

# The Rohingya Violence

Violence has returned to haunt the hapless Rohingya community in Myanmar. The latest round of violence and the subsequent exodus of the Rohingyas from their Arakine homeland had its origins with a series of attacks carried out by the Rohingya militants on 25 August.

By now, one could identify a trend – violence against the Rohingya community, exodus, international condemnation of the regime in Myanmar and a gap in violence. If the present violence-exodus-global condemnation cycle does not cease and a solution is not found within Myanmar, the Rohingya conflict is likely to get internationalized and linked with radical groups elsewhere. This would lead to internationalization of Rohingya violence – with either a section within the Rohingya community getting international support to use violence as a strategy, or those global jihadi groups see Rohingya conflict as an opportunity to expand their footprints in Southeast Asia. Perhaps, it is already happening, as some reports tend to indicate.

Both the above forecasts would complicate the ground situation for the poor Rohingyas who do not have the resources –economic or political to stabilize their situation. With the regime in no mood to provide any political and constitutional space to the Rohingya community within Myanmar, and no support to them from other Burmese ethnic groups, any violent protests by the Rohingyas would be used as a reason by the regime and anti-Rohingya groups.

The following four trends are likely to complicate the Rohingya conflict even further

## 1. The Burning Rohingya Villages: The Triple Jeopardy for the Rohingyas

The first trend is the most dangerous affecting the basic survival of Rohingya community - the continuing violence within Myanmar. The Rohingya community faces a double jeopardy, perhaps a triple jeopardy.

The first threat to the Rohingya survival comes from the nationalist Burmese ethnic groups supported by a section within the Buddhist clergy. Unfortunately, fellow communities – sharing the geographic space in the Rakhine State have turned against the Rohingyas. Two major differences – ethnic and religious complicate the intra-Rakhine community relations within the province jeopardizing the Rohingyas. The Rohingya's speak Bengali and are Muslims, whereas rest in the Rakhine State belongs to different communities – predominantly Buddhist. Other communities including Hindu and Christian in Rakhine constitute less than five percent. Unfortunately, none of the other communities stand up for the Rohingya rights within Rakhine, or in rest of Myanmar. Even the non-Rohingya Muslim community in rest of Myanmar is guarded in their response.

Second threat comes from those self-proclaimed nationalist Burmese groups, supported by a section of the Buddhist clergy led by radical monks. While for the Rakhine based non-Rohingya communities the

Rohingyas are seen as a threat for the scarce resources within the province, for the nationalist-religious groups outside the province, the Rohingyas have become “the other”.

Third threat to the Rohingyas comes from the State. Led by a non-democratic regime, supported by the military, it became easier for the State to politically outcast and constitutionally strip the rights of the Rohingyas making the latter Stateless.

The guillotine finally came down, when political expediency has made Aung San Suu Kyi to ignore the Rohingyas, for she has bigger issues to confront, including the survival of her own government.

So the burning of Rohingya villages in the Rakhine State has not been started by a single torch. But the fire has engulfed not just thatches houses, but an entire community and their future.

### **1. The Social Media based Research: Does it help or complicate further?**

There is a strong perception cutting across different communities within Myanmar that the international community does not appreciate the local sentiments. And worse, a section believes that there are baseless stories about atrocities against the Rohingya community.

There is an element of truth in the above perception. Unfortunately, the social media has been shaping contemporary research and perceptions about Myanmar, especially the Rohingyas. When Facebook and Twitter becomes the basic tool of research, then postings and tweets are taken as real. The biggest injustice to the Rohingya cause has happened in the Social Media.

A BBC report tracking some of the recent photographs posted in the Social media depicting atrocities against Rohingyas found a deliberate misleading. The pictures of two infants crying in front of a dead mother, a man killed and tied to a tree with two women crying in front of his dead body, and a group of floating corpses – were originally claimed of atrocities against the Rohingyas. Further research according to the above report seems to indicate that the photos were actually taken from other situations – some from Africa and Indonesia!

It is easy to post a picture or tweet with few sentences. But its impact is far reaching. The above is not happening only with Rohingyas, but also in other conflict theaters.

Unfortunately, such a distortion strengthens the discourse of the State.

### **1. Internationalization of Rohingya Conflict**

Three sets of internationalization are taking place vis-à-vis the Rohingya conflict; unfortunately, none of them are helping the Rohingyas.

The first is led by the religious sentiment, especially the Muslim countries – starting from Pakistan all the way to the Gulf. Editorials and commentaries on Rohingya conflict have inflamed the popular sentiments

against the Buddhist Myanmar. The latest statement of the OIC is an expression of this collective sentiment.

The second is led by rest of international community; the lead is taken by the UN Refugee Agency and other humanitarian organizations especially the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Crisis Group. Reports by these organizations were based on serious research and extensive field trips and interviews.

Unfortunately, the above interventions have not made a decisive impact on pressurizing the regime in Myanmar to stop the violence against the Rohingyas. Perhaps, the Powers that matter – from US to China and organizations such as the EU look at Myanmar through a narrow prism. Politically Myanmar is opening slowly, and these States have a “larger picture” where the Rohingyas do not fit. Or, perhaps these States look at Myanmar through Aung San Suu Kyi. How can a Nobel Laureate not worry about her own people? Perhaps, the belief is – give her some time, and she would do something.

Perhaps, they have a point. The Lady may finally consider it is time to do something. But there may not be many Rohingyas left in Myanmar.

The last set of internationalization is taking place in the immediate neighbourhood of Myanmar – involving India, Bangladesh, Thailand and rest of Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, the views within Bangladesh are extremely polarized, with a majority unwilling to accept the fleeing Rohingyas. Despite informally settling Rohingyas in different parts of India – from Jammu to Chennai, the official Indian position is unlikely to help Rohingyas. India would also like to look at the larger India-Myanmar picture - involving bilateral relations, Chinese presence and the Northeast militants in Myanmar. ASEAN's position is no different in Southeast Asia.

Result is simple. There are larger issues and the international community “will have to be nuanced” in approaching Myanmar. The Rohingyas are less likely to receive global support; haven't we seen this earlier in Darfur, Rwanda and Burundi?

### **1. Internationalization of Rohingya Violence**

The last trend is likely to invite even more trouble for the Rohingyas within Myanmar. From HaY to its modern Avatar ARSA, a small section within the Rohingya community is getting radicalized and seems to have taken up arms.

The report by International Crisis Group would highlight this issue. On the one hand, there is a danger of global jihadi groups picking up Myanmar as a destination. But, the clear and present danger is a group of Rohingya youth getting training elsewhere, and ideologically influenced by a radical philosophy in the Gulf and returning to Myanmar to fight for a cause. The ARSA leadership has been reported to have trained in Pakistan and ideologically influenced by Saudi Arabia.

The above would pose greater danger to the Rohingyas within Myanmar. The latest round of violence perpetrated against the Rohingyas started with the targeted attack of police posts by the ARSA militants.

Violence can never be an answer. It would only invite more violence. And make political reconciliation even difficult.

And at the international level, let the Rohingya die, for we have nothing to lose but our conscience.