

# Modi government blocks Rohingya refugees entering India

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The Indian government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has deployed security forces along India's northeastern borders to prevent thousands of Rohingya refugees entering the country. The Rohingya are fleeing ongoing military violence in Myanmar (Burma). New Delhi also plans to expel around 40,000 Rohingya already in India.

On September 22, Reuters reported that India's Border Security Forces (BSF) had been authorised to use "rude and crude methods" to block the refugees. One official told the news agency, "We won't tolerate Rohingya on Indian soil," he said.

R.P.S. Jaswal, a BSF deputy inspector general leading patrols in the east Indian state of West Bengal, admitted that his troops had been ordered to use chilli grenades and stun grenades. Chilli grenades cause severe irritation and temporarily immobilise people who are targeted.

On Wednesday, the *Hindu* reported that the BSF had pushed back Rohingya trying to cross into the northeastern Indian state of Tripura. The newspaper claimed this was the first such incident since India's home ministry ordered the BSF on August 19 to stop the refugees.

The newspaper has also reported that the chief ministers of Assam and Manipur had instructed border forces to prevent the fleeing Rohingya coming to their states. Assam and Manipur are ruled by political allies of Modi's Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP). The Tripura state government is controlled by the Stalinist Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM)-led Left Front.

A recent editorial in *People's Democracy*, the CPM's web site, criticised government attempts to deport the Rohingya but did not defend the right to asylum or oppose New Delhi's violent border actions. Instead the

publication cynically called on the government to provide the Rohingya with identification papers so they could be sent back when the "conditions are conducive."

During his visit to Myanmar last month, Prime Minister Modi endorsed government claims that the military violence in the Rakhine state was in response to "extremist attacks."

What is occurring in Myanmar is the opposite. The long-standing oppression and military violence against the Rohingya has been intensified under the new ruling regime headed by Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Burmese military has exploited minor attacks by insurgency groups in Rakhine to unleash a murderous ethnic-cleansing program against the minority Muslim community. Over half a million Rohingya have fled Burma since August, with about 400,000 entering Bangladesh and tens of thousands crossing to India.

The BJP's backing for the Myanmar regime is driven by India's geo-strategic ambitions. Encouraged by its strategic partnership with the US, New Delhi wants closer relations with Myanmar in order to isolate China's influence in the region.

Modi's hostility to the Rohingya is also connected to its anti-Muslim communalism, which is used to divide the Indian working class and divert the rising political opposition to the government's austerity measures. In line with this reactionary agenda, the BJP is also stepping up its political and military provocations against Pakistan.

The Congress Party, India's other main bourgeois party, is encouraging the BJP's reactionary attacks on the Rohingya. Congress spokesman Ajay Maken has recently declared that the influx of refugees is a "serious" issue and appealed for an all-party conference to formulate Indian policy.

The BJP has tabled a constitutional amendment to the 1955 Citizenship Act in the Indian parliament. It states that minority communities—Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians—from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan “shall not be treated as illegal migrants.” The reactionary amendment fails to include Muslims from these countries.

Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh claimed that Rohingya were “not refugees” and slammed anyone criticising the government’s crackdown. Speaking last week at a seminar organised by the National Human Rights Commission, Singh declared that human rights for Rohingya had been “raked up” but that they were “illegal immigrants” and posed a “threat to national security.”

Whitewashing the military repression unleashed in Rakhine state, Singh said, “I am sure Myanmar will take positive steps to take back the Rohingya.” He claimed that India’s actions were not in violation of international law because it was not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, however, recently rejected this claim, stating all countries, irrespective of whether they had signed the convention have obligations under customary international law. “They have obligations not to push people back to places where they would face these serious harms,” he said.

Early last week, the Indian government submitted an affidavit to the Supreme Court countering a petition filed by two Rohingya, Mohammad Salimullah and Mohammad Shaqir. The two refugees are attempting to prevent their deportation, arguing that they had fled Burma, because they faced violence, bloodshed and discrimination. The case is to be heard on October 3.

The home affairs ministry affidavit stated that the Rohingyas’ continued stay in India was “illegal” and posed “serious security threats.” It claimed that the refugees could have links with ISI, the Pakistan intelligence agency, Islamic State and other extremist Islamist groups.

The affidavit called on the court to allow the “executive” to make the decision on “illegal immigrants.” In other words, this will allow the government to hand over these refugees to the Burmese military.

Workers in India must oppose the Modi

government’s anti-democratic actions against the Rohingya refugees. The Rohingya are victims of the pro-western government of Suu Kyi and her military backers. They must be given asylum and allowed to live in safety with full democratic rights wherever they choose.



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