-economic hardship. Limitations on bringing the perpetrators of the attack under justice have created discontent among Muslims as they have suffered differently and hampered inter-communal harmony.

The 2012 violent attack on the Buddhist community and resilience building in Ramu

The severity and pervasive communal consequences of the attack on social cohesion have continued for many years. Under such a context, post-violence resilience-building means reestablishing a normal socio-economic environment, fostering community relationships and ensuring contingent recovery mechanisms for violence prevention. In line with the conceptual framework, we analyse the resilience-building initiatives regarding protection, prevention, and social cohesion and relationships. This study identifies the steps taken by different authorities during and after the incident in 2012 to prevent the violence, address its consequences and rebuild the intercommunity relationship between the Buddhists and Muslims. The local authorities, including police, local administration (UNO and DC Offices) and political leaders, adopted three interrelated measures: immediate preventive steps, measures for preventing potential future attacks and rebuilding social cohesion and inter-community relations that this section examines.
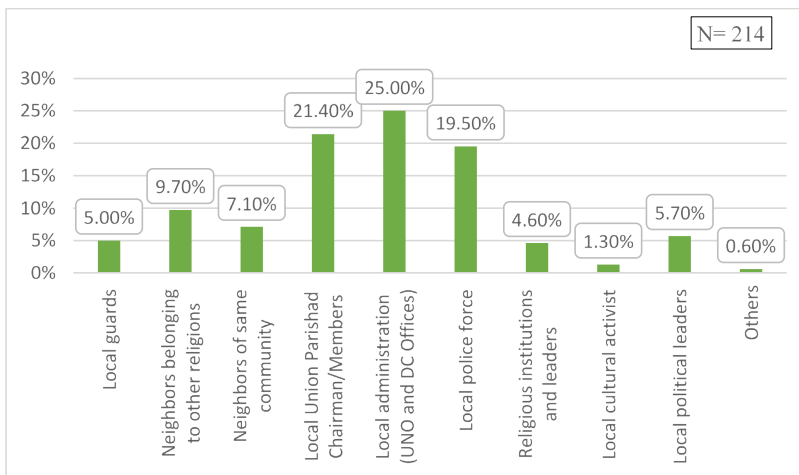
Preventive measures

First, we wanted to find the preventive measures adopted by various relevant bodies during the 2012 attack. A large majority in the survey, 70.81%, express that authorities attempted to prevent the ongoing violence, while a significant portion of the respondents, 29.19%, mention otherwise (Figure 6). When cross-tabulated this data by religion to further assess, we have found that the majority of the responses (72%) have come from the Buddhists, and 50.20% believe there were attempts to prevent the ongoing violence.

Figure 6: Attempts to prevent violence during the phase of violence

N= 298

70.81% 29.19%

■ Yes
■ No
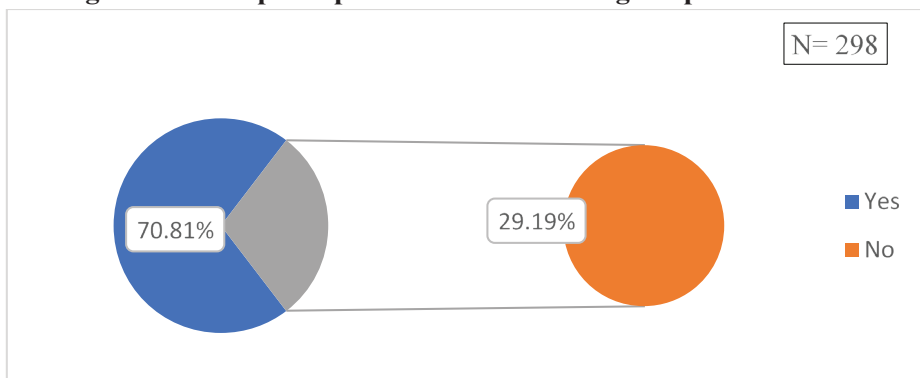
According to survey data, 25% of the respondents opine that the local administration took preventative measures proactively to tackle violence. However, 21.4% of the respondents think local government institutions such as Union Parishad Chairman and Members and Upazilla Parishad Chairman took these initiatives. The police also attempted to prevent violence during the incident as suggested by about 20% of the respondents (Figure 7). People perceived local political and religious leaders had a minimal role, whereas neighbours of the other community played some role in attempting to prevent the attack.

Figure 7: Actors that played roles in preventing/tackling violence

Qualitative data highlights the preventive measures taken by several security forces in Ramu, including Police and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and indicates that the administration could not act effectively to prevent the violence even though the affected places are very close to the Upazila Parishad. In the opinion of interviewees, police and some government and local government representatives tried to dissuade the angry demonstrators on the event day. However, their efforts were hardly sufficient due to their timing and approach. The police failed to pursue the issue and address it before the situation worsened; some argued that the local Officer in Charge (OC) played a questionable role without understanding the sensitivity and gravity of an evolving crisis.

Besides the OC, the UNO, who was away from the station, did not understand the nature and magnitude of the problem. Therefore, they were late to respond

and thus unprepared to face such a massive flow of outsiders, preventing them from attacking the Buddhist community. Local people believe the situation could have been prevented if the police and administration had taken appropriate proactive, early measures. This discussion means a Facebook post/tag generated misinformation and religious incitement that challenged societal cohesion and led to a spree of violent attacks on the Buddhist community, mainly due to the inability of the administration and police to respond appropriately on time.

Protective mechanisms

While exploring the measures taken to protect the community under attack, it reveals that immediately after the incident, they received prompt assistance for meeting their basic emergency needs from different sectors of society. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) immediately responded with financial aid and security measures, including reconstruction of burned infrastructure, including religious institutions, food relief and shelter for directly affected people, and deployment of security forces, especially police in religious places. Numerous non-government groups also reached the affected community with assistance and projects of diverse nature.

Over one-third (36.50%) of respondents perceive that the victims reportedly received financial and administrative support for rebuilding their places of worship. Other 36.30% and 19.90%, respectively, opine that the victims received assistance for rebuilding their houses and financial aid. A minimum number of respondents believed a guarantee for protection from similar incidents and protection for land was provided by the authority.

Figure 8: Compensation and guarantee for the affected community
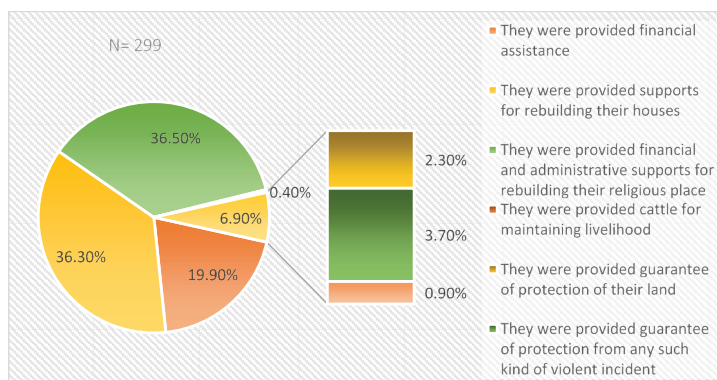
The Prime Minister (PM) of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, visited the affected place twice in a month that sent a message to the affected community that the state and its government had taken the crisis seriously and symbolised the government's responsiveness to survivors of attacks. The state's support to re-build the victim community's houses and religious places, including temples, Behars and idols, was significant in restoring their trust in the state and government.

The government also took legal action against the culprits and filed several cases against them, which were questioned for various reasons. Qualitative data suggests several limitations in this measure. People from both communities pointed out that most of the names in the lawsuits filed by the police incriminated some innocent people, creating panic and resentment within the Muslim community. At the same time, many who were believed to be guilty were excluded, including the outsiders who joined the attack. As people from the Buddhist community were named as witnesses, they were perceived with suspicion by the targeted Muslim people, irrespective of the content of testimonies. Legal action, therefore, created an uncomfortable situation between the communities and did not help generate a sense of security within the affected community. Nevertheless, communities have developed a channel of emergency communication with the administration, for example, with the UNO, who, based on such communication, undertook some proactive measures to prevent another evolving unwanted crisis that could have undermined the state of relationship between the communities.

Building and strengthening relations between the communities

After violence, strengthening social cohesion is a precondition of resilience building, as communication between communities is limited, and relationships among people get strained since the incident disrupts the regular flow of communal, social, and interpersonal interactions. While we explore measures to build social cohesiveness in the community experiencing communal violence, we found such communication and interaction disruption worsen when communities see their counterparts as the cause of suffering.

The Buddhist community was attacked by Muslim-identified people. Therefore, a certain generalised perception about Muslims was established within the suffering community. Nevertheless, their Muslim neighbours also developed feelings of guilt, whether they were directly involved in the attack or not. Therefore, irrespective of their experience of the event, people from the two communities developed an uneasy relationship after the event. Survey data shows that nearly two-thirds of

the respondents, 64.31%, believe immediate steps were taken after the violence to rebuild relations between the Buddhist and Muslim communities. However, over one-third of the respondents were unaware of such post-attack initiatives (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Immediate steps to re-build relations between the communities
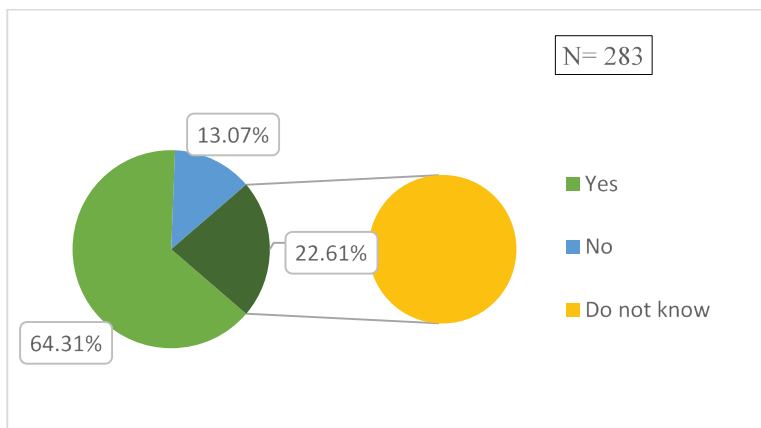

Amongst those who said initiatives were taken, about 39% identified administrative officials (local UNO and DC office) who had undertaken steps to rebuild relations between the communities. On the other hand, 18.60% and 14.10% of the respondents acknowledged the role of the law enforcement officials and civil society groups, respectively, in taking such steps (Figure 10). Local organisations, which are supposed to engage more in such activities, have come down the line in such initiatives to regain inter-community relations.

Figure 10: Authorities approached to rebuild inter-community relations
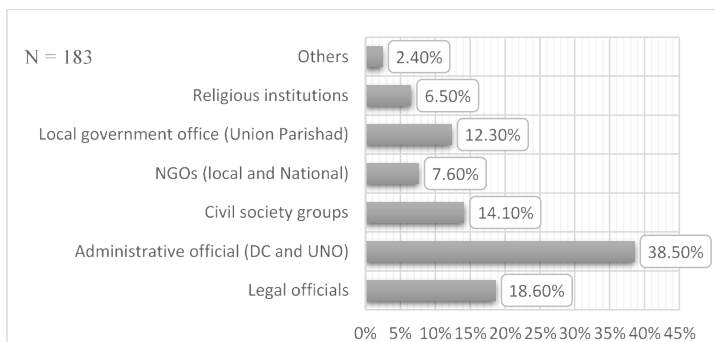
Respondents identified various inter-community relationship-building initiatives. Over one-third of the respondents, 36.70%, identified regular police patrols, and 31.20% said local administrative officials visited the area. About 7.10% identified initiatives like seminars and meetings arranged by the local UNO office where representatives of all communities participated. One-tenth of the respondents identified initiatives for discussion and dialogue between people of communities, while only 6.40% noticed NGO programmes to make people aware of social peace and harmony. These data show that people identified more protective measures as sources of relationship-building than localised social cohesion-building measures like inter-religious dialogues and cultural and religious activities for bringing communities closer.

Figure 11: Initiatives and measures undertaken for re-building relations
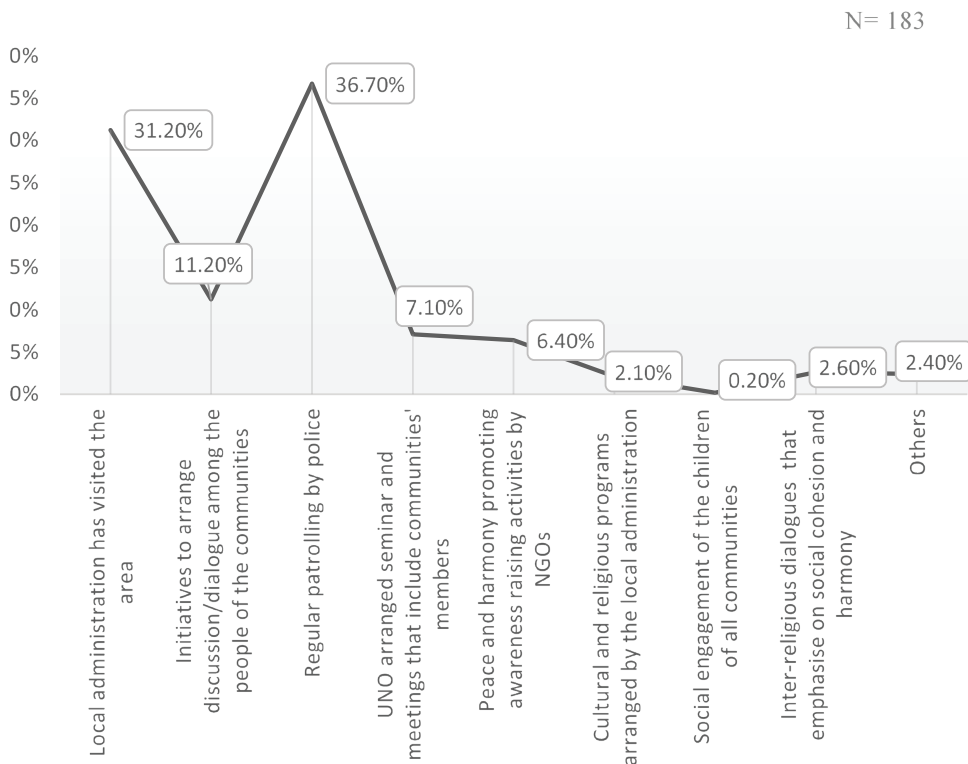
Qualitative data echo that both government and non-government entities worked in the affected areas for resilience building and establishing communal harmony between the communities. Some relationship-building efforts, like seminars, have taken place to reunite the communities and overcome the challenges of the 2012 event. Government representatives, NGOs, educators, and other social elites have engaged in resilience-building and relationship-building programmes. For example, respondents highlighted BGB, the UNO office, NGOs and the Islamic Foundation for operating various programs to raise awareness about communal harmony among ordinary people and religious leaders.

Findings from the qualitative data highlight the role of Sampriti Parishad, a local civil society network consisting of imams, Buddhist priests and other community leaders, aimed at strengthening community harmony. It arranges seminars and dialogues involving inter-community leaders to raise awareness about the ills of communalism but nurturing social harmony and peaceful coexistence of people from different communities. Besides these, some non-governmental efforts were to arrange yard meetings, dialogues, and seminars to make people aware of propaganda and misinformation and educate them about their responsibilities.

However, local people think most of these efforts did not reach the root level people as they are being executed with privileged ones, who get monetary incentives for participating in such programs. One respondent called such elite-oriented programmes the 'Packet Programme' that fail to reach their objectives of promoting peace and harmony among communities because their elitist approach leaves behind the target audience, the root-level people. Moreover, there was a claim that Buddhists mainly attended the awareness-raising programs, while Muslims had less interest and tried to avoid these, which did not help in bridging the gaps and mistrust created by the 2012 event. Therefore, ambiguity, fear, and doubt lingers, overtly and covertly, in society, which, in turn, hinders the initiatives for restoring social cohesion and communal harmony.

The data shows that resilience-building activities were more focused on immediate protective measures than engagements of grassroots-level people. The legal preventive measures, which are crucial to ensure justice for the victims, could not effectively overcome communal disharmony as the justice process did not progress much due to a lack of witness protection and a reserved perception developed between the communities. However, besides the protective and preventive measures, some NGOs and government initiatives like Sampriti Parishad may have attempted to engage local peacebuilders with their activities. There was

limited effort to establish mechanisms to quickly identify signs of agitation or steps to tackle such scenarios. Measures for social cohesion and relationship building, measures to increase social connectedness and tolerance for diversity were limited to meetings and group discussions, which did not penetrate the grassroots level. Therefore, post-attack resilience-building efforts could not make enough impact on social cohesion and societal-level relationship-building. Overall, the institution-centric preventive and protective actions overshadowed the community-level social relationship building. As a result, a sense of discomfort continues at the community level.

Conclusion

Bangladesh has witnessed many incidents of communal violence in the last four decades. Although the constitution of Bangladesh ensures equal rights for all citizens in the practice of religion, religious minorities experience different kinds of violent attacks at regular intervals. This study has analysed the causes and impacts of the 2012 communal violent attack on the Buddhist community in Ramu, Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh and the post-attack resilience-building process. It found a questionable Facebook post/tag that disrespected the religious sentiment of Muslims, which different local and outside actors used to mobilise people through propaganda, rumour and misinformation and instigate an attack on the Buddhist community. Conventional communalism was inspired by misusing a questionable social media post/tag, which led to an organised attack in Ramu that authorities, including police and local administration, failed to prevent due to their lack of understanding of the event's gravity and inadequate preparedness.

It developed as a one-sided event but has affected the victim community directly in the short term and the Muslim and Buddhist communities in the long term and undermined their relationship. The immediate impacts included property damages, destruction of ancient sacred religious places (which have high archaeological values), personal property, and disruption in economic activity in the Buddhist community. However, despite the promptness in providing relief and supporting reconstruction by national and international bodies, the incident left a far-reaching impact on inter-community harmony between the communities, who used to have a thriving and interdependent social life for long. Therefore, community-level resilience-building did not progress much except for short-term measures, such as providing assistance and restoring damaged property and temples. To a considerable extent, these were effective and successful in overcoming immediate losses and regaining the trust of the victim community in the state and its institutions.

In contrast, the impact of long-term measures to address the sense of loss, trauma and breach of trust has been more ambiguous as long as the inter-community relationship has only been cemented through institutional initiatives. These challenge the existing theories of resilience building that pay more attention to community-level relationship building than only elite-level institutional interventions. Although police, UNO and civil society took some measures, such as increased patrol in the affected community and initiative of seminars and dialogues, to rebuild inter-community relationships, they could not touch the very people at the bottom. There have been inadequate grassroots-level resilience-building efforts to create societal capacity to prevent future violence. Due to this, mistrust and anxiety tacitly continue in the affected community. To avoid future violent attacks of this nature and build a cohesive society, a resilience-building approach is as relevant as making people aware to prevent rumour and propaganda. Authorities can invest in tracking and dismantling disinformation and maintain reciprocal contacts with the communities wherein local political and socio-religious leaders can play more responsible, connecting roles with the institutions.

Acknowledgment

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