

Caught between Hindu and Buddhist nationalists: Rohingya Muslims face expulsion

Posted: Thu, 17th Aug 2017

The Indian government plans to deport 40,000 Rohingya Muslims living in the country to Myanmar after labelling them all illegal immigrants.

Last week Kiren Rijiju, the junior interior minister, told parliament that the central government had directed state authorities to identify and deport illegal immigrants. He said this included Rohingya, who face persecution in Buddhist-majority Myanmar.

And in an interview with *Reuters*, Rijiju [said](#) the measures would even apply to the 16,500 Rohingya who have been given identity cards by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR says the cards help to "prevent harassment, arbitrary arrests, detention and deportation".

"We can't stop them from registering," Rijiju said. "But we are not [a] signatory to the accord on refugees. As far as we are concerned they are all illegal immigrants. They have no basis to live here. Anybody who is [an] illegal migrant will be deported."

The Indian government says it is in talks with Bangladesh and Myanmar about the plan for deportation. "There's a procedure, there is a rule of law," Rijiju said in his interview. "We can't throw them out just like that. We can't dump them in the Bay of Bengal."

Roughly one million Rohingya live in Myanmar, a Buddhist-majority country. But in recent months tens of thousands have fled amid an intensifying military crackdown in the western state of Rakhine. Some have fled to Bangladesh, India and south-east Asia.

The UN has said the Rohingya are being collectively punished for militant attacks, although the Burmese government disputes this. In February the UN's special adviser [said](#) the violence could amount to crimes against humanity.

There is increasing concern over rising Hindu nationalism in India. In recent years there have been attacks on churches and mosques; Hindu groups have engaged in forced conversions; and there have been [crackdowns](#) on the sale and possession of beef. Last month Ram Nath Kovind, a low-caste politician backed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's conservative religious faction, was [elected](#) president.

In March, Modi appointed Yogi Adityanath as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh – a state of 200m people, around a fifth of whom are Muslim. Adityanath founded the Hindu Yuva Vahini, a religious activist organisation which critics say is a Hindu supremacist group. In one incident a decade ago, court documents [allege](#) that Adityanath's followers went on a rampage, burning Muslim-owned properties and an Islamic mausoleum.

The National Secular Society said the Indian authorities' stance was "deeply troubling". A spokesperson said: "Merging religion and nationalism will always create 'others' to be excluded and discriminated against."

[*Image*](#) from Kiren Rijju's official Facebook page, Rijju with the Prime Minister.

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [FoRB](#)

Related Campaigns

-

[Freedom of religion or belief](#)

Secularism protects freedom of religion or belief for all.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

[We must empower secular schools to assert their ethos](#)

When Islamists tried to bully Michaela Community School, the school refused to back down. Other schools have not been so successful in challenging religious intimidation. Megan Manson explores what made Michaela different. [Read More »](#)

[School's decision to restrict prayer rituals lawful, court finds](#)

Disadvantage to Muslim pupils outweighed by need to promote interests of whole school community, judge says. [Read More »](#)

[The universality of human rights needs defending](#)

Seventy-five years on from the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, its promise of freedom and equality remains a distant dream for those living under religious rule, says Stephen

Evans. [Read More »](#)

Freedom of religion or belief must include the freedom to 'blaspheme'

The freedom to question and criticise religious ideas in the same manner as any other kind is foundational to a democratic... [Read More »](#)

Established church hinders religious freedom, NSS tells UN expert

The NSS has told a UN expert that lack of separation between Church and state is undermining freedom of religion or belief in the UK. [Read More »](#)