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Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

India – January to June 2023

30 June 2023

09 January 2023

Kashmir: suspected rebel attacks

On 02.01.2023, two children were killed and at least five other civilians were injured in an explosion that occurred in Dhangri in Rajouri district of Indian Kashmir a day after two armed men had reportedly indiscriminately opened fire at three houses in Dhangri. According to police, four civilians were killed and at least five persons were injured in that incident. Police are blaming armed rebels for both the attacks. The incidents occurred near the highly militarised Line of Control (LoC) that runs through Kashmir, dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Dhangri is a Hindu-majority village, and all the victims were Hindus. Protests erupted in Dhangri in the wake of the episodes.

16 January 2023

Chhattisgarh: attacks on Christians; anti-conversion laws

In Chhattisgarh, an anti-conversion law regularly forces converts to Christianity to convert back to Hinduism. Almost any activity by religious minorities can be interpreted as an unfair attempt at forced conversion based on these laws which exist in several states. This can apply to a public prayer or charitable offers of assistance.

On 18.12.22, the situation escalated into an organised attack. Christians from more than 15 villages in Narayanpur and Kondagaon districts were attacked and displaced, many of their houses and churches destroyed. On 02.01.23, the situation escalated once again. Members of the Hindu faith went door to door, damaging churches, Christian institutions and homes. People of the Christian faith were threatened and told to leave their homes and the village community. Security forces that had been called in were also attacked. According to an observer close to the organisation Open Doors, attacks like these are not spur-of-the-moment acts of violence, but were armed gangs who had planned the attacks in advance. Many were carrying swords and stones. Christians in Chhattisgarh were accused of adhering to a foreign religion and of endangering the traditional way of life of the tribespeople. The authorities took no steps to address the issue or ensure security of the Christians. They did not take any steps to curb or restrain the rallies and meetings of the anti-Christian elements, which are openly mobilising and instigating locals against Christians and church leaders.

30 January 2023

74th Republic Day; ban on broadcast of documentary about Prime Minister Narendra Modi

On 26.01.23, India celebrated its 74th Republic Day with a military parade. This year's guest of honour was Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

To mark the Indian holiday, the UK's public service broadcaster BBC aired a two-part documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political career. The film shows that Modi's political rise cannot be separated historically from the religiously motivated violence against members of the Muslim faith in the state of Gujarat in 2002. The

situation for Muslims in the country has worsened since the election victory of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and since Modi took office in 2014. Not only were members of the Muslim faith declared stateless in the state of Assam, but violence against this religious minority in the country has been increasingly played down, while Modi has presented himself to the outside world primarily as a pragmatic promoter of the economy.

The government immediately used emergency powers to prevent the documentary from airing in India and banned its distribution on social media. Students gathered across the country to watch the documentary on laptops and mobile phones. Clashes broke out with student groups close to the BJP at Delhi University. Police stormed the university, confiscated laptops and imposed a ban on gatherings of more than four people. According to police, two dozen students were also arrested.

06 February 2023

Forced displacement of Muslim families

In the northern Indian town of Haldwani, some 4,000 families have been facing homelessness since December 2022, after the Uttarakhand State High Court ordered the eviction of land claimed by the Indian Railways. The Supreme Court temporarily halted the eviction on the grounds that the authorities must first submit a resettlement and rehabilitation plan.

In the state of Assam, thousands of Muslim families have been facing forced expulsion since 2021. The Miya Muslim community, whose ancestors settled in Assam, then part of British India and now part of Bangladesh, from East Bengal many generations ago, has been hardest hit by forced displacement. Extremist Hindu groups refer to members of this community as illegal immigrants.

Indian Muslims have a higher poverty rate as well as a lower literacy rate than the national average and have even fewer social advancement opportunities than members of the Hindu castes and tribes that have traditionally been discriminated against.

06 March 2023

Internet shutdowns

Access Now has documented that India had the highest number of internet shutdowns globally in 2022 for the fifth consecutive year. Of 187 internet shutdowns recorded in 35 countries, 84 took place in India. However, this is the first time since 2017 that the number was below 100. Of the 84 shutdowns, 49 occurred in the Indian-administered part of Kashmir, accounting for 58% of the shutdowns compared to no less than 80% in 2021. As a rule, Internet shutdowns are implemented in response to unrest and are occasionally accompanied by concurrent curfews.

13 March 2023

Uttar Pradesh: radical Hindus raid church service

On 19.02.23, several dozen members of the Hindu radical youth organisation Bajrang Dal assaulted worshippers at a Christian church in Siddharthnagar district in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The premises used as a church were vandalised and the worshippers were beaten with sticks under the pretext that the church was forcing religious conversions. According to the pastor, the police did not register the incident and he and his family are living in constant fear. Bajrang Dal is the youth wing of the Hindu radical organisation Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), which, like the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, adheres to the Hindutva ideology, which aims to change the secular and liberal institutions of the Indian state to reflect the values of the majority Hindu population.

Bihar: radical Hindus lynch Muslim for possessing beef

On 11.03.23, three suspects were arrested in the state of Bihar in connection with the lynching of a Muslim man. The man had been attacked and killed by a mob in Saran district a few days earlier for possessing beef. Attacks by self-appointed cow vigilantes particularly affect members of the Muslim minority and lower castes. The sale and consumption of beef is restricted by law in some parts of the country. Hindu radical groups are calling for a nationwide ban on the slaughter of cattle.

Kashmir: selective arming of Hindu civilians

A series of deadly attacks on Hindus in Rajouri district in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in 2023 is behind the arming of civilian volunteers. Indian authorities blame the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), one of several banned militant groups active in the region alongside local separatist groups, for the attacks. According to local security authorities, about 5,200 Hindu civilian volunteers are currently being armed. Local Muslim leaders criticise the selective arming. The government justifies this decision by saying that the attacks in the recent past have only been perpetrated against Hindus.

20 March 2023

Punjab: large-scale police operation against radical Sikh preacher

In the state of Punjab, more than 110 people were arrested on 20.03.23 in a large police crackdown lasting several days against supporters of radical Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh, including Singh's uncle and driver. On 20.03.23, there was still an increased police presence across Punjab, especially in rural areas and around Singh's home village of Jallupur Khera. Mobile internet and mobile short messaging services were shut down across the state. Police were also on heightened alert in the neighbouring state of Haryana.

Amritpal Singh has come to attention in recent months, demanding the establishment of an independent state called Khalistan. In February 2023, his supporters armed with swords, knives and pistols stormed a police station in Amritsar. Several police officers were injured. Amritsar is home to the holiest Sikh shrine, the Golden Temple. Sikhs are a religious minority in India, living mainly in Punjab and parts of the neighbouring states. In recent years, the demand for an independent Sikh state has re-emerged for the first time in connection with the farmers' protests that took place in 2021. The Khalistan movement, which gathered force in the 1980s, had been relatively low-key in the years before.

27 March 2023

Opposition politician Rahul Gandhi expelled from Parliament

On 23.03.23, a court in the state of Gujarat sentenced opposition politician Rahul Gandhi of the Congress party to two years' imprisonment for defamation. In 2019, Gandhi asked why all thieves have Modi as their common surname, alluding to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He was referring to an alleged diamond trader named Modi who had defrauded a bank of several billion U.S. dollars in 2018 and then absconded abroad. On 24.03.23, Gandhi was expelled from the Lok Sabha, India's lower house. The sentence was suspended though appeals can still be filed. India will hold its next Union-wide elections in 2024. The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has been in power since 2014 and is led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, remains best placed to win the election.

03 April 2023

Bihar: Ram Navami celebrations overshadowed by violence

The Hindu Ram Navami celebrations were marred by violence in several states in eastern India. In the state of Bihar, radical Hindus set fire to houses, shops and a Muslim school. A minor was shot dead in Nalanda district. Local authorities deployed hundreds of extra riot police and blocked mobile internet access in parts of eastern India. The celebrations are usually marked by large processions in parts of India, with people carrying swords, sticks, tridents and occasionally guns. In recent years, these processions have sometimes been held specifically in Muslim neighbourhoods.

17 April 2023

Uttar Pradesh: Former Muslim lawmaker shot dead

On 15.04.23, a former Muslim member of the Indian parliament and his brother were shot dead in Prayagraj in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The two victims, convicted of kidnapping, were in police custody at the time of the crime and were being taken to a hospital for medical examination. Three assailants, apparently posing as journalists, fired several shots and shouted Hindu nationalist slogans, which are also used in anti-Muslim campaigns. The incident was seen on live television coverage.

24 April 2023

Kashmir: Five soldiers killed

On 20.04.23, five soldiers were killed while on patrol in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, allegedly by separatist rebels. Unidentified assailants fired at the vehicle and probably also used grenades.

08 May 2023

Kashmir: Five soldiers killed

Last week, five soldiers were reportedly killed in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir after a suspected rebel attack in the Rajouri sector (cf. BN of 24.04.23)..

Manipur: Ethnic conflicts

Following the outbreak of unrest in the north-eastern state of Manipur bordering Myanmar, the government has sent thousands of soldiers to the region, imposed curfews and restricted internet access. The background to the unrest is conflict between the Hindu Meitei ethnic group and the Christian Kuki and Naga tribes. The dominant Meitei want to be classified as a 'Scheduled Tribe', which would give them access to government subsidies and privileged access to forest areas. The other tribes fear being marginalised. The violence led to protests by the Kuki tribe on 03.05.23. More than 50 people have since died in the ensuing unrest. As of 07.05.23, a total of 23,000 people have been evacuated.

22 May 2023

Manipur: Escalation of ethnic conflict

In early May, violence between the Hindu Meitei ethnic group and the Christian Kuki and Naga tribes erupted in the north-eastern state of Manipur, leaving at least 60 people dead and more than 250 others injured. More than 1,700 buildings, including churches and Hindu temples, were burnt down and around 35,000 people were displaced. The clashes began after the Manipur High Court ordered the state government to consider including the Hindu Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes list (cf. BN of 08.05.23).

Karnataka: Election defeat for the BJP

The Congress Party won the regional elections in the southern Indian state of Karnataka with 136 out of 224 seats in the regional parliament, beating the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Karnataka, home to the technology hub of Bengaluru, is the only state in the richer south where the BJP, which is generally stronger in the north of the country, has ruled so far.

19 June 2023

Uttarakhand: Muslim families threatened

Since 26.05.23, there have been protests against the approximately 400 Muslim residents of Purola in the northern state of Uttarakhand following the alleged attempted kidnapping of a Hindu girl. Local residents arrested the two alleged perpetrators and handed them over to the police. As one of the accused was a Muslim, rumours began to circulate that this was a case of 'Love Jihad'. This is a conspiracy theory used by radical Hindu groups who suspect Muslim men of luring Hindu women into relationships in order to convert them to Islam through marriage. This narrative is mainly exploited by the radical Hindu Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and its youth wing, the Bajrang Dal. Both the VHP and the Bajrang Dal are in turn linked to the far-right paramilitary cadre organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which exerts ideological and personnel influence on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The aim of 'Hindutva' ideology is to turn India's constitutionally secular state into an ethnic Hindu state. These radical Hindu groups are often collectively referred to as the 'Sangh Parivar'. On 29.05.23, they again organised rallies with hundreds of participants and used defamatory slogans to demand that Muslims living in Purola leave the area. The Muslim shopkeepers received no help from the government, including the provision of security forces, other than a warning on 27.05.23 to keep their shops closed.

Manipur: Ethnic conflicts claim more victims

Recent data from the interior ministry show that since 03.05.23, around 100 people have been killed, 310 injured and more than 40,000 displaced in the course of ethnic conflicts between the mostly Hindu ethnic group of the Meitei, who make up half of the population in the north-eastern state of Manipur, and the largely Christian Kuki and Naga tribes (cf. BN of 22.05.23). Media reports confirmed on 16.06.23 that the house of a BJP federal minister in Imphal was vandalised and set on fire by a mob.

Kashmir: Five alleged foreign militants killed

On 16.06.23, five suspected foreign militants were killed during an Indian military operation on the Line of Control (LoC) running in Kashmir, according to media reports.

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