

## The Rohingya crisis: Another step towards a Hindu nation?



(Image source: ibtimes.co.in)

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### The Rohingya Crisis: Another step towards a Hindu nation?

#### Introduction

The 25th August violence on the security forces in the Rakhine state of Myanmar has set in motion a fresh exodus of Rohingya Muslims. UNHCR estimates that one-third of the population has fled the country, with most of them seeking refuge in India or Bangladesh. While the Rohingya statelessness has been an ongoing issue since the Myanmar government denied them official recognition as a citizen, this recent bout of departures have left the region grappling with the challenge of responding effectively to this refugee crisis. The international community has unanimously condemned this systematic targeting and persecution of the Rohingya community and has even stated that the mass killings amount to genocide. The response in the region, however has been stark in its apathy towards the crisis with India, one of the largest and most prominent countries of asylum amongst the Rohingyas openly expressing its reluctance to accept these asylum seekers. India's refusal to be a signatory to the Bali Declaration which unequivocally condemned the violence against the Rohingyas along with the recent statements made by the Minister of State for Home Affairs regarding the deportation of the Rohingyas mark a low in India's otherwise remarkable history of hosting refugees. The justification given by the government is on the grounds of security concerns, terror threats and national interests, all of which can be negated by reliable data. Interestingly, Mr Rijju has also cited 'changing demographic patterns' as also one of the major concerns of Rohingya infiltration. This argument is an extension of the government's communal policies and the growing Islamophobia in the country. While the Rohingya crisis reflects an increasing lack of conscience in mainstream politics, it is also evidence of BJP's larger scheme of achieving a Hindu state.

#### Politicizing a humanitarian crisis

The Rohingyas have often been cited as the most persecuted people in the world. Denied citizenship by the country where they allegedly trace their origins from, they have been rendered de facto stateless and forced to seek refuge in other countries most of which have rejected their claims. In their 2016 report, the UN Human Rights Commission have brought on record "summary executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest, degrading conditions of detention, consistent allegations of torture and ill-treatment, sexual humiliation and abuse" and any number of other charges against the state authorities of Myanmar in their treatment of the Rohingya minority. In such a situation, there is no doubt that these are refugees fleeing persecution, making them eligible for international protection. It reflects a humanitarian crisis and not merely a phase of 'illegal immigration' by muslims in an attempt to change demographics or launch terrorist attacks in the host country. India has always affirmed its commitment to protection of refugees despite being a non signatory to the Refugee Convention. Though it has been firm in its stand against being a signatory to the Convention of 1951, India's ad hoc policies have been mostly legally tenable and in consonance with the customary law of non-refoulement. Several Supreme Court judgments have also reiterated the fact that Article 14 and Article 21 of the Indian Constitution apply to 'any person' who is residing within the Indian territory at the moment regardless of whether he is an Indian or not. It is shameful that this government has chosen to bypass the laws of the country as well as traditional practices and fundamental principles of international law to pursue its sectarian agendas by targeting the hapless Rohingyas.

A cursory look at the facts and figures reveals that the pretext used by the government to expel the Rohingyas does not hold water. The community has been settled in different parts of India for almost 10 years without any detriment to the locals in those areas. Claims of Rohingya extremism in the country cannot be substantiated as yet since there has hardly been any instance of a threat from Islamist terror sponsored by the Rohingyas in India. There have been not more than 3 criminal cases lodged against Rohingyas living in Jammu and it cannot be sufficient ground for deporting an entire community to the country of persecution. Moreover, as one of the largest countries in the region, citing lack of resources by the Indian government cannot be accepted as a valid argument especially since smaller and poorer neighbours like Bangladesh have displayed exemplary treatment of the refugees with the minimal resources they possess. Despite facing the complete brunt of the exodus and rising jihadist threats due to its proximity to the Myanmar border, Bangladesh has affirmed that they strive to uphold the human rights of this displaced community, in stark contrast to the derogatory statements that the Indian ministries have recently released. India has previously granted refuge to communities from East Pakistan, Srilankan and Tibetans fleeing persecution for an indefinite period of time and an additional 14000 people is a meagre number when compared to the other communities that India has previously hosted. What really seems to be the government's concern is the 'changing demographic pattern' specifically in Jammu where the movement for expelling 'outsiders and foreigners' is garnering maximum support. Targeting of Muslims settled in Hindu dominated Jammu can only be read as a calculated, politically motivated attempt at further polarising a volatile society already divided along communal lines.

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### Politics over law

Not only has the government exaggerated the threats posed by the refugees by fanning the communal fire, it has also ignorantly conflated refugees with immigrants. The role and position of the UNHCR has been degraded and undermined by the casual statements issued by the government. By contemplating the deportation of people who are legally recognised by the UNHCR as refugees under its mandate and as per its agreement with the Government of India, the government has displayed complete disregard towards all its international obligations arising from core human rights treaties like UDHR, ICSSR and Convention against Torture. It is immaterial in this context that India is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Non-refoulement, or the right against deportation to the country of persecution is a customary international law which all nations are bound by. The Home Ministry while sending out directives to states to identify and deport Rohingya, has ignored the fact that our own Constitution provides for safeguards to a person's life and liberty, and religion has never been a marker for determining whether these will apply to a person. Thus it is obvious that the current stand of the government is not only violative of international law, it is also in contradiction to the wide embrace of our Constitution. Most importantly, by putting the lives of thousands at stake, this government's policies have revealed that it is willing to sacrifice the humanitarianism that has been the hallmark of India's democracy for its own political gains.

### The march towards a hindutva state

The deportation of Rohingyas is not an isolated policy decision. Nor is it one aimed at curbing the of inflow of unaccounted illegal immigrants. It is simply one amongst a slew of policy directives rolled out by this government in furtherance of the RSS brand of hindutva politics. Therefore it is not surprising that the focal point of each of these legislations is directly or indirectly communally divisive. The Citizenship Amendment Bill is the perfect example of such religion-centric discriminatory policy-making which seeks to extend the scope of citizenship to all persecuted minorities in the neighboring countries while conspicuously excluding the Muslim minorities including the Rohingyas. Tackling the problem of illegal immigrants from the porous Assam-Bangladesh borders had been the rallying point of the BJP campaign before the Assam elections. The demands of the people were a manifestation of the socio-economic and ethnic concern of infringement of the rights of the Assamese people because of the massive inflow of immigrants illegally entering the state. The state had witnessed several protracted agitations and uprisings from civil society and student organizations in its efforts to seal the border and update the National Registry of Citizens by expelling foreigners who entered India after 1972. However it was always clear that nationality, not religion should be the determining criteria for expulsion. Therefore the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Bill last year giving Hindu immigrants an automatic right of residence was a distortion of the entire debate on immigration. It is ostensibly a move to declare India as a Hindu country by according a right to return to all Hindus, much like the Jewish State of Israel, and in the process, betraying the very premise of India's secularism.

The government's narrative on migration and refugees is not the only one that is fraught with right wing Hindu nationalism. The controversial decision on the slaughter house ban has also revealed communal undertones by portraying a particular religious community as a taker of animal lives versus the others who are seen as the protectors. While Article 48 of India's constitution does require the state to endeavor to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines, the implementation of this ban did not reflect this spirit. In fact, it proved to be extremely divisive as the law seemed more motivated by the Hindu veneration of the cow than anything else. The fact that it had such a catastrophic effect on the Muslims, especially the Qureshi community, solidified the perception that this was another piece of legislation introduced to propagate Hindu faith. The State's infringement on personal freedoms like restriction on consumption of meat on a certain Jain ritual is indefensible because the basic premise of any secular society is that the State shall not use its legal and statutory powers to impose the religious practices of any one community on other religious groups. While Mr. Modi's declaration extending an automatic right to residence to any Hindu and exempting them from the Foreigners Act and the Passports Act was the first signpost of the march towards a Hindutva India, it is these gradual policies that seem to be slowly cementing that into a reality.

### Conclusion

When countries around the world are calling out the Suu Kyi government in Myanmar on its failure to protect the Rohingyas, India has been passive towards the entire crisis, much to the detriment of the stability in regional as well as domestic politics. One of the driving forces behind India's new discriminatory refugee policy is the ruling BJP's hard line nationalist discourse which has pervaded almost every aspect of India's internal politics. The fact that helpless refugees are seen as pawns in a political game or an inconvenience that needs to be eliminated should make us question if we are losing our conscience and humanity as a country. It is amply clear that the government's claims of potential jihadist tendencies amongst these groups are vague and without sufficient evidence. The recent attacks in Myanmar is not enough to define the exact contours of Rohingya extremism though it must be

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understood that a disenfranchised community, wherever located is the most vulnerable resource pool for terror outfits looking for an opportunity to hijack an existential cause for their own gains. Thus, it is in the larger benefit that the government abandons its policy of further isolating a community already on the periphery of society, living in the perpetual fear of their survival.

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## Headline

### India needs regulatory reforms to tackle data fraud: UN

PTI, *Economic Times* September 13 2017

India needs regulatory reforms to protect people against fraud and misuse of data by unscrupulous elements, United Nations' Resident Coordinator in India Yuri Afanasiev said. Current protocols for encrypted data transfer, from money to medical records, to be shared between many companies, people and institutions have raised questions on how this data will be stored and accessed by government and private entities, he said at a Conclave on Financial Inclusion organised by the UN. Referring to the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), the world's largest financial inclusion scheme, he said there are still various challenges that are to be addressed. "Despite the push from Indian government, as many as 60 million people still don't have bank accounts, remote areas still don't have a mobile phone service or 3G/4G data networks," he said. The most significant roadblock to using these technological innovations in improving access to finance, among other things, is the concern over the robustness of the security architecture that protects citizen data, he said.

Read more:

[http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/60498387.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/60498387.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

Date Accessed : 18 September 2017

## Governance & Development

### AGRICULTURE

#### **In Rajasthan, BJP faces the first serious challenge to its cow politics – from angry farmers**

(Shoab Daniyal, *Scroll.in*, September 18, 2017)

After a 13-day long agitation led by the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) in Sikar, Rajasthan, the State government agreed to meet the farmers' demands – which included loan waivers, better prices and a let up in the draconian rules that govern the sale of cattle. The ruling-BJP government's focus on cow protection has hit the bovine economy hard, with farmers finding it difficult to sell cattle, which is leading to falling incomes and increasingly large herds of abandoned cattle that pose a threat to crops. "Thirty percent of a farmers income comes from selling milk and animals," explains Amra Ram, three-time CPI(M) MLA from Sikar and National President of the AIKS. "First notebandi hit the farmer severely. But he will still recover from that. You kill the animal trade and the farmer will never recover."

Read more: <https://scroll.in/article/850889/in-rajasthan-bjp-faces-the-first-serious-challenge-to-its-cow-politics-from-angry-farmers>  
Date accessed: 18.08.2017

### EDUCATION

#### **Girls suffer as Madhya Pradesh college turns toilet into store**

Deshdeep Saxena, *Times of India*, September 18 2017

Then chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was busy promoting sanitation in Chhatarpur district on Sunday, he was possibly unaware that over 450 girls of an undergraduate college in neighbouring Panna district are forced to go out of the college premises in the absence of a toilet in their educational institution as the sole washroom in the college located in Ajaygarh tehsil of Panna district has been converted into a storeroom. College principal AK Singh said, "There is hardly any space in the 4-room college building. About a year back, when the science section was added in the arts college, the girls' common room was converted into a storeroom. I have informed my superiors about the problems faced by students and the staff members".

Read More: [http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/panna-college-girls-suffer-in-absence-of-toilet/articleshow/60724800.cms?utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=TOIDesktop](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/panna-college-girls-suffer-in-absence-of-toilet/articleshow/60724800.cms?utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=TOIDesktop)

Date Accessed: 18 September 2017

### TRANSPORT

#### **As India prepares for bullet train, 9 derailments in 27 days reveal safety crisis**

(IndiaSpend Team, *IndiaSpend*, September 14, 2017)

A coach of Jammu Tawi-New Delhi Rajdhani Express derailed at the New Delhi Railway station on the same day which saw Prime Minister Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe laying the foundation stone for India's Rs-1,10,000-crore bullet train. As the Twelfth Report of the Standing Committee on Railways on 'Safety and Security in Railways' had shown, derailment was the second leading reason for train accidents and casualties between 2003-04 and 2015-16. The leading reason for accidents was human error.

Read more: <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/as-india-prepares-for-bullet-train-9-derailments-in-27-days-reveal-safety-crisis-22180>

Date accessed: 17.09.2017

### ENVIRONMENT

#### **CPCB firms up plan to check use of polluting fuels in industries**

## Governance & Development

(PTI, *Financial Express*, September 17, 2017)

Addressing the rampant use of sulphur-heavy fuels across industries in India, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has now fixed the emission standards for SO<sub>x</sub> (sulphur oxides) and NO<sub>x</sub> (nitrogen oxides) for 16 types of industries. This implies that the use furnace oil and pet coke, cheaper alternatives to natural gas and petrol, will have to be brought down. According to Anumity Roychowdhury of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), gaseous pollutants like SO<sub>x</sub> and NO<sub>x</sub> produce secondary particles which add to the volume of particulates and their prolonged exposure impairs the respiratory system.

Read more: <http://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/cpcb-firms-up-plan-to-check-use-of-polluting-fuels-in-industries/859086/>

Date accessed: 17.09.2017

### We are the river, the river is us

(Ashish Kothari & Shrishtee Bajpai, *Economic & Political Weekly*, September 16, 2017)

Abstract: As per the recent ruling of the Uttarakhand High Court, the Ganga and Yamuna rivers have rights as a “juristic/legal person/living entity.” It raises a complex set of questions. What does it mean for a river, and its associated natural elements, to have rights? What does it mean for them to have rights as a “person?” How would such rights be implemented, given that rivers and other elements of nature would not be able to claim and defend such rights for themselves? What implications do these two decisions have for not just the rivers and those living in/on/along them, but for the relationship between humans and the rest of nature? This article addresses these questions in order to find solutions.

Read more: <http://www.epw.in/journal/2017/37/special-articles/we-are-river-river-us.html>

Date accessed: 16.09.2017

## LAW AND JUSTICE

### NREGA Workers Protest ‘Great Injustice’ in Budget, Wages and Delayed Payments in Letter to Jaitley

Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar, *The Wire*, September 14 2017

The NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, which began a five-day agitation at Jantar Mantar on September 11 to protest against low budget, poor pay and delays in payment being used as tools to kill the employment scheme, has shot off a letter to Union finance minister Arun Jaitley to highlight the “great injustice” that has been done to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government. The Morcha has demanded “a substantial increase in NREGA wages; ensuring that NREGA wages are no lower than state minimum wages in any state; a guarantee of payment within 15 days for all NREGA workers; automatic compensation for delays in wage payments along with raising the compensation norm from 0.05% [of the amount due] per day to 0.5% per day and adequate provision for NREGA in the next Union Budget, so that employment can be provided on demand at the enhanced wages.” Beyond these measures, it has also called for coming out with “new norms” for NREGA wages based on the notion of living wage and consisted with the recommendations of the 15th labour conference as well as Supreme Court judgments on the matter.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/177356/nrega-workers-protest-great-injustice-budget-wages-delayed-payments-letter-jaitley/>

Date Accessed: 18 September 2017



## Governance & Development

### DEFENCE

#### What Nirmala Sitharaman needs to do to reform India's defence establishment

Manoj Joshi, *Hindustan Times*, September 15 2017

Nirmala Sitharaman's task seems larger than of a commerce minister. Not only does she have to run a ministry, which deals with more than a million people and whose budget is nearly Rs 360,000 crore, but to run it well, she needs to carry out deep reforms and restructuring of the ministry. The Indian ministry of defence (MOD) is obsolete, its public sector units and ordnance factories dysfunctional, it runs a military whose organisation is outdated. Worse is the barely concealed hostility between the civilians who run it and the military personnel who have to implement its policies without having an effective role in formulating them. "Fixing manufacturing and acquisitions alone will not work. Nirmala Sitharaman needs to urgently tackle the need to reorganise India's sprawling military to make them an effective fighting unit for 21st century warfare, where challenges range from nuclear armed adversaries to proxy jihadis". This means shedding flab, integrating commands, getting them to work as a single unit with the civilians and so on.

Read More: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/what-nirmala-sitharaman-needs-to-do-to-reform-india-s-defence-establishment/story-YcSALJaWQw4z8CdhkOFmDP.html>

Date Accessed: 18 September 2017

## India and World

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India needs regulatory reforms to protect people against fraud and misuse of data by unscrupulous elements, United Nations' Resident Coordinator in India Yuri Afanasiev said. Current protocols for encrypted data transfer, from money to medical records, to be shared between many companies, people and institutions have raised questions on how this data will be stored and accessed by government and private entities, he said at a Conclave on Financial Inclusion organised by the UN. Referring to the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), the world's largest financial inclusion scheme, he said there are still various challenges that are to be addressed. "Despite the push from Indian government, as many as 60 million people still don't have bank accounts, remote areas still don't have a mobile phone service or 3G/4G data networks," he said. The most significant roadblock to using these technological innovations in improving access to finance, among other things, is the concern over the robustness of the security architecture that protects citizen data, he said.

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Date Accessed : 18 September 2017

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