



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

### **THREAT OF ROHINGIYAR MILITANCY LOOMING IN NORTH EAST INDIA AND NEIGHBOURING REGIONS?**

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Rohingiyars are stateless people comprising approximately 1.3 million who stay in Arakan state of Myanmar. Myanmar has not given citizenship to them despite the fact that muslims have been in Myanmar since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. When the British annexed Arakan after the first Anglo- Burmese war in (1824-26) they encouraged Rohingiyar farmers from Bengal to move to the sparsely populated areas of Arakan. The sudden influx of immigrants from British India sparked a strong reaction from the mostly-Buddhist Rakhine people living in Arakan at the time, sowing the seeds of ethnic tension that remain to this day.<sup>i</sup> However due to non recognition by Myanmar Government, they have been living in extreme poverty and have been targets of exploitation, harassment and killings by mainland Buddhists. There have been many occasions where apprehended Rohingiyars have been shunted out in boats in the sea to fend for themselves as neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia have refused to take them as refugees.

Rohingiyars have now become perfect fodder for international muslim militant organisations to recruit and spread sectarian violence in the region of Bangladesh, Arakan and Chin states of Myanmar and North East India as well as West Bengal. Recently, on 01 Dec 2014, three suspected Rohingiyar militants were arrested with a large of explosives in Dhaka. These members from different Rohingiyar organisations came to Bangladesh from Myanmar illegally and got involved in militant activities in Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and the Chittagong Hill Tracts.<sup>ii</sup> These organisations seem to be working in tandem with Jamaat - ul - Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) as revealed by arrest of one Khalid Mohammad, another Rohingiyar activist at Hyderabad. As per tinterrogation reports, he was an expert in explosives and had trained with JMB cadres who are known to be have many sleeper modules in West Bengal and Assam. According to a July 2013 report, India's external intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing

(RAW) has confirmed that the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) from Pakistan, Jama'at-ud-Dawa (JuD) are working in tandem to extend their footprints along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.<sup>iii</sup>

There is a possibility that a region comprising of Bangladesh, Myanmar and North East India could become the centre of international terror networks. There is escalation of large scale sectarian violence against the Muslims both in Kokrajhar by the Bodo community and in the Arakan state of Myanmar by the Rakhine Buddhist community. Myanmar has witnessed clashes and sectarian divide, resulting in deaths and displacement of Rohingyars over the last decade. There are intelligence reports of increased activities and involvement of ISI with Rohingyars. Moreover Myanmar military government's discriminatory policies against the muslim Rohingyar minorities have resulted in their disillusionment with Myanmar making them vulnerable for exploitation by both Pakistan and Bangladesh based militant outfits. There are reports of Islamist outfits like Al-Qeada, HUJI-B etc having exploited the 'protracted statelessness' of Rohingya refugees since 1990s, in forming several transnational militant Rohingya groups to destabilise the region.<sup>iv</sup>

There are press reports of growing resentment amongst the sizeable population of muslims in India and Bangladesh with the ongoing conflict between Rohingyar muslims and ethnic Buddhists in Arakan state of Myanmar. There have been reports of Rohingyar Muslims trying to make their way into Northeast India, given the state of our porous borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh, especially in Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura.<sup>v</sup> It is not hard to comprehend the link between the rise of Islamic militancy and presence of illegal migrants in Assam with a perception of marginalised Islamic identity like Rohingyars. There are many Islamic based terrorist outfits like MULTA,PULF, Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam, Islamic Liberation Army of Assam etc operating in North East India, may tie up with international muslim terrorist organisations like Al- Qeada to take revenge on killings of muslims in Assam by Bodo militants. Similarly radicalised Rohingyars may be coming with tie ups, training and other related purposes like raising of funds to both Bangladesh and India. Under such circumstances, there are major concerns of —al Qaida and inimical forces against India gaining ground in these regions and foment instability, increased ethnic violence and international terror with Al - Qeada chief's focus on jihad and his announcement of launching a new jihadi front, Qaedat al-Jihad, in the Indian sub-continent to establish a caliphate in the region. <sup>vi</sup>

Enhanced terrorism in the region described will create a major security concern for India. This may derail the ongoing initiatives and projects of not only Look East Policy but also halt the development

process in the region. Therefore it is in the interest of India that it counters the threat of Islamist militancy not only in the North Eastern region but widen its scope into neighbouring countries of Bangladesh and Myanmar by joining hands with their governments. India can not sit as a mute spectator and be immune to the trends which seems to be initial stage of formation of pan south Asian islamic militant organisation.

The Government of India must prepare and come up with policies to tackle the likely growing menace of Islamic terror in the region. Besides the anti- terrorism law and legal framework, India should come up with policies to target the roots of terrorist ideology. It should modernise and enlarge the intelligence networks so that it is capable of monitoring situations in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Also, it should aim to check further radicalisation of Rohingyars which seems to be the one of the main reasons of Al – Qeada forming its South Asia group. India should use the diplomacy in a proactive manner and work in tandem with Bangladesh to ensure that Myanmar’s policies show greater sagacity towards Rohingyars, with the aim of stopping the emergence of such a terrorist network in this region.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)*

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<sup>i</sup> Who are Rohingyars? By Kallie Szczepansk [http://asianhistory.about.com/od/Asian\\_History\\_Terms\\_N\\_Q/g/Who-Are-The-Rohingya.htm](http://asianhistory.about.com/od/Asian_History_Terms_N_Q/g/Who-Are-The-Rohingya.htm)

<sup>ii</sup> The News Today 2 December, Dhaka, Bangladesh; 3 Rohingya Militants held in city ; [http://www.newstoday.com.bd/index.php?option=details&news\\_id=2396298&date=2014-12-02](http://www.newstoday.com.bd/index.php?option=details&news_id=2396298&date=2014-12-02)

<sup>iii</sup> South Asia Intelligence Review; Weekly Assessments and Briefings; Volume 12, No 4, July 29, 2013; Bangladesh, India, Myanmar at [http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/sair/Archives/sair12/12\\_4.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/sair/Archives/sair12/12_4.htm)

<sup>iv</sup> The Politics of Religion in South and South East Asia edited by Prof Ishtiaq Ahmed; Chapter 3 Islamism beyond the Islamic heartland by Taj Hashmi

<sup>v</sup> India’s North East : Threat of Islamic Militancy by Mirza Zulfiqar Rahman

<sup>vi</sup> Threat of Islamic terror looms large in Assam by Rupak Bhattacharjee; 4 Nov 2014 in [http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/ThreatofIslamicterrorloomslargeoverAssam\\_RBhattacharjee](http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/ThreatofIslamicterrorloomslargeoverAssam_RBhattacharjee)