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# India's Relations with Muslim Countries during the Implementation of CAA/NRC: India-Indonesia and India-Malaysia Relations

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Submission: 31 August 2022 | Accepted: 31 December 2022

## Abstract

*In 2005, Imtiaz Ahmad wrote an article on the relations between India and the Muslim World. Ahmad argued that the ties between India and the Muslim World would be determined mainly by two factors: (1) the diverse and multiple identities of Indian Muslims and (2) the “relative moderation” driven by the Indian model of secularism. In the wake of the current Indian government led by the Hindu nationalist BJP, it is essential to review Ahmad’s argument. Although BJP is known as a party that strives to strengthen the Hindu nationalists’ agenda in Indian polity, it is vital to note that BJP maintains good relations with most Muslim countries. As BJP furthers its plan to scrap the special status of Kashmir and amend the Citizenship Act, there are worries that India’s stature in the Muslim World will worsen. This article would like to investigate whether the Hindu nationalist outlook in contemporary Indian politics and the standing of the current government towards Indian Muslims will eventually affect India’s relations with the Muslim World, especially in the case of India-Indonesia and India-Malaysia Relations.*

**Keywords:** CAA/NRC, India, Nationalism, Muslim World

## INTRODUCTION

The influence of nationalism in the global politics has been studied continuously by scholars. Since the implementation of Westphalian global order, nationalism is still becoming the *zeitgeist* of the order. As nationalism provided sense of pride and sovereignty to the nations, it became clear that each nation was differentiating itself from each other. That differentiation could be seen in a clearer manner through ‘foreign policy’, or a policy that distinguished central countries’ political orientations to the other. Nationalism clearly ‘helped’ countries to delineate which countries could possibly become its allies, or its enemies. As studied by Woodwell (Woodwell, 2007), rising nationalism had driven several countries to carefully mitigate foreign influence and to exercise control over some territories or people which were considered as alien or foreign. While the meaning of ‘foreign’ itself could be contextual from one case to another, the definition of ‘foreign’ depended on how a nation build its conception of ‘nationhood’ and ‘alien people’ as an opposite of constructed ‘nationhood’. This argument strengthens the notion that foreign policy and nationalism are actually related to each other.

Many other researches have also suggested that the rise of populist, right-wing, and authoritarian populism in several countries prompted the aggressive and ultra-nationalist

foreign policy. Weiss (2019) has explained the case of China, where the case of 'rising nationalism' in China has resulted in more hawkish attitude in the conduct of Chinese foreign policy. From several case studies in Armenia, Georgia, and Hungary, Jenne (2021) also explained that the doctrine of 'sovereignism' promoted by populist parties which are trying to reclaim the sense of 'authentic' state community had clearly affected the foreign policy orientations in the mentioned countries. In the case of Russia, Laruelle (Laruelle, 2015) elaborated that while Russian foreign policy might not be one that was being driven by nationalist agenda, Russian foreign policy could be explained by some of its nationalistic tendencies, which were shown in a post hoc manner after the 2014 Crimean invasion. This paper would like to dedicate its discussion on the case of India under the premiership of Narendra Modi. As explained by Wojczewski (2020) & Plagemann and Destradi (2019), the increasing influence of Hindu nationalism in Indian polity had changed the landscape of Indian foreign policy.

Several experts have remarked on the Premiership of Narendra Modi as a regime that has created a pervasive climate of discrimination against the religious minorities of India, particularly towards Muslim community (Farooqui, 2020; Kim, 2017; Kinnvall, 2019; Wright, 2015). The implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the subsequent protests against the enactment of the Act has caused a series of violence in Delhi in the early months of 2020. The Muslim community was also recently exposed to the hijab ban for Muslim female students in the state of Karnataka, a condition currently under the practical ruling of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (BBC, 2022). These controversial policies have impacted Indian stature in international politics to some extent. The ever-increasing discrimination against Indian Muslim citizens has caused critical responses from global communities, predominantly Muslim countries (Iyer, 2019). Although the responses from Muslim countries were not significantly damaging the relations between India and the Muslim world, a detailed examination should be done to investigate whether the BJP-led and Hindutva-inspired Narendra Modi's premiership has affected India's position in the Muslim world.

This paper wishes to re-examine the argument once brought forward by Imtiaz Ahmad (Ahmad, 2005). Imtiaz Ahmad wrote his article after a brief interregnum of the premiership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who is also coming from the BJP. The government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee happened when the world was grappling with the issue of global terrorism, which actions were being conducted by several groups claiming to represent the interest of Muslims worldwide. With the ascent of Al-Qaeda and its prevalent threats in the South Asia subcontinent, India felt it needed to address the probable radicalism stemming from the Indian Muslim community. In his article, Ahmad argued that while Muslim communities in the surrounding region are experiencing radicalisation, the majority of Indian Muslim communities remained immune from any radical tendencies. Even with the ongoing turmoil in Jammu and Kashmir and the tragic incidents of the 2002 Gujarat riots, which happened between Hindu and Muslim communities, Ahmad indicated that most Indian Muslims were not taking any extreme actions in response to the amok conducted by Hindu nationalists. This immunity from radicalism, according to Ahmad, stemmed from the diverse nature of Indian Muslim society.

Ahmad also tried to assess the nature of relations between India and the Muslim World. According to Ahmad, India's connection with the Muslim world did not necessarily affect the radicalisation of Muslim communities in India. Instead, the changing conjuncture of global politics after 9/11 is a definitive event that could transform the entire framework of Indo-Muslim world relations. Ahmad argued that several factors, such as the American influence over Indian foreign policymakers, the viewpoints of Indian security and military establishment on the issue of terrorism and radicalism in the Muslim world, the background of non-alignment in Indo-Muslim relations, and the efforts to reorient Indian foreign policy, will be keys to understand the development in the relations of India and the Muslim World. Although Ahmad had tried to present some general outlooks on this topic, Ahmad has not explored the detailed picture of the case, particularly in explaining India's 'relative moderation' and the 'diverse' background of Indian Muslims. Another part of Ahmad's analysis that needs to be furthered is elaborating on the critical developments in the relations between India and the Muslim World amidst a new geopolitical dynamic. Ahmad remarked that the analysis of the relations between India and the Muslim World should not be limited to the geopolitical realm of the South Asian subcontinent but also extend beyond the subcontinent.

Thus, this research would like to focus on how India develops its relations with several Muslim countries, especially in the case studies of India-Indonesian relations and India-Malaysian relations. The research will commence its analysis with a brief elaboration of the geopolitical vision of government influenced by Hindutva's values. This research will continue to explain the current circumstances of Indian Muslims and how Indian Muslims should be considered as one of the determinants in analysing India's current standing in the Muslim world. After elaborating on the condition of Indian Muslims and their respective position in Indian foreign policy, this research will also focus on the CAA's event as a critical turning point that changes the nature of relations between India and several Muslim countries, especially in the case of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Some past researches have actually been conducted on the specific matter of Indian-Indonesian relations and Indian-Malaysian relations. Singh (2011) has specifically elaborated the nature of Indian-Malaysian relations from strategic perspective. Singh considered that the bilateral relations between two countries were missing many opportunities that are yet to be explored. While this paper has explored many urgent topics on general development of Indian-Malaysian relations, this paper doesn't specifically discuss the factors that contribute to the development of Indian-Malaysian relations. Another paper written by Chandran (2017) tried to see globalization as determining factor in the Indian-Malaysian relations. Chandran contributed significantly in the study of Indian-Malaysian relations by stating that there are three dimensions which should be seen in order to understand the context of Indian-Malaysian relations in the era of globalizations: political-strategic, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. Singh (J. Singh, 2014) also elaborated some cases of convergence and divergence in India and Malaysia relations, albeit in general manner. An interesting case study on the influence of Indian diaspora was also being constructed by Singh (2014) that strongly argued Indian diaspora as a liability in the Indian-Malaysian relations. Lastly, Chandran

and Nathan (2015) noted that Indian and Malaysian economic cooperation stimulated prominently by both governments. Many of these researches are mainly focusing on the contemporary development in Indian-Malaysian relations from different sectors. Looking at these researches, Indian-Malaysian relations has been assessed in many sectors. But, there is a gap that has not been addressed properly in the case of Indian-Malaysian relations, which is the influence of identity in the bilateral relations.

Indian-Indonesian relations are also important to be discussed in this aspect. Gogoi and Srinivas (2015) have dedicated their paper to present some main features in Indian-Indonesian relations. Gogoi and Srinivas focused their analysis on the recent development of Indian-Indonesian relations, particularly on the issue of how both countries developed their relations in new regional and global political contexts. Another research, such as by Brewster (2011) and Supriyanto (2013), looked on how Indonesia and India could be reliable strategic and security partner amidst new geopolitical development in Asia-Pacific. Supriyanto further argued that India and Indonesia might share new common visions as both countries are redefining their policy orientations in the regional and global politics. In his paper, Mishra (2011) has also touched upon a significant factor that could be main driver in the Indian-Indonesian relations, that is the factor of culture. Manners' (2014) evaluation on Indian-Indonesian relations is also important to be mentioned here, since he argued that Indian-Indonesian relations lacked the acceleration it needed in order to further the bilateral relations. Recent research by Zhang (2021) also emphasized that the bilateral relations between two countries could be advancing but it will be highly dependent on the nature of domestic politics in both countries and geopolitical constraints. This research will fill the gap in terms of addressing the identity factors and domestic political dynamics which actually could in a way or another affect the nature of Indian-Indonesian relations.

## GEOPOLITICAL VISION OF HINDUTVA

Before delving further into the discussion on the Indian stature in the Muslim world, it would be necessary to evaluate the normative framework used by Indian policy maker during the premiership of Modi and Vajpayee. Many experts have remarked that the vision of Hindutva has influenced the foreign policymaking process in the premiership of Narendra Modi. Arndt Michael (2018) noted that there are some expectations from domestic, regional, and international communities that the Indian government, under the rule of the BJP, is expected to change its foreign policy orientation. Even though some figures in BJP are cautious about the possibility of significantly changing the Indian foreign policy orientation, the premiership of Narendra Modi is steadily incorporating Hindutva values into the Indian foreign policy conduct. The strong dominance of Nehruvianist tradition in Indian foreign policy becomes one of the main obstacles for the Hindutva values to be adopted.

Therefore, as noted by Miller and de Estrada (Miller & Sullivan de Estrada, 2017), the foreign policy conduct of Narendra Modi's premiership follows a pragmatic approach to balance the Nehruvianist and Hindutva values. On the one hand, the government of

Narendra Modi is pursuing policies of strategic engagement with many countries based on the Nehruvianist value. Nehruvianist value is based on five principles of peaceful coexistence, also known as *Panchasheel*. These five principles, which Jawaharlal Nehru introduced, consisted of the principles of coexistence, respect for the territorial and integral sovereignty of others, nonaggression, non-interference with the internal affairs of others, and recognition of the equality of others (Verma, 1989). While the *Panchasheel* principles are based on the non-alignment movement, the Hindutva values are trying to contextualise the ancient Hindu civilisational glory and to further the Indian leadership based on the ancient Hindu value of *Vashudhaiva Kutumbakam*. The usage of *Vashudhaiva Kutumbakam* in contemporary times envisions India's role as one of the proactive leaders in ensuring peace and stability in modern global politics.

There are differences between implementing Hindutva values during the premiership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi. Being a leader in the tumultuous times, Atal Bihari Vajpayee paid careful attention to ensuring India's security and India's territorial integrity against the potential threats coming not only from the surrounding hostile neighbours but also from the religious and terrorist organisations claiming to represent the repressed Muslims. Despite coming from the party directly linked to the Hindu nationalist movement, Vajpayee did not act according to the Hindutva values. Instead, most experts consider Vajpayee to follow the logical realist framework in pursuing Indian interests in regional and global politics (Chaulia, 2002; Talukdar, 2018). The hostile conducts against Pakistan and the Pokhran-II nuclear tests that were happening during the premiership of Vajpayee were not an indication of Hindutva influences in Vajpayee's political behaviour. Instead, what Vajpayee is trying to do is to re-contextualise Nehruvianism in a new geopolitical environment. Vajpayee once considered that the traditional Nehruvianism constructed in the heydays of the Cold could not answer the unprecedented threats (Singh, 2007).

Here, Vajpayee tried to design a new vision of peaceful coexistence that would enable India to play a more active role in a region. The fast-paced changes in regional and global politics mean that India has to be responsive in answering new challenges. In many ways, Vajpayee's conduct in Indian foreign affairs has been marked by strategic calculations and careful engagements. The relatively stable relations between India and Pakistan, amid the heightened tensions after the Pokhran-II test and Kargil War, indicated that Vajpayee's considerations were mainly motivated based on material interests. Vajpayee's premiership was tested by the unfortunate events of sectarian Hindu-Muslim riots.

Nonetheless, despite several harsh criticisms from Western countries, India under Vajpayee has tried its best to prove its credential as a secular 'Hindu' nation that respects and upholds the right of its Muslim and other religious minorities in front of the international community. Vajpayee's concerns about reforming the Indian economy & stabilising Indian politics and security have made him realise that promoting the Hindutva value in Indian foreign policy conducts could bring more harm and disadvantages. Overall, realism and pragmatism in Vajpayee's era helped India go through a challenging era in Indian foreign policy.



If Vajpayee did not attempt to infuse Hindutva's values into Indian foreign policy, how about Narendra Modi? Does he attempt to stay away from involving Hindutva values in Indian foreign policy? Narendra Modi is often called one of the most successful Hindutva politicians. Additionally, he is also recognised as a Hwa politician who follows the footsteps of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, mainly due to his pragmatism in his effort to catalyse Gujarat's economic development. After the sweeping victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2014 Indian parliamentary election, Modi had promised to reboot and reorient Indian foreign policy in order to fulfil the vision of '*Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat*' (One India, Great India), which the path toward the vision will be laid by the motto of *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas* (Unity and Development for everyone) (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014). As mentioned earlier in this writing, no one is quite sure about the reboot and reorientation of Indian foreign policy that Modi will conduct in his first premiership. An expert even noted that specific complex geopolitical triggers would cause Modi to act impulsively and unpredictably (Sahoo, 2014). Several experts have shown concern that his legacy in the 2002 Gujarat riot and his repeated remarks on his commitment to reinstate the Indian civilisational legacy will tarnish Indian credentials as a secular and democratic nation, and this will have severe repercussions on Indian foreign policy (Dalrymple, 2014; Harneit-Sievers and Bertram, 2014; Mishra, 2014; Prakash, 2014; Shainin, 2014).

What happened in subsequent years after Modi's election to the position of Indian Prime Minister has some concerns initially pointed out by experts. Modi intended to revive the glorious Hindu past seen in Akhand Bharat's vision. This vision had affected how India would view its non-Hindu citizens, its neighbouring region, and the larger context of global politics. This intention of Hindutva to revive the glorious Hindu past was unfortunately marred by the alienation of minorities and communities outside of the 'normal' conception of Hindu citizenship (Anand, 2005). This worsening alienation was mainly driven by the ontological insecurity caused by the forceful exposition of secularism towards the Indian society and the extreme responses from the Hindu nationalists against the process of political modernisation and secularisation (Kinnvall and Svensson, 2021). Hindutva is a by-product of this long process which eventually gained necessary momentum when Narendra Modi's government created a single, unified identity of Indian citizens (Prakash, 2020). This notion of creating a single, unified identity of Indian citizens resulted in clearly defined boundaries between the 'true' citizen in the realm of *Akhand Bharat* and the non-citizens. They fell outside the ideal portrayal of a 'true' Indian citizen (Wojczewski, 2020).

This tendency to implement boundaries and discriminative policies was deemed by experts such as Anand (2009) as an effort by the Hindutva political movement to build the conception of schizophrenic nationalism. The development of Indian nationalism with these pejorative qualities had marred Indian images and Indian geopolitical standings in parts of the Muslim world and the global community. While significant incidents between Hindus and Muslims did not necessarily mark the first premiership of Narendra Modi, several policies enacted by accomplices of Narendra Modi in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), such as the politics of cow protection and the paranoid responses against so-called 'love jihad,' had been noted with criticism

by human rights organisations and international bodies. The debate surrounding the system of the National Register of Citizens, which excluded millions of Muslims from being recognised as full Indian citizens, particularly became the moment that brought India to a critical conjuncture in its relations with parts of the Muslim world. However, there were no significant impacts felt by India in this regard. The concerns of discrimination against Muslims have been noted by several of India's prominent Muslim allies in the surrounding regions, such as Malaysia, Iran, and Afghanistan. In the context of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), many Western countries are concerned about the human rights violations occurring during the anti-CAA protests.

Regardless of the critical evaluation surrounding the incorporation of Hindutva and Hindu-centric nationalism in Indian foreign policies, several arguments have shown that the premiership of Narendra Modi in both the first and second terms was implementing Hindutva in soft ways. These arguments were constructed because some scholars realised that Narendra Modi did not make any significant changes or reboot the fundamentals of Indian foreign policy. Instead, Narendra Modi tried to insert some changes and adjustments in the conduct of Indian foreign policy. The Indian government under Narendra Modi was not going to readjust the Indian foreign policy radically. At that time, the only rational option for Modi and his foreign policy team was to pragmatically assess the status quo in the Indian foreign policy establishment and arrange priorities that would align with new plans for Indian foreign policy visions. The Hindutva values were promoted more softly and applied in a logical framework similar to Vajpayee's realism alternative to the Nehruvianist principles (Michael, 2018; Miller and Sullivan de Estrada, 2017).

Narendra Modi's foreign policy team thus devised a way to pave some ways for Hindutva to play a positive role in enhancing India's image in international affairs. In the examples of International Yoga Day and the promotion of Yoga and Indic culture, Hindutva had become one of the prime causes that promoted Indian cultural diplomacy globally (Miller and Sullivan de Estrada, 2017, p. 37). Another aspect that shows the contribution of Hindutva toward Indian foreign policy is the promotion of BJP-led states' accomplishments at the global level. This effort was inspired mainly by Narendra Modi's tenure as Chief Minister of Gujarat, which is now continued by most BJP-led states, such as Uttar Pradesh and Bangalore. The re-branding effort for these BJP-led states is one of the ways to softly promote Hindutva as one of the main positive drivers in the new Indian foreign policy. The implementation of 5T (Tradition, Talent, Tourism, Trade, and Technology) in the effort to brand India is seen as a part of integrating the soft version of Hindutva into the Indian foreign policy (Michael, 2018, p. 70).

Another analysis that needs to be mentioned is that there is no connection between Hindutva and the conduct of Indian foreign affairs during the premiership of Narendra Modi. As explained by Krzysztof (2018) in his paper, the inclination of Narendra Modi's government to incorporate Hindutva in the aspects of Indian foreign affairs could not be shown. This inclination is due to the fact that while Narendra Modi is prominently displaying Hindutva politics in domestic political affairs, the case is not the same in foreign political affairs. Notwithstanding the fact that the international community is witnessing the discriminatory policies instigated by organisations affiliated with Hindu

nationalism, India can still conduct friendly and cordial relations with many Muslim countries without any significant challenges or hurdles.

Krzysztof noted that there are several reasons behind this condition. Firstly, there is a clear consensus on the central issues of Indian foreign policy, despite the divergence of ideologies adopted by Indian political parties. Secondly, BJP, as a national party pursuing a strategic vision in the global arena, needed to show itself as a flexible political party. Considering the iron-clad establishment of the non-partisan Indian Ministry of External Affairs, BJP could not allow the Hindutva establishment represented by RSS to disrupt the grand design of foreign policymaking still implemented in place. A disruption would cause a serious mishap to the whole foreign policymaking process. It is also essential to be noted that the divergence of position in RSS itself on the issue of foreign policy would be another critical point to disallow RSS's direct influence on the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

In summary, the above explanation is intended to show at least three significant streams in assessing Hindutva's influence in the premiership of Narendra Modi. The first stream argued that Hindutva's influence on Indian foreign policy has strong tendencies. This strong tendency of Hindutva brought severe damage that tarnished Indian stature in global politics. The second stream of thought that Narendra Modi proposed was that Narendra Modi promoted pragmatism with a soft inclusion of Hindutva in the Indian foreign policy. The promotion of pragmatism is the only possible and rational choice that could be taken by the Indian government, considering the complexity of the domestic and foreign politics of India. The third stream of thought saw that there is no direct correlation or connection between Hindutva and Indian foreign policy due to the existence of a solid foreign policymaking establishment in India.

## **THE RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND THE MUSLIM WORLD**

Some issues surround the nature of relations between India and the Muslim World. First, when considering the nature of relations between India and the Muslim World, it should be realised that India is one of the countries with the most populous Muslim communities in the World. Despite becoming one of the largest countries which host Muslim populations in the World, India was not considered a natural member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Besides India's status as a secular Hindu country, Pakistan's continuous attack on India in the case of Kashmir in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation had disallowed India's further engagement with the organisation (Singh, 1994). Initially, during the founding years of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, India was invited to present its delegation to OIC's conference, but Pakistan threatened to boycott the conference (Khan, 2019).

Recently, there have been several attempts from some OIC members to include India as one of the members of the OIC. Some countries, such as Qatar, support India in its way for membership in the OIC (Abhyankar, 2018). Bangladesh even argued that there should be a change in the rulings on membership applications that would eventually allow India to become a member of OIC (The Times of India, 2018). The disqualification of India just



because of its status as a secular non-Muslim country contradicts the fact that several non-Muslim countries, such as Guyana, have been included as permanent member state of the OIC. In 2006, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia also proposed that India should be one of the 'Observer' states in the organisations (Gulf News, 2006). In year 2019, India was invited as a guest of honour by OIC and the United Arab Emirates as the conference host country (Mint, 2019). These recognition of India's importance in the Muslim world are notable signs that should not be dismissed.

It is important to note that several Muslim countries could actually think that the voice of Indian Muslims is underrepresented in the organisation and some channels need to be opened for these voices to be recognised as well. Pakistani opposition and its continuing block against Indian membership remain the most critical challenge for India and Indian Muslims to be accommodated in the OIC. Besides, the debates surrounding Kashmir's situation and the reactions also became a significant hurdle for India's membership in the OIC. Due to the official ruling in the OIC, an aspirant state could not be applying to the membership in OIC when the specific aspirant state is having an ongoing conflict with one of the member countries of OIC (The Times of India, 2022).

Second, the position of Indian Muslim communities as the one of the determinants as well as crucial broker in the relations between India and the Muslim World should not be overlooked. Not many researches are dedicated to analyse the influence of Indian Muslim in the process of Indian foreign policymaking. With the amount of Indian Muslim totalling to almost quarter billion people and will reach the number of three hundred million in 2050 (or almost 11% in total), India will be a non-Muslim, secular country which will host the largest populations of Muslim in the world (Hackway, 2015). However, even when the population of Indian Muslims had peaked to the number of three hundred million by that year, there will still be more Hindu citizens living in India than Muslims, accounting to at least four Hindus in every five Indian citizens. This possible scenario is a delicate one, noticing that relations between Hindus and Muslims in India are still having the tense nature. However, this tense relations are balanced with India's strong credential as a secular nation in the global politics. India has been relatively successful in building good and stable relations with many Muslim countries.

As a matter of fact, many of the relations were with Muslim countries were forged at the zenith of Non-Alignment Movement in 1960s and 1970s. In this period, although Indian Muslims were not having prominent roles in Indian diplomacy, India had constructed cordial relations with Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iraq, Indonesia, and many other countries within the boundaries of the Muslim World. As indicated by Theodore P. Wright (1982), Indian Muslims had been able to become a determining factor in the nature of relations between India and Muslim countries. This is a particular issue that needs to be considered due to the limited numbers of Indian Muslims that were being represented in the Indian civil service. Instead of the direct involvement of Indian Muslim communities in the bureaucracy, Indian Muslims are primarily involved through mediation and influence exerted by several Muslim communities.

Wright argued that the existence of certain Muslim groups in India as middleman minority have successfully exerted the interest of Indian Muslim towards the Indian government. One of the groups is the Dawoodi Bohra's community, who is known for their political pragmatism and business networks, who was becoming the largest donator for the Congress in the 1970s. Especially during the leadership of Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin, Dawoodi Bohra community have significant roles in strengthening the relations between India and several Arab countries, such as Egypt and Jordan. On another side, Wright also noted that the relations between India and Muslim countries were also being disturbed by events such as the Arab-Israeli War in 1960s and 1970s & the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Both of these events were giving detrimental effects towards Indian government and the policies of Indian government towards Indian Muslim.

The Arab-Israeli War in 1973 had resulted significant impact on the economies of the Gulf countries which resulted in cash donations to various Muslim establishment in India coming from multi-million petrodollar Muslim countries. These donations were enabling Muslim educational establishments in India to develop its capacity and also to turn their Islamic orientation into a more radical and violent one. The inclusion of Wahhabi-oriented curriculum is radicalising several students and quickly becoming security concerns for Indian security establishment. The Islamic revolution in Iran has also fuelled several separatists in Kashmir to openly declaring their support for Pakistani politics and also to encourage Indian Muslims to become more confrontational towards the Indian government. At the end of his paper, Wright did argue that the nature of India and Muslim World relations will still very much be depended on the hostile relations between India and Pakistan, and less on the relations between India and countries in the Western Asia.

Compared to today's geopolitical context faced by the Indian government, some of his arguments are not holding relevance anymore. Nevertheless, several Muslim communities are still playing distinctive roles in ensuring the development of relations between India and the Muslim world. Not only limited to Bohra, specific Muslim organisations such as Student Islamic Organization of India and also Kerala-based and Azhar-oriented *Markazu Saqafathi Sunniyya* are also playing some parts – albeit liminal – in developing the relations between India and the Muslim world (Visakh, Santosh and Mohammed Roshan, 2021). The increasing presence of Muslims in Indian foreign service is also becoming one of the main reasons behind the more robust bonds between India and Muslim countries. Several of Indian Muslims' foreign officers, such as Syed Akbaruddin, Ausaf Sayeed, Salman Haider and Salman Khurshid, have seated in the critical positions as high-ranking diplomats who have represented Indian represented in the global forum.

The expanding role of Indian diaspora and Indian economic interests in the Gulf, which is mediated by Indian companies owned by Indian Muslim businessmen, are giving significant improvements in the correspondence between India and Muslim countries. Considering these recent developments, it is fair enough to say that Indian Muslims' role in crafting new developments and endeavours are gaining more importance than previous decades. Narendra Modi's government is well aware of this fact and involving more Muslim diplomats serving in Indian foreign service to serve in more influential capacity.

However But, as being noticed by Huju (2022) in her breakthrough work on Indian diplomats, there are several efforts to 'saffronise' or entrench the values of Hindutva to the Indian diplomatic cadres. Despite of these efforts by the nationalist BJP government, the inherent ethics and code of conduct which were already applied by Indian diplomat cannot be easily replaced by Hindutva values and strong nationalist tendencies.

Third, it should also be noted that there are several issues which could significantly affect India's stature in the Muslim World. Among the most crucial issues in this aspect, the case of Islamic radicalism affects India's position and policies toward Muslim world and Muslim countries. Central to the concerns of India and the Muslim World is the issue of Islamic radicalism, especially the activities of movements related to Islamic radicalism in South Asia and the neighbouring regions. With the rise of Islamic radicalist movements such as al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jemaah Islamiyah, some Muslim countries are aligning themselves with the alliance of Global War against Terror. The participation of these Muslim countries is primarily being driven by American invitation towards these Muslim countries. Regarding this issue, India is having some significant differences and divergent point of views with neighbouring Muslim countries regarding the nature of Islamic radicalism and terrorist movements affiliated with Islam.

The problem that particularly disturbed Indian establishment is the existence of militia and armed groups affiliated to the radicalist movements within the borders of Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Bangladesh. Besides the activities of insurgency in Kashmir, India also blamed Pakistan for not being able to resolve the terrorism and Islamic radicalism in its own country. The existence of groups such as *Jaish-e-Mohammed* and *Lashkar-e-Taiba* and their series of attacks in India (notably the 2001 Indian Parliament attack, the 2007 Samjhauta Express bombing and the notorious 2008 Mumbai attacks) had been used as a proof for India to accuse Pakistan and its security establishment to have either direct or indirect involvement in endangering India's security and stability (Doval, 2007).

How Indian Muslim establishment reacted to these terrorism-related activities? One of the largest, earliest, and the most authoritative Muslim bodies in India, Jamiat-e-Ulama Hind has defended cases of terror-suspects and terror-accused. *Jamiat-e-Ulama Hind* has even set up a legal cell in order to work and provide legal services for at least 700 accused in trials related to terrorism cases in India. These accusations were being legally assisted by *Jamiat-e-Ulama Hind* due to the number of Indian Muslims that are allegedly falsely indicated and implicated in cases related to terrorism. *Jamiat-e-Ulama Hind* defended its action as a part of an effort to defend the minority Muslim community against the perpetual discrimination (OpIndia, 2021).

On the other side, Indo-Bangladeshi relationships were also marked by the incidents of terrorism and separatism conducted by several terrorist organisations, such as *Harkatul Jihad al-Islami* and *Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh*. These groups, has been allegedly funded by Pakistan in order to disrupt and change the secular government to be an Islamic system (Momen, 2020). Some of the activities conducted by these organisations are also occurring within the land borders of India and Bangladesh and has increased the awareness of Indian security establishment over time. Another issues that has that is

becoming a severe obstacle in Indo-Bangladeshi relations is also the issue of irregular migration that are happening from Bangladesh to the states of Assam and West Bengal in India. Some of these migrations were occurring incredibly happening during the years of Bangladeshi Independence War and the following years due to the continuation of political and economic instability in Bangladesh (Singh, 2009). This irregular migration alone has contributed to the number of unrecorded migrants from Bangladesh that will definitely impacted India's societal and security stability. This eventually ended in the enactment of National Registry of Citizen and Citizenship Amendment Act.

## CAA/NRC AS A TURNING POINT

The debates surrounding NRC and CAA are not only going on between Indian Muslims and Hindu communities, but also within the Muslim communities itself. Initially, the debates are happening between the Muslim communities in Assam, one of the hotspots of irregular migrations in India. *Jamiat Ulama-e Hind* branch of Assam has created a new theory on the existence of irregular migrants from Bangladesh who have resided since the years of Bangladeshi Independence War. *Jamiat Ulama-e Hind* branch of Assam considered that the community were originally Assamese according to historical data provided by them. Hence, *Jamaat Ulama e-Hind* Branch of Assam stated that this community should not be disqualified from their Indian citizenship. A different opinion was being presented by native Assamese Muslim organisations, such as *Ujoni Asom Muslim Kalyan Parishad*. This organisation, together with native Assamese Muslim organisations, is rejecting the "absurd theory" proposed by *Jamiat Ulama e-Hind* Assam-Branch, saying it as having no clear basis (Acharyya, 2019).

When the NRC system has been established and CAA has been passed into the legislation by two houses of Indian parliament, the series of persecutions start to be felt by Indian Muslim. Several debates were notably occurred between Muslim communities of India, particularly within the Shia community which was known for their strong support and ties towards the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. One of the leading Shia clerics in India, Maulana Kalbe Jawad, said that Shia community in India should be making a fundamental distinction between the NRC and CAA and not getting involved in politically-charged issues (ANI, 2020). His statements were then criticised by many parts of Muslim communities, saying that it does not go in line with Shia Islam's main message on injustice. Aside of that, not many Indian Muslim groups are supporting the NRC/CAA, noticing that this could well be a method indicted by BJP politicians to fuel the anger of Indian Muslims, which will consequently make it easy for BJP politicians and Hindu nationalists to brand Muslim as 'anti-nationalist' and to exclude Muslim entirely from the general public life of Indians.

How this issue then resonates to the global level, especially to the Muslim communities outside India? Indian neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, are obviously disturbed with the notions that their countries are discriminating the minority Muslim communities and non-Muslim communities inside of their respective countries. Afghanistan, once a nation known for its affinity with Indian

government, also shocked by the decision of India to instate CAA/NRC rulings. Several Afghanistan citizens even conducted protests against India's stance against Afghanistan in the context of CAA/NRC rulings (Tripathi, 2020). The reactions also came from not only from India's immediate neighbours but also India's strategic partners in various parts of the Muslim worlds, such as Western Asia and Southeast Asia. One of the India's strategic partner in the West Asia, Iran is concerned about India's "discriminatory" policies against Muslim and lack of actions against extremist Hindus. Despite the ongoing projects in the Port of Chahbahar, Iranian Supreme Leader and Iranian Foreign Minister constantly reminded India to restrain the acts of 'senseless thuggery' against Indian Muslim (OutlookIndia, 2020).

Beside Iran, Turkey is also joining in condemning the action of several Indian citizens towards Muslim as "massacre" (Ensonhaber, 2020). Several parliament members in Gulf countries, such as Bahrain and Kuwait, were also joining hands in giving condemnation and showing concerns for the rights of Indian Muslim (National Herald India, 2020). The notable example of straightforward rejection was also shown by the Malaysian Prime Minister, which questions the necessity behind the creation of CAA/NRC rulings. Last but not least, several Indonesian parliamentarians together with Indonesian Muslim scholar council were closely monitoring the anti-CAA/NRC protests and the resulting riots. This paper would like to specifically address the India-Indonesian relations and the Indian-Malaysian relations that were being affected in the course of CAA riots. Indonesia and Malaysia were being chosen as case studies because these countries were sharing similar identities as multicultural Muslim nation located in the same region of Southeast Asia. Nevertheless. But, the responses of Indonesia and Malaysia towards CAA/NRC policies could be clearly distinguished from each other. The analysis would be focusing on how both countries are constructing response towards the CAA/NRC controversies and reasons why both countries could be constructing different views on this case.

## **INDONESIAN RESPONSE TO CAA/NRC AND ITS EFFECTS ON INDIAN-INDONESIAN RELATIONS**

Indonesia has always been considered as one of the strategic allies by India. Both countries has shared a lot of common concerns on many issues, ranging from economic to strategic issues. Until now, India-Indonesian relations is not encountering serious troubles and challenges because of this common ground. Kaura (2018) argued that in the changing dynamics of Indo-Pacific Security, India and Indonesia had chosen to become close allies to each other because both countries shared security and economic interests in the region. Supriyanto (2013b) called this reinforced commitment as a journey toward 'convergent mandala', which ensured both countries to leave the mutual neglect that had separated Indonesia and India for so long. Pankaj Jha (2008) also argued that Indonesian-Indian bilateral cooperation could be working well in terms of security and maritime sectors.

Furthermore, what makes the relations between Indonesia and India are thriving is due to the fact that both countries have sensitivities in ensuring that they are not



violating each other's sovereignty by rejecting to comment on internal affairs of each other, such as in the case of separatism in Kashmir and Papua. This has helped India and Indonesia to develop a sense of mutual respect and trust throughout the period of different governments. Currently, both countries are already implementing the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as a way to advance the bilateral relations between India and Indonesia (PTI, 2020).

During the premiership of Narendra Modi, India and Indonesia has reached substantial progress in its bilateral relations. But at the same time, there are several challenges that are started to arise during the early years of Narendra Modi's premiership. As Narendra Modi begins to strengthen the Hindutva credential in his administration, several policies has been affected with Hindutva values. CAA/NRC is also becoming one of the central policies that are significantly influenced by Hindutva. As CAA/NRC effectively became a law in late 2019, several Indonesian Muslim organisations intensively followed the development of CAA/NRC and its effects against Indian Muslims. As the protest and counter-protest of CAA/NRC movement turned violent, Islamic Defender Front and several representatives of Islamic organisations in Indonesia were protesting in front of the Embassy of India in Jakarta (DetikNews, 2020). Some Muslim humanitarian organisations, such as recently-banned ACT Foundation, were also collecting humanitarian drive for persecuted Indian Muslim (ACT, 2020). Indonesia's state-sponsored supreme religious body, the Indonesian Council of Ulama, even sent an official invitation to Ambassador Pradeep Kumar Rawat to attend a meeting to clarify the current plight of Indian Muslims. The meeting was planned to be attended by representatives of Indonesian Muslim organisations. Nevertheless, before this meeting could happen, Ambassador Rawat skipped the meeting due to his official visit (Detiknews, 2020a). Additionally, it should be noted that Ambassador Rawat had met with Coordinating Minister for Political, Security and Legal Affairs, Prof Mahfud MD (Detiknews, 2020b; PKS, 2020). During this meeting, Ambassador Rawat had successfully confirmed to the Minister that the situation is under the control of Indian government. The responses were not only given by the civil society organisations, but also by the parliamentary members.

Several parliamentary members from 1st Commission of Indonesian House of Representatives were commenting on the alleged discrimination and violent persecutions conducted by Hindutva extremists towards Indian Muslims. Sukamta, one of the senior-ranking members of the commission who is also member of Islamist Justice and Prosperous Party, asked the government to strategically react against the discriminative policies in India (PKS, 2020). Other parliamentary member from Democratic Party, Teuku Riefky Harsya also resonated similar argument that has been delivered by Sukamta (Tirto, 2022). A different opinion was presented by TB Hasanuddin, another member of the commission, which stated that Indonesia believed that this is an internal affairs which could be managed by the Indian government (Gesuri.id, 2020).

While the members of Indonesian parliament actively reacted to the controversy of CAA/NRC, Indonesian Foreign Ministry did not provide any specific comment and response toward the Indian government. Instead, it is the Indonesian Minister of Religious

Affairs who has voiced his grave concern over the violent that has been happening between the Hindu and Muslim communities in India (Kemenag, 2020). In this case, it could be concluded that official stance of Indonesian government did not condemn the Indian government, as Indonesian government believed that this is a case of domestic nature that Indian government should be able to solve with its own capability. Thus, CAA/NRC might have an effect on how Indonesian citizens perceive India, but it is not damaging the whole nature of Indian-Indonesian relationship. Instead, India continued its strategic engagement with Indonesian government throughout the critical time.

## **MALAYSIAN RESPONSE TO CAA/NRC AND ITS EFFECT ON INDIAN-MALAYSIAN RELATIONS**

As one of the countries which hosted significant numbers of Indian diaspora and Overseas Indian in Southeast Asia, Malaysia is always regarded as one of the critical partners of India in the region. According to the statistical data from year 2020, Malaysia currently hosted at least 2.016.000 Malaysian of Indian origin, that is consisted of at least 6.8% of total population of Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). This number signifies the importance of Malaysia in the eyes of India, especially in the era where Indian government decided to embrace its diaspora whom it called as PIO or Persons of Indian Origin. The Indian-Malaysian relationship has been established in a solid foundation due to both countries sharing the similar fate as countries which have been colonised by the United Kingdom. Many of Malaysian military officers were being trained at the heart of the British Raj and also obtained education together with fellow Indian officers. The relations between both countries were very much sustained by the membership of both India and Malaysia in the Commonwealth organisation. Despite this close formal affiliations, Singh (Singh, 2014) once argued that Indian-Malaysian relations was a 'missed opportunity'.

During the early 2010s, both governments of India and Malaysia successfully agreed on several ground-breaking agreements that founded new pathways of cooperation between two countries. Among the agreements that were signed include the Joint Statement of Enhanced Strategic Partnership between India and Malaysia. Both countries also established the Joint Commission that would enable both countries to continue their engagement in a more constructive manner (MEA India, 2013). While this positive trends continue to happen in the bilateral relations between India and Malaysia, the return of Mahathir Mohammad to the politics and his subsequent victory slowly changed the dynamics of bilateral relations between India and Malaysia. Mahathir Mohammad is a politician who believes in pan-Islamist agenda. During the premiership of Mahathir, Malaysia was aligning itself with the existing alliance between Turkey and Pakistan whose trying to tackle the issue of global Islamophobia in many sectors (Anadolu Ajansı, 2019). Mahathir's vision in pan-Islamism and Islamophobia influenced his ways in dealing with India. Many of the problems in the context of Indian-Malaysian relations were originated from Mahathir's personal values. One of the earliest turmoil in the context of Indian-Malaysian relations began when Mahathir Mohammad decided not to extradite Zakir Naik, who was allegedly accused to incite religious and racial hatred in Malaysia.

Mahathir Mohammad defended his case by saying that “not many country would receive Zakir Naik and would ensure his safety” (Malaysiakini, 2019).

Indian-Malaysian bilateral relations was getting worsened once more by Mahathir Mohammad's remarks on Kashmir and CAA/NRC controversies. Mahathir Mohammad commented that he stood by his remarks because he was only following the existing UN regulation on the Kashmir issue and defended the rights of Kashmiri people based on that regulation. Since the issue of Kashmir is a matter of national sovereignty for India, one of the largest trade association in India decided that it will impose an import ban for Malaysia's palm oil product. In response to this, Mahathir said that Malaysia will carefully assess the impact of the import ban and will carefully engage with Indian government . Not long after the revocation of Article 370 regarding the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, Mahathir also responded strongly to the CAA/NRC controversy. Mahathir's statement clearly disturbed Indian authorities because Mahathir said that he needed to be frank about the wrong things that are happening in India (Reuters, 2020). His statement was so speculative that Indian Foreign Ministry felt compelled to call Malaysian Embassy to clarify Mahathir's statement and call Mahathir not to comment on any 'internal matters' of India. India even decided to halt import of palm oil and other commodities from Malaysia as a retaliation to the Mahathir's derogatory comments(Reuters, 2019). Responding to this, Mahathir said that Malaysia will not retaliate against and emphasised that trade should not justify any kind of wrongdoings. In this context, some Malaysian MPs are also supporting Mahathir's statements. Langkawi MP and Lumut MP supported the government's effort to publicly support the cause of Indian Muslim, despite the trade ban currently put into place (Dewan Rakyat Malaysia, 2020) . Besides this, there are no further comments from Malaysia politicians and civil society organisations that followed Mahathir's leads.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, it could be said that the government of India under Narendra Modi tried to balance the national interests of India and its need to accommodate the Hindutva value in the conduct of Indian foreign policy. While India always wanted its relations with its strategic partners in region to continue develop in positive manner, India's strong inclination to Hindutva had affected certain countries' stance on India. It could be said that India's decision to redefine the concept of Indian citizenship had really prompted strong responses from many Muslim countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia who are known as Muslim countries and also strategic partner of India. While both countries has expressed similar concern over the CAA/NRC controversies, there are differences on how both countries have reacted to and continue their bilateral engagement after the controversies.

The case of Indonesia shows that civil society organisations and parliament members are having essential role in shaping the discourse of the debate surrounding the lack of inaction and clear policies by Indonesia government on the case of CAA/NRC. This lack of inaction even drove Indonesian Council of Ulama to invite the Indian Ambassador for a

meeting. A visible democratisation process in Indonesian foreign policy discourse could be witnessed this case. But, civil society demands does not really push Indonesian government to succumb to the demand. Indonesia's strong ties to India really determine the Indonesian official response in this case of CAA/NRC. As Indonesia has shown in the case of Kashmir, Indonesia did not really want to involve in the internal matters of India and did not want to make its response affecting other strategic sectors of bilateral cooperation.

The case of Malaysia displays that Malaysia tend to see its credential as a Muslim nation more important than its status as an Indian strategic partner. This was mainly seen especially during the reign of Mahathir Mohammad whose tried to attract public support by publicly supporting many causes in the Muslim world, including the current plight of Indian Muslims. It could be seen from the Malaysian case that Indian Hindutva vision in its governance could really affect and disturb the dynamics of bilateral relations between two countries. The disturbance even brought serious consequences to the trade activities between two countries. Aside of Mahathir's personal values and inclinations towards pan-Islamist agenda, the case of Malaysian identity politics could also be influential in determining the course of Malaysian policies in the CAA/NRC. It should also be noted that the lack of civil society response meant that Malaysia has a more centralised and authority-based decision making process in its foreign policy. Malaysian people have also entrusted their government to formulate the foreign policy program that would represent their political and religious interest without necessarily have to demand more from the Malaysian government.

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