

The Indian Northeast: India's Shift from Colonised to Coloniser.

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Abstract

The introduction of The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) by Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has sparked a collective resistance that has not been witnessed since the fight for Indian Independence. Although Modi is living up to the promises he made in his manifesto(s), and some BJP supporters believe the act "fulfils the aspiration of Mahatma Gandhi"¹, this article considers how his government are using the CAA and NRC as weapons to rid India of its Muslim "foreigners" and this has caused significant communal tensions and rising levels of violence, particularly in the capital (New Delhi). In today's society issues of racism, discrimination, Islamophobia and even dehumanisation should be horrors of the past, yet they are beginning to take centre stage in a future dominated by Hindu nationalism. This article seeks to explore some of the consequences of this decision, and what the future holds for the Indian Northeast.

The Indian Northeast

The Northeast region of India is comprised of 8 states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura². Known for its "naturally carved beautiful landscape"³, it is neighbour to China (north), Bangladesh (south-west), Nepal (north-west), Myanmar (east) and Bhutan (north-west). Despite sharing vast borders with numerous states, it is merely hanging on to India by a 22km thin piece of land in Bengal known as the Siliguri Corridor, or the "Chicken's Neck"⁴. The states of the Northeast have experienced mass migration from the South and East Asia "since time immemorial"⁵. Demographically, as per the 2011 census almost 28% of the entire population are Scheduled Tribes (ST) and almost 25% of the entire population are Muslim⁶. The ST population have

¹ Karn, J. (2019) "India's Citizenship Amendment Act is 'Pro-Minorities and Not Anti-Muslim". Available at: <https://www.indepthnews.net/index.php/opinion/3200-india-s-citizenship-amendment-act-is-pro-minorities-and-not-anti-muslim> Accessed: 29th October 2020.

² Marchang, R. (2018) "Land, Agriculture and Livelihood of Scheduled Tribes in North-East India", in *Journal of Land and Rural Studies*, 6 (1). pp. 67-84.

³ Meetei, B.N. (2018) "State's Response to Intra-state Conflicts: The Case of North-East India", in *History and Sociology of South Asia*, 12 (2). pp. 137-148.

⁴ Goswami, N. (2012) "Making Sense of Insurgencies in North-east India" in Dutt, S. and Bansal, A. (2012) *South Asian Security: 21st Century Discourses*. London: Routledge. pp. 170-200.

⁵ Goswami, 'Making Sense', 179.

⁶ Marchang, 'Land, Agriculture', 69.

more than 220 tribes and sub-tribes spread across the Northeast⁷. The majority (70%) of the Northeast population are located in Assam, also known as the “hub of the region”⁸.

Colonial Impact

When the British ruled India, they became primarily interested in the Northeast when tea was discovered in Assam. Tea-growing gave the East India Company a chance to create a product that would be suitable for global trade and enhance the British economy. This resulted in Assam becoming “the British Empire’s own tea garden”⁹. However, the British were not interested in Assam’s past and “did little to preserve its diversity”¹⁰. The lack of awareness and understanding of the region arguably caused a “complicated relationship of dependence, co-option, and eventually resistance to British rule”¹¹. As we will see, such strategic interests are reflected in India’s attachment to the Northeast and how they need it for connections to South East Asia.

As a result of rising tensions, the British followed a policy of appeasement and kept the region isolated from the rest of India using its “divide and rule”¹² strategy. In order to keep the region confined and excluded, in 1873 the British introduced the Inner Line Permit (ILP)¹³. This is an extension of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act and was a tool to restrict the entry of mainland Indians into the Northeast, as well as preventing those from the Northeast from entering mainland India. This prevented any large-scale migration in the region. The primary use of the ILP was to protect the British commercial interests in Assam from the hill tribes. Although this was put into place almost 150 years ago, the ILP still stands today to the advantage of the central government.

For decades the Northeast has remained a secluded and landlocked region. This has resulted in separatist unrest in the region and the formation of numerous militant organisations, pledging to fight against the neighbouring governments of India, Myanmar and Bhutan. Most

⁷ Goswami, ‘Making Sense’, 179.

⁸ Mukherjee, J. (2005). *An Insider’s Experience of Insurgency in India’s North-East*. London: Anthem Press. pp. 110-120.

⁹ Sharma, J. (2011). *Empire’s Garden Assam and the Making of India*. Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 20-50.

¹⁰ Mukherjee, K. (2014) “The Conflict in the Indian Northeast”, in *Defence Studies*, 14 (2). pp. 111-133.

¹¹ Sharma ‘Empire’s Garden’, 48.

¹² Farooqui, A. (2015) “‘Divide and Rule’? Race, Military Recruitment and Society in Late Nineteenth Century Colonial India”, in *Social Scientist*, 43 (4). pp. 49-59.

¹³ Mukherjee, ‘The Conflict’, 115.

of the insurgent groups have the same political objective(s): self-determination and to be independent from India¹⁴. But the conflict does not impact all of the 8 states in the same way and there are sporadic levels of violence across the states. The main insurgencies take place in Assam, primarily by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), in Manipur, by the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), and in Nagaland, by National Socialist Council of Nagalim led by Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu (NSCN-IM)¹⁵. Most of the groups have benefitted from the influence of external states including Bangladesh, China and Pakistan. The external support has included providing weaponry, underground camps and training for the insurgents¹⁶. The region is also highly militarised, and the presence of paramilitary forces including the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Border Security Force (BSF) is felt far and wide across the Northeast¹⁷.

Recent Decisions

In December 2019, the BJP announced The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Making religion a basis for citizenship is not only discriminatory, but it encourages communal tensions and completely disregards the premises of secularism and democracy. Prior to 2016, the law did not use religion as criterion for citizenship. Rather, since Partition in 1947 and the creation of the constitution shortly after, being Indian was taken to mean anyone born in India. Article 5 of the constitution states citizens of India include every person who;

- (a) Was born in the territory of India.
- (b) Whose parents were born in the territory of India.
- (c) Who has been a resident in the territory of India for not less than 5 years (Constitution of India 1950).

This pushes one to question why the Government is suddenly deciding to change the CAA and the NRC on grounds of religiosity. One reason could be that the Northeast has remained a strategic opening for India to other countries of South East Asia. For example, India's "Act

¹⁴ Goswami, 'Making Sense', 180.

¹⁵ Goswami, 'Making Sense', 180.

¹⁶ Goswami, 'Making Sense', 182.

¹⁷ Mukherjee, K. (2017) "Insurgency and Peace Building in the Northeast Indian State of Manipur", in *Democracy and Security*, 13 (3). pp. 220-245.

East” and “Look East” policies that were “initially driven by economic calculations”¹⁸ are also dependent on the Northeast for its connections to neighbouring countries. For the BJP, the CAA, NRC, and the Look East/Act East policies will work together to stabilise the Northeast and encourage economic and political development. This would demonstrate the BJP’s “strong commitment to developing the infrastructure of the region in transport, highways, communication, power and waterways”¹⁹. Such a diplomatic initiative would appear desirable to promote relations between the Northeast, the central government and other Asia-Pacific states more generally. Therefore, the BJP’s decision would be legitimate, especially if it facilitates “economic, strategic and cultural relations”²⁰ at numerous levels and between numerous states.

The recent use of the CAA by the BJP is to provide citizenship to persecuted minorities from neighbouring countries including Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. The new bill excludes the likes of Sri Lanka’s Tamil minority community and Bhutan’s ethnic Nepalis and the persecuted minority category is specifically non-Muslim²¹. Rather, it refers to Buddhists, Parsis, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, and Jains (practically all religions other than Islam). For the BJP, the CAA offers a legal route for persecuted minorities and demonstrates the fact that “all religions are accepted in India”²². The reason for leaving the Sri Lankan Tamil community absent from the Act is because their persecution was on “ethnic fault lines”²³ and not on religious lines and the war has been over for a decade. Excluding the wider Muslim community from the act, according to the BJP, is because the outcome of Partition left the Muslim community with their own state, whereas other communities have since suffered. This may be true because the suffering of minorities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan

¹⁸ Acharya, A. (2015) “India’s ‘Look East’ Policy”, in Malone, D., Mohan, C., Raghavan, S., & Acharya, A. (2015) *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*. Oxford University Press. pp. 450-460.

¹⁹ Kesavan, K.V. (2020) “India’s ‘Act East’ Policy and Regional Cooperation”. Available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-act-east-policy-and-regional-cooperation-61375/> Accessed: 27th October 2020.

²⁰ Kesavan ‘India’s Act’.

²¹ Kuchay, B. (2019) “What You Should Know About India’s ‘Anti-Muslim’ citizenship Law”. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/india-anti-muslim-citizenship-bill-191209095557419.html?utm_source=website&utm_medium=article_page&utm_campaign=read_more_links Accessed: 20th December 2019.

²² Dhamija, D. (2020) “Indian CAA Law is a Positive Step”. Available at: <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/indian-caa-law-is-a-positive-step> Accessed: 27th October 2020.

²³ Karn, ‘India’s Citizenship’.

is of concern, not only to India, but also to the European Parliament²⁴. India offering a way for minorities to alleviate such suffering may be viewed as a positive step for the world's largest democracy. However, one of the BJP's strategists exposed the underlying motive of the act is: "to protect India's so-called Hindu identity"²⁵.

The method to document these illegal immigrants, is to count the citizens and single out those who are undocumented that have come from neighbouring countries. However, when this method was previously conducted in the Northeast in 2018, almost 4 million people were left off the NRC, thus rendering them to be stateless²⁶. This level of statelessness has not been witnessed since WWII²⁷. Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah announced that some of the North-eastern states will not be included in the bill but given the way he has behaved over the Kashmir situation²⁸; it is unlikely that Shah will uphold his promises. The ILP, Shah argues, will protect the states that are not covered in the new act²⁹. However, the success of the ILP is to be questioned here because the borders between states in the Northeast are particularly porous and therefore will be unable to stop the fluidity of migration in the region.

What we are currently witnessing in India is the profound impact of what Gudavarthy (2018) refers to as "hypernationalism"³⁰, on disputed areas such as the Northeast and Kashmir. Gudavarthy (2018) explores the rise of right-wing politics of the BJP and how it does not correlate to their promises of a "neoliberal economy". This is a dangerous trajectory as issues of identity and citizenship are being used to heighten Modi's authoritarianism, rather than focusing on sustaining a democratic agenda³¹. The dangers of the far-right³² can also be seen

²⁴ Dhamija, 'Indian CAA'.

²⁵ Apoorvanand (2019) "The New Citizenship Bill and the Hinduisation of India". Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/citizenship-bill-hinduisation-india-190110141421871.html?utm_source=website&utm_medium=article_page&utm_campaign=read_more_links Accessed: 25th February 2019.

²⁶ Apoorvanand, 'The New'.

²⁷ Ghosh, S. and Shneiderman, S. (2019) "New Laws Weaponize Citizenship in India". Available at: <https://theconversation.com/new-laws-weaponize-citizenship-in-india-129027> Accessed: 15th January 2020.

²⁸ Connah, L. (2020) "The Echoes of Colonialism: Kashmir's Future Remains Uncertain Following India's Revocation of its Self-Rule", in *New Zealand International Review*, 45 (2). pp. 6-11.

²⁹ Sitlhou, M. (2019) "In India's Northeast, Protesters Rally Against Citizenship Bill". Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/india-northeast-protesters-rally-citizenship-bill-191210111006001.html> Accessed: 15th December 2019.

³⁰ Gudavarthy, A. (2018) *India After Modi: Populism and the Right*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

³¹ Mir, A. (2019) "Ajay Gudavarthy, India After Modi: Populism and the Right", in *Society and Culture in South Asia*, 5 (2). pp. 369-371.

³² Chacko, P. (2018) "The Right Turn in India: Authoritarianism, Populism and Neoliberalisation", in *Journal of Contemporary Asia: Crisis, Populism and Right-wing Politics in Asia*, 48 (4). pp. 541-565.

in the language used by the Government in the recent implementation of the act and are of concern to this article.

Determining migrants to be “foreigners”, “infiltrators”, and “termites”³³ dehumanises them and reduces them to a sub-level of society. This may be just a small portion of the BJP and its supporters, as others believe the act views migrants favourably and gives them “a life of dignity as Indians”³⁴. Or, the language used is specific to Muslims, rather than other minorities as other members of the BJP have openly incited violence against the Muslim population saying things like “feed them bullets”³⁵. This creates an ‘us vs them’ narrative making those absent from the list, and the wider Muslim community in India to be the primary enemy³⁶. This kind of rhetoric should not be evident in a secular and democratic government. This language should also be a warning sign to anyone that wants to avoid the horrors of Partition from repeating themselves. Senior leaders of the BJP would disagree that the act is anti-Muslim and instead argue that it is “pro-minorities”³⁷.

The CAA has already been passed in the lower house of Indian Parliament with 311 members voting in favour of it, and 80 voting against it³⁸. But petitions have been filed to the Supreme Court to prevent the act from being implemented fully into the law. It is questionable how powerful the Supreme Court of India is, given the number of numerous petitions filed against the state’s decision to revoke Article 370 last August. At the time of writing, the Supreme Court declined to delay the CAA implementation and gave the government a few weeks to respond to the petitions³⁹, the outcome of which is yet to be announced.

³³ India Today (2019) “Illegal Immigrants are Like Termites, Will throw Them out if BJP Comes Back to Power: Amit Shah”. Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/lok-sabha-2019/story/bjp-amit-shah-hindu-refugees-mamata-bannerjee-1499691-2019-04-11> Accessed: 1st May 2019.

³⁴ Tanna, K. (2019) “Citizenship Amendment Act is Misunderstood”. Available at: <https://www.firstpost.com/india/misunderstood-citizenship-amendment-act-seeks-to-give-millions-of-persecuted-minorities-dignity-of-indian-citizenship-7777591.html> Accessed: 27th October 2019.

³⁵ Ellis-Petersen, H. (2020) “‘Feed Them Bullets not Biryani’: BJP Uses Delhi Elections to Stoke Religious Hatred”. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/06/feed-them-bullets-not-biryani-bjp-uses-delhi-elections-to-stoke-religious-hatred> Accessed: 10th February 2020.

³⁶ Mamdani, M. (2008) “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism”, in *American Anthropologist*, 104 (3). pp. 766-775.

³⁷ Karn, ‘India’s Citizenship’.

³⁸ Al Jazeera (2019) “India’s Lower House Passes Controversial Citizenship Bill”. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/india-table-controversial-citizenship-bill-parliament-191209041402071.html?utm_source=website&utm_medium=article_page&utm_campaign=read_more_links Accessed: 2nd January 2020.

³⁹ Krishnan, M. (2020) “Supreme Court Declines to put CAA on Hold”. Available at: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/govt-petitioners-spar-over-stay-on-caa-hearing-in-supreme-court-after-4-weeks/story-T3KpnX4anlWaNl6q8rfpRP.html> Accessed: 3rd September 2020.

Consequences

The worst consequence of this decision are the riots that gripped New Delhi with intensified violence. Hundreds of vehicles were burnt out, houses were torched as well as shops, schools and places of worship⁴⁰. By March, the death toll had reached 53 people⁴¹. Reports also suggest that Muslims have become the targets of lynching's⁴² and have been the primary target of communal violence. Not only is this problematic for the capital, but the Indian Northeast already suffers from high levels of violence. In 2018, over 22,000 additional armed forces personnel were deployed across the region in order to enforce Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code to prevent gatherings of more than four people from occurring⁴³. The Northeast is also victim to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA)⁴⁴, a draconian law that has been manipulated and abused to commit gross human rights violations⁴⁵.

In addition to the violent riots in Delhi, there have been some peaceful protests on a scale that has not been seen since the fight for Indian Independence⁴⁶. Individuals of all ages and backgrounds, from student activists to Muslim women, have participated in the protests⁴⁷. Those participating in the riots or supporting them believe that the act is in violation of the secular ideas that Indian Independence and the constitution are founded on. Without going into the details of constitutional law, it is not difficult to see how the new act violates notions of equality (Article 14 of the constitution)⁴⁸. Those in favour of the CAA would argue that the

⁴⁰ Nigam, C. (2020) "Long Road to Rebuilding: How Riots Ravaged Northeast Delhi". Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/how-riots-ravaged-northeast-delhi-1651246-2020-03-01> Accessed: 20th March 2020.

⁴¹ India Today (2020) "Delhi Riots: Death Toll Rises to 53, Delhi Police Register 654 Cases". Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/delhi-riots-death-toll-rises-to-53-delhi-police-register-654-cases-1652830-2020-03-05> Accessed: 28th March 2020.

⁴² Mander, H. (2019) "Lynching, the Scourge of New India". Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/lynching-the-scourge-of-new-india/article29693818.ece> Accessed: 2nd November 2019.

⁴³ Gani, A. (2018) "Assam: Some Four Million Left Out of Final India NRC Draft List". Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/07/4-million-people-left-final-draft-nrc-list-assam-180730044002717.html> Accessed: 1st August 2018.

⁴⁴ Bhattacharyya, R. (2018) "Living with Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) as Everyday Life", in *GeoJournal*, 83 (1). pp. 31-48.

⁴⁵ McDuire-Ra, D. (2008) "Fifty-Year Disturbance: The Armed Forces Special Powers Act and Exceptionalism in a South Asian Periphery", in *Contemporary South Asia*, 17 (3). pp. 255-270.

⁴⁶ Menon, B. (2019) "Pictures: Anti-CAA Protests Continue in Indian Cities". Available at: <https://gulfnews.com/photos/news/pictures-anti-caa-protests-continue-in-indian-cities-1.1577291422651?slide=1> Accessed: 28th December 2019.

⁴⁷ BBC News (2020) "Shaheen Bagh: The Women Occupying Delhi Street Against Citizenship Law". Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-50902909> Accessed: 20th January 2020.

⁴⁸ Singhvi, A. (2009) "INDIA'S CONSTITUTION AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES", in *The George Washington International Law Review*, 41 (2). pp. 327-360.

act does not actually violate Article 14, nor does it violate Articles 21 and 25 which refer to personal liberty and freedom of religion⁴⁹. However, given that “one of the hallmarks of democracy is how the state secures the rights of minority citizens”⁵⁰, it is no wonder that the recent decision has caused outrage.

Another consequence of the act is that by excluding Muslims from the persecuted minority category, this prevents the Rohingya of Myanmar to seek refuge in India. The Rohingya population are arguably one of the most persecuted minorities in South Asia and suffer from human rights violations including sexual violence, torture and imprisonment⁵¹. It also prevents the Hazaras from Afghanistan, and the Shia and Ahmadiyya communities of Pakistan from seeking citizenship in India. The Ahmadiyya are another minority community who have “suffered fierce persecution”⁵² and opposition from mainstream Muslim communities.

The NRC is undoubtedly going to exclude genuine citizens, regardless of religious affiliation, even perhaps some Hindus. This is because people are not equipped with the necessary documentation to prove their citizenship. The documentation required to prove citizenship includes; land deeds, birth certificates and others. This sort of documentation requires a certain level of privilege and financial stability, advantages that are not common in communities that belong in the Northeast due it being “one of the most underdeveloped and impoverished parts of the country”⁵³. Therefore, one could argue that the new act is isolating the poorer communities who cannot provide the documentation. It is both anti-Muslim and anti-poor⁵⁴. There is also a gendered element to the decision because it is believed that women are suffering the most. Women in rural parts of Assam in particular suffer from illiteracy and if they do have proof of identity, they are unable to read and understand it⁵⁵.

For those who are left off the NRC, their futures are fraught with uncertainty. Some of them could end up being deported, in jail, or even in other detention centres which in the past have

⁴⁹ Karn, ‘India’s Citizenship’.

⁵⁰ Mukherjee, ‘Insurgency and Peace’, 220.

⁵¹ The Lancet. (2016) “Recognising the Rohingya People”, in *The Lancet*, 388 (10061). pp. 2714.

⁵² Moten, A.R. (2018) “Ahmadiyya: Growth and Development of a Persecuted Community”, in *Malaysian Journal of International Relations*, 6 (1). pp. 35-46.

⁵³ Mukherjee, ‘Insurgency and Peace’, 224.

⁵⁴ The Hindu (2019) “NRC is Anti-Poor and Dehumanises a Out-Group, say Former IAS Officers”. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/nrc-is-anti-poor-and-dehumanises-an-out-group-say-former-ias-officers/article30131566.ece> Accessed: 10th December 2019.

⁵⁵ Pisharoty, S.B. (2019) “Women Without Parents: An NRC Ground Report”. Available at: <https://thewire.in/rights/women-without-parents-an-nrc-ground-report> Accessed: 1st October 2019.

proven to be notorious for human rights abuses⁵⁶. However, deportation is problematic because if they do not have the proof to say that they are Indian, it is unlikely that they will have any proof of belonging to a neighbouring state either. So, where will they go?

International Reactions

U.S. President Donald Trump was in India for a two-day visit at the time of the violent outbreak. Although the death toll was rising during his visit, Trump believed Modi when he said he is working closely with minority communities and is focused on religious freedom⁵⁷. The human rights situation in India has not altered the U.S. strategic interests and the Trump-Modi relationship came away unscathed by the unprecedented violence in the region⁵⁸. This is most likely due to India rising to become a major emerging economy in the BRICS⁵⁹ and being a part of the Emerging and Growth Leading Economics (EAGLE)⁶⁰. Essentially, Modi is “good for business”⁶¹ and has become one of India’s most powerful politicians.

Trump is not alone in remaining neutral on the matter and in Canada, Trudeau’s government has remained mostly silent over the controversial decision to re-introduce the CAA, other than the Foreign Affairs Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne expressing concern⁶². Perhaps the reason for Trudeau’s silence on the matter is to prevent any disturbance to the bilateral negotiations that are working towards a Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA) and a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement⁶³. Also, other states including Russia and France have remained neutral on the matter and have excused it

⁵⁶ Mookerjee, A.S. (2019) “How the National Citizenship Registration in Assam is Shaping a New National Identity in India”. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/how-the-national-citizenship-registration-in-assam-is-shaping-a-new-national-identity-in-india-121152> Accessed: 5th September 2019.

⁵⁷ Ellis-Petersen, H. (2020) “Delhi Rocked by Deadly Protests During Donald Trump’s India Visit”. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/25/delhi-rocked-by-deadly-protests-during-donald-trumps-india-visit> Accessed: 26th February 2020.

⁵⁸ Kugelman, M. (2020) “India’s Illiberal Turn Won’t Shake its Relationship with the United States”. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/28/riots-hindu-modi-trump-delhi-brutal-violence-us-india-relationship/> Accessed: 10th March 2020.

⁵⁹ BRICS Information Portal (2020) <https://infobrics.org/india/> Accessed: 28th March 2020.

⁶⁰ Mukherjee, ‘The Conflict’, 112.

⁶¹ Gettleman, J., Schultz, K., Venkataraman, A., and Yasir, S. (2019) “India Election Gives Modi a 2nd Term”. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/23/world/asia/india-election-narendra-modi.html> Accessed: 28th May 2019.

⁶² Dyer, E. (2020) “Canada’s Politicians Have Stayed Mostly Silent About a Wave of Anti-Muslim Violence in India”. Available at: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-india-modi-1.5484349> Accessed: 15th March 2020.

⁶³ Government of Canada (2020) <https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/india-inde/relation.aspx?lang=eng> Accessed: 9th April 2020.

as an internal affair for India to deal with. Australian Trade Minister Simon Birmingham has taken a similar stance to Trump, thus ignoring the riots in order to make trade negotiations with India. Similarly, the European Parliament have expressed that they trust that India will pursue the decision in line with its constitution and that the CAA is an internal matter⁶⁴.

Despite some countries remaining silent and neutral on the issue, the decision has received international and supranational condemnation and numerous parties within India have opposed the bill, particularly Indian National Congress (INC)⁶⁵. If human rights, diversity, equality and basic tenets of democracy are at the centre of U.S. foreign policy, the Northeast deserves more attention. It is true that they are not the only country to have remained neutral on the matter, but the Trump government should tread cautiously in how it responds to future decisions made by the Modi government. If the OHCHR consider the decision to be “fundamentally discriminatory”⁶⁶, perhaps the U.S. should follow suit.

A Violent Future

The recent pandemic of Covid-19 is a huge distraction for the world to pay little attention not only to India, but to the struggling communities of the Northeast. Although the protests and riots have simmered in recent months due to the lockdown, that is not to say that they will not rise again. It seems unlikely that the riots, or the views of the international community will change Modi’s stance on the matter. The damage and “mischief caused by colonial military ideologues”⁶⁷ appears to be influencing the policymaking decisions of today. The gradual polarisation of India that is encouraged by Modi will undoubtedly set them on a collision course.

If a solution is to be achieved in the Northeast, one needs to take into account the historical factors, as well as the contemporary factors. Also, to achieve a resolution, steps “have to be considered for the region in its entirety and not in isolation”⁶⁸. The conflict in the Northeast has been going on for decades and it is important to consider the changing nature of the

⁶⁴ Roche, E. (2020) “As European Parliament Defers Vote, Delhi Says CAA ‘Internal Matter’”. Available at: <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/-diplomatic-victory-for-india-as-european-parliament-defers-vote-against-caa-11580360422317.html> Accessed: 5th February 2020.

⁶⁵ Al Jazeera ‘India’s Lower’.

⁶⁶ Laurence, J. (2019) “Press Briefing on India”. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25425&LangID=E> Accessed: 15th December 2019.

⁶⁷ Farooqui, ‘Divide and Rule’, 49.

⁶⁸ Mukherjee, ‘An Insider’s’, 117.

conflict over the years. Similarly, the recent decisions being made in the Modi government are deserving of equal attention. There is light at the end of the tunnel, if the government understands the implications of its actions, is willing to broaden dialogue with the numerous ethnic groups who occupy the Northeast and takes into account the impact recent decisions are having on the Muslim population. Other factors including economic development and clamping down on corruption and criminality should be taken into account. Resolution could only be possible if the constitutional principles of diversity and equality take centre stage and the government strives to demilitarise the area and increase human rights. This will not occur if India continues to act as a coloniser, with the Northeast as the colonised. The situation ought to be handled very carefully and if Delhi is to avoid another misadventure, it needs to consider the Northeast's complexities before making its next move.

Notes on Contributors

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