



NIAS Discussions

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES (NIAS)

Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bengaluru, 560012

Rising Radicalisation in India's Neighbourhood Bangladesh and Myanmar

Report of NIAS Wednesday Discussion held on 8 June 2016

Sourina Bej & Albertina Nithya interns at the ISSSP, NIAS presented their initial research findings on 8 June 2016. The larger work is likely to be published as a NIAS report later in 2016. Following is an abstract of the discussions.

About NIAS Wednesday Discussions...

The NIAS faculty meets every Wednesday morning for academic discussions on various topics. As envisioned by Raja Rammanna, the Founder Director of NIAS, and pursued by his successors, the Wednesday meetings present the ongoing research, work-in-progress, and new/innovative ideas from the research studies of the faculty and the young researchers.

This Forum provides an excellent space to present one's work and also receive feedback and comments. Besides NIAS faculty and doctoral scholars others from outside the Institute also take part in these discussions.

Prof. Sangeetha Menon
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coordinates these meetings.

A worker at a Hindu temple, a Hindu priest, a Buddhist monk, a Christian tailor and wife of an anti-terrorism police official: all murdered in June 2016. These killings, now at 20 since 2013, are part of violence unleashed against religious minorities, liberal activists and bloggers. What started as hacking of bloggers, who were critical of Islam, has now expanded to include an LGBT magazine editor, an Italian and Japanese aid worker.

This picture indicates not only a rising intolerance but at the same time collective failure of State to ensure justice for the dead and protection for the living. Bangladesh police department have made mass arrests with little evidence of the convicts' involvement in any extremist organisations. The judiciary is neither free nor fair. Answering the dictate of the ruling government (Awami League), the International Criminal Tribunal was established to try the Islamist leaders involved in 1971 war crimes.

The question that has often been asked: Is this a new threat in Bangladesh? Or the country is inherently intolerant and is now in forefront of international attention



due to the holistic rise of religious radicalisation in other South Asian countries?

The birth of Bangladesh on linguistic and cultural freedom signalled a nation not based on a religious ideology. But a closer look will reveal that the Bangladeshi identity has never been inclusive or free. It has always belonged to the majority Sunni population alienating the other Bengali-speaking Hindus, Christians and Shia population. A political struggle over the social practise of Islam and its boundaries has been a matter of debate in the country. One group, induced by leftist ideology have criticised the Wahabi-influenced fundamental groups, another group (Jamaat-e-Islami) has advocated sharia laws and Islam as state religion. Caught between extreme opinions the country has indeed been struggling; the recent violence suggest a new trend: rising radicalisation.

On Bangladesh's east, also bordering India, there is another situation relating to radicalization; in Myanmar, there is wide-spread persecution of Rohingya Muslims ongoing. Anti-Muslim sentiments seems to be rampant throughout Myanmar along with the rise of Buddhist radicalism.

Both seems to be an effect of the democratic transition process wherein, the hatred that people feel is freely promulgated through the social media due to the relaxing of censorship laws. Xenophobia and Islamophobia also plays a major role and these in-built sentiments of the people, a product of their colonial history are being exploited by the military in order to create an unstable environment in the state. The perceived threat of ISIS and al

Qaeda in Myanmar further aggravates the situation.

The above has made the minorities vulnerable . Not only the Rohingya Muslims (considered Bengalis by the majority in Myanmar), but also other Muslims are getting labelled as terrorists, and being persecuted.

The multi-ethnic identity of Myanmar is under siege. A narrow-minded nationalism, wherein being part of the majority religion, culture and ethnic





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identity, threatens to become the face of Myanmar.

To conclude, both Bangladesh and Myanmar sharing long borders with India are caught between extremities. The radical forces are exploiting the situation to create a feeling of insecurity, thereby creating a need for their presence and cementing it in the region.

Question & Answers

What are the consequences radicalization in Bangladesh and Myanmar for India?

The killing of bloggers don't have any direct consequence in India. But the attack on religious minorities could have an effect. The porous border can add to the already existing refugee crisis from Bangladesh to India.

What is the role of Judiciary in addressing violence in both countries?



The justice delivery system is failing and it will create a lack of trust on State. The deaths, in the heart of the city and intruding in public sphere, are a means to telling the State, that it is weak. This might be dangerous as where State fails, extra-judicial institutions will fill the void.

What is India's take on the issues?

India is more concerned about Rohingya Muslims being radicalised rather than them being an economic strain to the country. There is a fear that Rohingyas can be captured by Pakistan's terrorist groups and engage in terrorist attacks against India.

Like the LTTE of Sri Lanka, will there be an armed wing of the Rohingyas?

Rohingyas have an armed wing called the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO). But the Rohingya community itself disowned them. After US's Global War on Terror, Myanmar has portrayed the RSO as a dangerous terrorist group; their training camps were also effectively hunted down. So there is no chance of Rohingyas having an armed faction. They also don't have the means to do so. The LTTE had strong leadership; the Rohingyas have none.

