

Guardians of law and order: India's success story in curbing illegal immigration outshines France

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Opinion

The porous borders have become susceptible entry points for illegal immigrants and extremist elements, posing potential threats to our nation's security and socioeconomic fabric

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View of a street with cars, burnt during night clashes between protesters and police on 30 June, 2023. Reuters

As the embers of discontent continue to smoulder in the aftermath of the France riots, the discourse on secularism and its role in a multi-faith society has taken centre stage. France, a country historically renowned for its commitment to liberty, equality, and fraternity, has navigated the intricate path of secularism, aiming to preserve the state's neutrality towards religion while accommodating a diverse populace. However, this noble aspiration has not been without its challenges with the rise of radicalism and extremist ideologies within some segments of the Muslim population.

Striking a balance has become an arduous endeavour, for any attempts to address these concerns have been met with conflicting interpretations of secularism and cries of religious discrimination. As we explore the contours of this predicament, it becomes

evident that there are lessons to be learned from a nation that has endeavoured to foster unity amidst its own intricate cultural fabric: India.

India, a country renowned for its mosaic of languages, faiths, and traditions, offers a unique perspective on immigration and religious coexistence. Despite being home to a vast array of religious groups, including a substantial Muslim population, India has managed to tackle the challenges of immigration and extremism with remarkable resilience. While not free from controversies and incidents, learning from India's experiences may provide France and indeed the rest of the world, with innovative and adaptive solutions in addressing the pressing concerns of immigration and extremism that transcend national borders and demand collective global action.

From the senseless bloodshed at the Charlie Hebdo headquarters to the tragic massacre at the Bataclan concert hall, the country has endured an alarming surge of violence. Delving into the heart of this crisis, we find that France's turbulent history with North African nations like Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia plays a pivotal role in shaping the current conundrum. A tale woven with interventionism, immigration, and identity struggles, France's complex relationship with the Muslim world holds crucial clues to understanding the rise of homegrown extremism within its borders.

The recent devastating strike in Nice, claiming the lives of several people is merely the latest chapter in a prolonged narrative of deadly assaults. As we probe deeper into the reasons behind this incident, it becomes evident that a confluence of domestic and external factors intertwined with France's approach to secularism, Islam, and identity, has thrust the nation into the crosshairs of violent extremism. However, amidst these disheartening circumstances, we can look up to India as a beacon of hope, observing how it is confronting illegal immigration while maintaining a delicate balance that eludes France.

The internal conflict in Myanmar with the Rohingya population gave birth to 7,30,000 refugees in 2017 and since then almost the entire refugee populace is spread across various camps and settlements in Bangladesh, the most prominent one being the Cox Bazaar region. India's border with Bangladesh in the North East can be easily infiltrated as compared to our borders with Pakistan, which are guarded with electric fencing and sensors. This lack of a thoroughly secured border provides the Rohingyas with the opportunity to cross over into our country and illegally settle across various parts of our country, especially the North East.

Furthermore, often these refugees can get easy access to forged documentation such as ration cards and Aadhar cards from various sources. It is pertinent to note that several reports from Bangladeshi authorities have well-established the fact that these Rohingya settlements have become a hotbed for radical groups and the propagation of religious extremism, which is often supported by external groups. Furthermore, there has been a multi-fold increase of nearly seven times in crime-related activities, which largely involve violent crimes and, drug abuse & trafficking. Most importantly, not only were mass Hindu

graves found in the refugee camps in Myanmar but there have also been several accounts of conflicts between the Rohingyas and the native Bangladeshi citizens which highlights their inability to peacefully co-exist with other communities.

It is a rule of thumb that prevention is better than cure. It is pertinent to note that France has largely ignored this rule and had accepted the most refugees, approximately 75 per cent during the Europe Refugee Crisis and as of 2021 it was providing shelter to 499,914 refugees and this has largely been a key factor in their current crisis. Additionally, they have also taken a fairly lenient approach to enforcing law and order when it came to the case of these immigrants.

On the other hand, India was mindful of the immense national security and economic risks that came along with accepting an exponential number of refugees while declining to give refuge to the Rohingyas. However, despite the preventive measure taken by our government, according to a report by *Reuters*, Ali Johar who is a Rohingya Rights activist had estimated that as of early 2022, approximately 1,100 Rohingyas were settled in Delhi and another 17,000 of them were spread across various parts of the country wherein they were engaged in professions such as manual labourers, rickshaw pullers and hawkers. However, unlike its Western counterparts, India is proactively involved in the identification of such illegals and deporting them back to either Bangladesh or Myanmar.

India having seen a fortitude of riots since its independence has developed several countermeasures in extinguishing the same and mitigating the damage to civilian lives and property, provided that there is a strong political will. Akin to the French Police, India's state police forces are largely inadequately trained and equipped in terms of numbers and equipment, to deal with large-scale riot-like situations similar to the crisis that France is currently undergoing. However, India has one of the largest paramilitary forces in the world which operate under the umbrella of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), out of which the CISF, RAF, and the CRPF would be the ones that would be relevant in a situation such as that of France.

All three of these paramilitary establishments operate under the aegis of the Ministry of Home Affairs and have well-trained personnel who have seen conflicts across various parts of the country, from Kashmir to the Naxal-infested jungles spanning various states. The RAF is a specialised organization of the CRPF. It has been instituted to specifically deal with riots and played a major role in enforcing law and order situations, especially during the Jatt riots in Haryana and the North-East Delhi riots of 2020.

On the other hand, the CISF provides top-grade security cover which is not only restricted to institutions such as metros and airports but also extends to over 300 industrial units, government infrastructure projects, and facilities all across India, thereby ensuring the safety of the public and the industries at large. Whereas the CRPF is largely involved in protecting the borders, dealing with Maoists whilst also enforcing the law-and-order situation of the country at large. While the RAF has 15 battalions spanning various states, the CRPF on the other hand has nearly 220 battalions spanning the entire country.

While the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the reach and efficiency of these paramilitary forces as saviours, they can very easily equip the hat of protectors of law and order as well, which is what the organisation has exemplarily done in handling crowd-control and riot-like situations whilst also creating goodwill with the locals in Kashmir, which is far more hostile and sensitive as compared to France. And, considering the pro-active BJP-led government in the centre and its strong political will, the CAPF would be more than adequate to tackle a riot-like situation akin to France whilst protecting life, public infrastructure, and businesses.

In the realm of securing our nation's territorial integrity, there emerges a pressing need to fortify and reinforce our eastern border in Bengal and the North East. The existing challenges surrounding illegal immigration and extremism have underscored the inadequacies of our current system, warranting immediate action. The porous borders have become susceptible entry points for illegal immigrants and extremist elements, posing potential threats to our nation's security and socioeconomic fabric.

A robust border fencing initiative must be undertaken, especially on the eastern side, to curb unauthorised crossings. The establishment of well-equipped border posts at strategic locations will further fortify our defence mechanisms. Furthermore, in Assam, Tripura and Mizoram, it is vital to establish a unified and integrated border management institution. This would facilitate seamless coordination between the Central government, state administrations and local authorities, thereby synergizing efforts to secure the region comprehensively. Learning from India's journey, the global community can foster innovative solutions to address the pressing challenges of immigration and extremism, ensuring a more secure and cohesive world.

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