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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### ISLAMOPHOBIA IN INDO-PACIFIC COUNTRIES AND THE ROLES OF REGIONAL ORGANIZATION

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#### Abstract

Many scholars accused that anti-Islam sentiment in many countries came after the 2001 Al-Qaeda attack. This study proves that such a phenomenon has become an issue in Indo-Pacific countries long before the attack. The article explains the root causes and impacts of Islamophobia in India, Myanmar, Thailand, and South Korea. It suggests that the regional organization should play a role in addressing this problem. The concepts of Islamophobia and national and human security are used to examine the issue. Qualitative methodology in case studies was used, with data collection from focused group discussions and literature reviews. The results show that the causes of Islamophobia range from the historical problem of colonialism, religious conflicts between majority and minority groups within a socio-political framework, separatism issues, and the media's role that stigmatizes Muslims. The Islamic-based terrorist attack in 2001 is merely a justification for violating Muslims' rights in Indo-Pacific countries. This condition threatens the region's stability and leads to serious human rights violations. Therefore, ASEAN, as a regional organization in Southeast Asia and partnering with Indo-Pacific countries, must address the issue while resolving its internal challenges.

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#### Introduction:-

The Al Qaeda (AQ) attack in the United States (US) on September 11, 2001, increased religious-based terrorism in the last two decades. This subsequently led to rejection, hatred, and anti-Islam sentiment or Islamophobia, especially in the US and Europe. Furthermore, the hatred developed into acts of violence against Muslims, which was allowed and supported by the government through numerous existing policies and regulations. The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed (2021), confirmed this. He reported at the 46th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in March 2021 that Islamophobia has developed from hatred to state-sponsored violence against religious freedom and the lives of Muslims in several countries.

According to the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Islamophobia has spread rapidly, especially in European countries since 2001. This leaves about 35 million Muslims in Europe vulnerable to becoming victims of racial crimes. Erdogan stated that violence against Muslims has risen, especially in France and Austria, where a hostile attitude has been taken through the regulations issued by the government (Laveda, 2021). Similarly, the

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights surveyed in 2017 and reported that about 38% of the respondents were ethnically discriminated against. This survey was conducted on immigrants and their descendants from Turkey, South Asia, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017).

Such aphobia is also increasing in Indo-Pacific, especially in Myanmar, with the anti-Rohingya stance supported by the government and Buddhist leaders. In New Zealand, hatred against Muslims was also witnessed at the shootings of Muslims praying in two different mosques (Detikcom Team, 2019). This condition is detrimental to Muslims and endangers social life, especially in a country with a pluralistic population. It threatens human, national, regional, and global security if left unattended.

From the above explanation, we might conclude that Islamophobia emerged after the rise of Islamic-based terrorism. Nevertheless, this study performs Islamophobia in several Indo-Pacific countries as a prolonged problem, long before the AQ attacks, rooted in historical legacy and political issues. Acts of international terrorism justify non-Muslim society and the government to commit violence against local Muslims.

It is important to discuss Islamophobia in India, Myanmar, Thailand, and South Korea since Muslims are the minorities in these countries. As democratic states, the governments should have respected, protected, and promoted human rights, including the Muslims' freedom to live and embrace religion and worship. However, the current phenomenon unveils the violation of Muslims' rights, which has led to tensions between countries in the region. Therefore, countries and regional organizations, mainly ASEAN, need to take a stand to solve the prolonged problem of Islamophobia, which the government has even supported in the last decades.

This article explains why Islamophobia occurs in Indo-Pacific, especially in India, Myanmar, Thailand, and South Korea, and its impacts on human and national security. A qualitative research design with a case study method was used. The primary data was collected through a virtual focused group discussion and in-depth interviews, and secondary data was collected through various literature. This article is divided into several sub-chapters explaining Islamophobia in India, Myanmar, Thailand, and South Korea in detail. Finally, it elaborates on how ASEAN should play a pivotal role in dealing with Islamophobic threats to human and national security and regional stability.

### **Literature Review:-**

According to previous studies, various factors, including social, economic, and political issues and the government's favor, create pressure on Muslims in several Indo-Pacific countries. Mohamed Nawab Bin Mohamed Osman (2017) explains that Myanmar and Malaysia's social, economic, and political problems led to anti-Islam sentiments in people's daily lives. However, such rejections, which in this article is defined as Islamophobia, were initiated by the ethnic migration of the British government during colonialism in the two countries. This confirmed that Islamophobia in the two countries had happened long before the AQ attacks.

Regarding Myanmar, Penny Green (2013) emphasizes that discrimination applies to the Rohingya ethnicity and all Muslims. Government policies and the indifference of the leaders exacerbate the situation. Discrimination and violence against Muslims remain problematic as they are not considered part of Myanmar's predominantly Buddhist society. Green confirms that religion-based racism in Myanmar has been institutionalized through state politics and policies discriminating against Muslims. Salman Majeed (2019) notes that Rohingya Muslims are not recognized as part of Myanmar, which makes them vulnerable to community and local government oppression.

Nawab, Green, and Majeed provide a basic understanding and a historical explanation of the emergence of anti-Islam sentiments, especially in Myanmar and Malaysia. Although Salman Majeed emphasizes the mental health of the Rohingya due to discrimination, their studies have not explained the impact that Islamophobia has on human and national security. These studies also lack information on how governments and regional organizations should have addressed the issue to prevent the spread of Islamophobia.

JesadaBuaban (2020) examines how Islamophobia appeared in Thailand due to the government's confirmation policies to the majority and its failure to establish secularism. Buddhist society criticizes the government's initiatives to facilitate and provide Muslim privileges. Although such policies prevent Muslims in Southern Thailand from demanding independence, they strengthen the Buddhists' desire to make Thailand a Buddhist-based country. Buaban notes that some Thai Buddhist movements perceived Muslims damaged the state order and were a threat to

Buddhists. Therefore, Buddhist society perpetrates violence by spreading hatred and portraying Muslims as different.

Similarly, ThameemUshama (2020) states that Islamophobia in India stems from fear and hatred due to the fanaticism of Hindus, leading to discrimination and acts of intolerance against Muslim minority groups. Islamophobia in India has a long history dating back to the Mughal Empire when Muslim rulers suppressed Hindu society. Such discrimination continues through Hindu community movements, specifically the anti-Islamic minority groups. In fact, according to Ushama, the movements wish to create a Hindu state in India and subsequently oppress Muslims.

Interestingly, Islamophobia also occurs in South Korea. Koo (2018) notes that such a condition was strengthened after the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) attacks in 2013. The growing misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims exacerbates the phobia. Bauman in Koo (2018) explains that Islam is an agent of liquid fear or threats, making Islamophobia challenging to avoid. According to Han (2017), Islamophobic discourse in South Korea grew due to prejudice that emerged at the grassroots after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and the kidnapping of South Korean citizens in Afghanistan in 2007.

To confirm the phenomenon, Rizki et al. (2015) note that the media is the leading cause of this issue. The authors explain in detail how Islamophobia occurs due to stereotyping by the media against Muslims, different from a historical and socio-political perspective. After 2001, the Western media continued to publish about terrorism and associated it with Islam. As a result, a negative view of Islam emerged and eventually triggered Islamophobia worldwide. Although the role of the media in Islamophobia was explained, the information about its impact on existing Muslims and national security is insufficient.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Runnymede Trust first used Islamophobia in 1997 to refer to discrimination, harassment, and social and structural harm directed against Muslims. Islamophobia is a series of behavioral processes involving emotional, cognitive, evaluative, and action-oriented elements. This attitude started from racism and developed into discrimination, anti-Islam, and anti-Muslim sentiments. According to Diane Frost (2008), such violence and racism are exacerbated by state policies and media campaigns aimed at Muslims in a political context, especially in England. The racist attitude toward Islam can also be hostile behavior toward Muslims based on a narrow understanding of the Western liberal mindset and secularization that cannot accommodate other religions, such as Islam (Ciftci, 2012).

Islamophobia is likened to an attempt to reintroduce and reaffirm the global discrimination against Muslims, where inequalities in the distribution of resources are maintained and expanded (Allen, 2017; Mondon & Winter, 2017). This is in line with Erik Bleich (2012), who perceives Islamophobia as social anxiety and rejection of Islam and Muslim culture, groups, and individuals based on prejudice and stereotypes. Interestingly, Islamophobic sentiment developed in western countries that adhere to the principles of liberal democracy (Bleich, 2010).

Further, Sabri Ciftci (2012) confirms the eight components of Islamophobia, including Islam being (1) perceived as a monolithic religion, static and unresponsive to change, (2) separate or considered as "other," (3) viewed as inferior to the West or barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist, (4) associated with violence, aggressive actions, threatening and supporting terrorism. Subsequently, (5) Islam is seen as a political ideology and often used for political or military gain, (6) criticisms made by the West about Islam are rebuffed, (7) hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices against Muslims and their exclusion from mainstream society, and (8) the perceived hostility is viewed as a natural and normal thing.

To understand how Islamophobia has been perceived as a threat to security, this article borrows the realist perspective of international relations scholars' national security from the classical concept of state security to human security. Schelling in Art and Jervis (2009) states that national security has been associated with military power. However, modern military power is a form of security and a contest for brutal shows of strength, such as exterminating or scorching the enemy. In ancient times, war was more inclined to contest strategies and tools to fight for interests in ancient times. Nowadays, it is also used for revenge or other secret and hidden agendas.

Therefore, threats to national security may come from anywhere and in any form, including worsening environmental conditions and climate change to limited natural resources (Brown, 1986; Zelikow, 2003). The focus is on human security and sustainable life support systems (Brown, 1986; Pettman, 2010). From that perspective, security now closely relates to human rights and protection from threats (Benedek, 2008). Therefore, human security is a concept that expands the security aspect from confinement to state boundaries and interests to individuals as the primary reference and beneficiary at the global level (Newman, 2010). Human security relates to how the state creates and maintains the security of each individual (Paez, 2007).

### **Research Methods:-**

This study used qualitative research methodology in case studies to describe, explore, and interpret behavior in social life (Blaikie, 2010), notably anti-Islam sentiments in Indo-Pacific countries. This approach does not obtain the findings through statistical data procedures or other calculation forms (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This method is appropriate for answering questions requiring much information about a particular case. The study becomes in-depth and obtains detailed information related to the case to be studied (Neuman, 2011).

Islamophobia in several countries in Indo-Pacific is a complex issue that affects other things, including security. Therefore, this study explains the root causes and analyzes the impact of Islamophobia on regional, national and human security, especially in Muslim society. It is expected to provide a holistic and comprehensive explanation to help decision-makers formulate domestic and international policies.

This study assumes that Islamophobia is a combination of international phenomena, especially the rise of Islamic-based radicalism and terrorism, with domestic historical and political backgrounds that affect Muslims' life and security at various levels. The data was collected using various techniques, such as qualitative questionnaires, literature reviews, in-depth interviews, focused group discussions (FGD), and analysis of policy documents. The authors then conducted data triangulation to ensure its synchronization.

The authors analyze data by collecting primary and secondary data needed to answer the existing questions. The collected data is then classified according to the periodization and typology of Islamophobia based on the existing theory. The data is then interpreted, and conclusions are drawn. At the end of this article, the authors also provide recommendations that need to be applied by ASEAN as an organization in the region to resolve the problems that arise.

### **Results And Discussion:-**

#### **The Phenomena of Islamophobia in India**

The separation between India and Pakistan based on religion in 1947 proved the prolonged tension between Hindus and Muslims in the region. Indeed, hatred against Muslims appeared before British colonialists entered South Asia. The British seized power from the Muslim Mughal Empire, which ruled from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and frequently oppressed Hindu society. As a result, the British saw Muslims as a threat, while the Hindus were more receptive. During the occupation, the British implemented a segregation policy at the societal level, making Hindu society hostile to Muslims. The prolonged tension eventually triggered the separation between India and Pakistan (Sikander, 2021).

This historical background creates a stigma that Muslims differ from Indian Hindus. The stigma is associated with the rampant violence against Indian Muslims. Cows can also be a valid excuse for such violence. The allegation is that Muslims kill cows considered sacred to Hindus. Cows are sacrificial animals on Eid al-Adha by Muslims worldwide, forming justifications for acts of violence. Death sentences by mobs, such as that experienced by Mohammed AkhlaqSaifi in Rajashtan, are often blamed on slaughtering cattle or storing beef (Siyech and Narain, 2018).

There are three factors influencing the rise of Islamophobia in modern India. First, the solid anti-Islam sentiment spread through social and print media, especially after the AQ attack in 2001. This condition is driven by Hindu fanaticism and spreads hatred against Muslims, leading to discrimination, persecution, and acts of intolerance against Muslim minority groups. The fanatical Hindu community wishes to create a state based on Hinduism and increasingly persecuted Indian Muslims (Ushama, 2020; Damayanti, 2018).

Secondly, the victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the parliamentary elections in early 2019. To win the election, BJP legalized implementing the ideology known as Hindutva, which militant groups propagated. This ideology aims to establish a Hindu state and triggered the 2002 Muslim genocide in Gujarat (Ushama, 2020). Prime Minister Narendra Modi expresses Hindutva ideology in his speeches, interviews, and podcasts, broadly supporting the idea that Indian Hindus are superior. Muslims do not deserve to be part of India because they are an "other" group (Waikar, 2018). This idea received support from those who wanted India to be based on Hinduism. Modi also put forward economic policies closely related to Hinduism's way of life, based on Lord Basaveshwar's teachings, in realizing "one India." (Waikar, 2018).

Thirdly, the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) under Modi's leadership. Muslim groups believe this law results from the political constitution of Hindutva supporters to achieve their interests through regulations. Under the CAA, the National Registered of Citizens (NRC) requires everyone to provide documents proving they are Indians. Those who cannot prove themselves will be categorized as illegal immigrants. However, most Muslims in India are poor, illiterate, and do not have supporting documents (Ahmed, 2020). The CAB provides a particular pathway for religious minority groups, except Muslims. The Indian government has stopped providing asylum for Muslims from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh since 2015. The wave of protests against the CAA and CAB generate sympathy for political parties other than BJP. Nevertheless, none brought policy changes at the government level (Ahmed, 2020).

In the last two decades, violence against Indian Muslims has increased (CFR, 2020). In February 2002, for instance, there was a train fire in Gujarat, where 58 Hindu activists died. Muslims were accused of being the mastermind behind the incident. Accordingly, Hindu groups took revenge on Muslims by committing massive murder, rape of Muslim women, and destruction of business locations and places of worship in Gujarat. Sadly, the total death of between 1,000 to 2,000 Muslim people was recorded (BBC News, 2012; Damayanti, 2018).

Mass violence against Muslims also occurred in the Babri Mosque conflict in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, and has been going on for decades. The mosque was demolished in 1992 with the BJP and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) support. This sparked a large-scale dispute, and an estimated 2,000 people died in 2012 (BBC News, 2012). The conflict over religion also occurred in 2013 near Muzaffarnagar, where more than 60 people died in clashes after two Hindu men died in an altercation with Muslims. It is estimated that 50,000 Muslims fled the violence and stayed in relief camps for months; others never returned home (CFR, 2020).

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2019), a group of Hindus often attacked those who were perceived to have killed or sold beef. At least 40 people died from a group calling itself 'the protector of cows' from 2015 to 2018 (HRW, 2019). Radical groups also target Muslim men for carrying out the 'jihad of love' by marrying Hindu women to convert (Dey, 2017). Currently, when the Indian government announced the imposition of CAA in 2020, fighting broke out again in New Delhi, and about 50 people, mostly Muslims, died (CFR, 2020).

### **The Phenomena of Islamophobia in Myanmar**

The persecution of Myanmar Buddhists against Muslims has materialized since Myanmar was a kingdom (Wildan, 2021). These intolerant acts continued in the Military Junta era and when democratization was applied in Myanmar. The change in Myanmar's political system brings no impact on Rohingya Muslims. From the Mandalay riots in 1997 to the democratic era, persecution in Myanmar has always been the same. This includes killing praying Muslims, burning the Koran, destroying mosques, Muslim settlements, and property, forcing Muslims to pray at home, delivering hate speech based on racism and anti-Islam, and discharging vandalism in mosques. Coclanis (2013) states that no matter how democratic or undemocratic Myanmar is, hatred of Islam remains a problem.

Political factors and identity notably cause Islamophobia in Myanmar. Although the system of government became more democratic, the Tatmadaw or Military Junta still has a significant role in the government. In addition, Buddhism has successfully shaped the spirit of religion-based nationalism as a majority religion. Such conditions have led to controversial and racist nationalist fervor, such as "non-Buddhists are not Burmese." Such religion-based nationalism, coupled with the strong influence of the Tatmadaw and Buddhist patrons in the political and socio-cultural system, has made democracy in Myanmar to be less helpful for Rohingya or other Muslims in the country (Coclanis, 2013).

Buddhism was the prominent patron firmly entrenched in Burmese society even before British rule in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. British-controlled Burma triggered the hatred of Buddhists toward Muslims. The British government brought Indians and Bengalis into Myanmar and trusted them to rule Myanmar (Wildan, 2021). The power of Indian Hindus and Bengali Muslims encouraged Burmese nationalism based on a robust Buddhist religion and sparked social tensions between indigenous Myanmar and non-Myanmar people. When the Indian and Bengal communities were given special privileges, the indigenous Buddhists of Myanmar saw it as a threat to the existence of the identity and culture of the indigenous people.

Although Buddhism opposes violence and acts of intolerance, the historical factor of British colonialism with the Indian-Bengali leadership left scars on the indigenous Myanmar people. The power forcibly transferred from Burmese leaders firm with Buddhist teachings to immigrants who were not Burmese and did not understand Buddhism sparked hatred that led to violence against non-Myanmar residents. In return, the Myanmar government refused to give the Rohingya Muslims living on the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India border citizenship rights after its independence in 1948. As a result, Rohingya Muslims often experience acts of violence perpetrated by indigenous Myanmar residents (Anwary, 2018).

Hatred against the Rohingya peaked when a Buddhist monk named Ashin Wirathu used propaganda, saying that Muslims wanted to establish an Islamic state in Rakhine. As the leader of the Myanmar nationalist group, he is also known as "Burmese Bin Laden." He became famous when he joined and became the leader of an anti-Muslim nationalist group often categorized as extremist in 2001. Specifically, he was a member of the 969 Group and strongly opposed the increasing number of Muslims in Myanmar (Damayanti, 2018).

A report by Human Rights Watch in 2013 stated that the attacks against Muslims and their homes in Arakan, executed by radical Buddhist groups, were organized by religious and community leaders in Myanmar and the government. Local security forces supported the persecution by not providing assistance and protection to the Rohingya. Specifically, they were threatened, and violence was allowed. The Myanmar government, under Thein Sein's leadership, refused to take serious legal action against the perpetrators (HRW, 2013).

Islamophobia in Myanmar has evolved from violence perpetrated by the community to state-perpetrated (Barany, 2019). The Myanmar military junta supported socio-cultural perceptions that violate the human rights of the Rohingya community (Abrar, 2013). The Tatmadaw has maintained the patronage of the Myanmar community against the Rohingya Muslims since they first came to power, making intolerance an internal political stance of the Myanmar government (BI, 2018). The international political situation exacerbated this condition, specifically the global rise of radical Islamic movements after the AQ attack (Wildan, 2021).

The poor democratization of Myanmar has contributed to the persecution of the Rohingya. Kevin B. I. (2018) states that the Tatmadaw in Myanmar is the cause of the slow democratization and the resolution of the Rohingya issue. The Tatmadaw always creates social tension by maintaining Burmese nationalism as the basis of Buddhism in Myanmar. This is attributed to the fear of losing its existence in Myanmar's new fully democratic system of government. By triggering conflict and social tension, especially against the Rohingya Muslims, the Tatmadaw retains its existence and influence in the new democratic government under Aung San Suu Kyi. Consequently, civil society sees Tatmadaw as embodying Myanmar's nationalism (BI, 2018).

Despite having the legitimacy to lead Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi could not oppose the Tatmadaw. Her efforts to solve the Rohingya issue would detriment her political support and consequently hamper democracy (BI, 2018). The lack of democratization and the decisive role of the military provoked the persecution of the Rohingya Muslims to slow resolve.

### **The Phenomenon of Islamophobia in Thailand**

Most of Thailand's population is Buddhist, though Islam is the most significant religious minority group. The four southern border provinces between Thailand and Malaysia – Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Satun – have the largest Muslim population, reaching 80% of Muslims in the country. In a population of 61 million, there are about 4 million Muslims, half of whom come from Malaysia and live in Southern Thailand. As a majority, Buddhists play a vital role in Thailand and are integrated into its central government system (The Nation, 2018). The new constitution even strengthens Theravada Buddhism's position as the majority religion.

The relationship between politics and religion intensely characterizes Islamophobia in Thailand. The anti-Islam sentiment was initiated by most Thai people who hindered the facts about the existence of Muslims in Southern Thailand. They built the national historiography based on Buddhism. This led to a separatist movement for the Muslim community of Southern Thailand in three provinces, including Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat (Abdulmani, 2013). Islamophobia intensified after the government of Southern Thailand rejected the central autonomy and sought to fulfill the aspirations of Muslims with various projects benefitting them in the region. This sparked the anger of local Buddhists as they felt neglected.

Buddhist nationalist groups in southern Thailand described Islamic forces as roaming "ghosts" seeking to seize political power. This prompted the Buddhism Protection Center of Thailand (BPCT) to promote the campaign of Buddhism as the only religion. Similarly, the Buddhist Federation of Thailand (BFT) supported various political party activities intending to stop all Muslim activities (Buaban, 2020). They intentionally spread fanaticism, discrimination, and marginalization, leading to the exclusion of Muslims from economic, social, political, and social activities (Pathan et al., 2018).

Violence against Muslims in Southern Thailand perpetrated by Buddhist nationalists and monks is motivated by religious and political interests (Jerryson, 2017). The conflict areas of Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, and several districts of Songkhla province, where the majority of the local population are Muslim Malays, are often regarded as the most vulnerable areas to the influence of transnational jihadism. The emergence of ISIS in the province has recently threatened the people and government. (Hannah, 2019).

Conflict in this region is driven by an ethnic-nationalist struggle based on religion. More than 90% of Thailand's population is Buddhist, though 85% of the people in Pattani are Malay and Muslim. Over the years, the Malay Muslims have tried to gain independence from Thailand through the 'Pattani Liberation Movement' and fight against the central government. This situation was witnessed when the political situation in the country heated up due to the coup. Consequently, the Thai government set an Emergency Law in 2004 to stop Muslim groups and members of the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) and the National Revolutionary Front (BRN), who were fighting for autonomy (Damayanti, 2018).

After enacting the Emergency Law, conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims escalated. Muslims were threatened by Buddhist Nationalists, especially by monks. The central government has taken strong counter-insurgency measures against Muslims in Pattani since they considered them separatists. In several conflicts, soldiers were deployed to guard Buddhist places of worship. The central government also permitted Buddhist nationalist groups in the south to form a paramilitary of monks known as the Tahanpras. They live like ordinary monks but are trained as mercenaries (Damayanti, 2018).

The Thai government perceives the violence in the south as an uprising on ethnonationalism grounds, not religious discrimination. However, people often ignore the government's analysis and assume that the behavior of Malay Muslims causes all forms of violence. Muslims are reluctant to live peacefully with Thai Buddhists. The Pattani Malays refuse to use the identity and historical narrative built by the government and citizens. For this reason, people accuse the Islamic teachings of making them what they are. The Buddhist nationalists also ignore the arguments of the Thai government's assimilation policy toward Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat Malays. This contributed to the violence against Muslims (Pathan et al., 2018).

Violence based on religion occurred at the Anuban Pattani school in 2018. There was a discourse about using the hijab in public schools. This led to a dispute between the Nationalist-Buddhist group and the Malay Pattani Muslim community. A total of 20 Buddhist teachers protested against their Muslim students for wearing the hijab. Consequently, hatred against Muslims increasingly spread in almost all parts of Southern Thailand, where every school forbids students from wearing hijabs. Moreover, Buddhist nationalists also remind that "The local Buddhist community accepts Kwam Pen Thai" or "only Thai identity." They rejected local Islamic and Malay identities (Pathan et al., 2018).

Islamophobia is on the recent rise, especially in cyberspace. Violence against Muslims not only physically and verbally occurs in the Southern Thailand region. Hateful and discriminatory speech is easily hurled at Muslims through social media (AZ, FGD, 2021).

### **The Phenomenon of Islamophobia in South Korea**

Islamophobia in South Korea differs from other Indo-Pacific countries. Xenophobia plays a significant role as the society is homogeneous with a high level of nationalism. Only about five percent of South Korea's population comprises non-Korean ethnicity (Gi, 2021). This condition might be problematic during globalization and an increase in international migration. South Korea's economic growth has made it a migration destination, and this country has cooperated with countries in the Middle East and North Africa, especially in the energy sector (Mulyaman, 2021).

Three factors cause Islamophobia to happen in South Korea. Firstly, the considerable homogeneity and nationalism. This condition triggers negative prejudice or xenophobia against other ethnicities, including Muslims. South Koreans are often indifferent and historically distant from the Muslim world (LJ and SK, FGD, 2021). They retrieve unidirectional information about Islam, especially from its alliances, the Western world. Muslims have difficulties adapting to Koreans due to their physical appearances, as experienced by a Muslim with Middle Eastern looks, although he was a French citizen. After knowing his citizenship status, his friends and colleagues finally accepted him and became friendly (SK, FGD, 2021).

The homogeneous South Koreans perceive Islam as a foreign religion practiced only by foreigners. Most do not understand Islam's teachings and practices (Sheikh, 2019). This perception subsequently encourages Koreans to reject the practice of Islamic teachings. Although minority Muslims in Korea have no issues dealing with the majority group, they struggle to practice Islam in social life. (Khalid et al., 2017). Their challenges involve halal food and working habits. Although local authorities invest heavily in halal products, most of them are for export. Therefore, Korean Muslims find popular halal products challenging to access. When coming home from work, South Koreans often go with friends or co-workers until late at night. They drink liquor and eat foods forbidden to Muslims. (Sheikh, 2019)

Secondly, mass media discredits the Islamic community, especially after the ISIS attack in 2013. Popular media pressures Muslim women, especially in how they dress. They said, for instance, that those wearing the hijab "needs to be saved." Koreans view the hijab and veil as signs of resistance and terrorism-associated. Therefore, Muslim women are often subjected to verbal and physical attacks. (Eum, 2017) The media also associates Muslim men with terrorism, violence, and sexual perversion. Muslims are portrayed as violent culture. Scholars also highlight issues of Islam and often use the terms terror, war, conflict, and sexual discrimination to form negative perceptions (Koo, 2018).

Third, the strong influence of Christian groups and the anti-multicultural sentiments contribute to Islamophobia. An anti-Islam movement was formed when 23 Korean nationals were kidnapped by the Taliban and the emergence of ISIS in 2013 (Han, 2017). The National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) 2010 noted that the dominance of Christianity and Buddhism forms a gap between the dominant and the minority religion, specifically Islam. Muslim students also experience unpleasant experiences, including the Malaysians studying at Hanyang University in Korea. The presence of Muslim students attracted the curiosity of extreme Christian missionaries who initially only asked simple questions. However, their conversation soon became a debate, turned aggressive, and offended Muslims (Khalid, 2017).

Muslim immigrants and South Korean Muslims face Islamophobia when they must serve in the military for approximately two years. During the military service process, South Korean Muslims must fulfill their obligations, such as praying, Ramadan fasting, and eating halal food. Women wearing the hijab often experience discrimination and sometimes have to lose their jobs. Children are often forced to eat non-halal foods. Therefore, when Islamophobia becomes common and society is difficult accepting Muslims openly, Muslims hide their religious identity for their safety (Sheikh, 2019).

The NHRCK data shows increased discrimination and hate speech towards Muslims through social media. In 2015, influential bloggers and Twitter users asked the government to block the construction of a mosque. Some videos depicting Islam as a terrible religion from CIA documents were also circulated on social media, causing misperceptions. After the terrorist attack by ISIS in Europe, several Christians demonstrated hostility by uploading hateful statements to Muslims for them to be blamed (Sang, 2017).



Nevertheless, the Korean legal system has yet to regulate the perpetrators of hate speech and acts of intolerance against Muslims. The dominance of the ruling party and the influence of Christian groups in formulating regulations hinders the government from taking firm action against discrimination against Muslims. In addition, although the South Korean government grants work permits to foreign migrant workers, the rights to education and care for migrant families remain neglected (Han, 2017). Although Islamophobia is yet to threaten Muslims' security, such conditions should be monitored and prevented.

### Islamophobia and the Role of ASEAN

From the historical background and Sabri Ciftci's components on Islamophobia, we can classify the root causes and conditions of Islamophobia in India, Myanmar, Thailand, and South Korea, as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:-** The Root Causes and The Components of Islamophobia.

<b>The Root Causes &amp; The Components of Islamophobia</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Myanmar</b>	<b>Thailand</b>	<b>South Korea</b>
Root Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical background of British colonialism</li> <li>• The Hindu-Muslim tension.</li> <li>• The strengthening of Hindu-nationalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical background of British colonialism</li> <li>• The powerful influence of the Junta Military</li> <li>• Racism and the strengthening of Buddhist-nationalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Islamic-based separatist movement in the Thailand-Malaysia border area.</li> <li>• Racism and the strengthening of nationalism in Buddhism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Racism due to xenophobia</li> <li>• Western media broadcasting after 9/11.</li> </ul>
Islam is seen as separate and perceived as "the other."	✓	✓	✓	✓
Islam is perceived as inferior to the Western countries.	✓	✓	-	✓
Islam is associated with violence, aggressive actions, threats, and terrorism supporters.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Islam is seen as a political ideology and is often used for political gain.	✓	✓	✓	-
Hostility towards Islam and Muslims for discriminatory justification.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Previous explanations prove that anti-Islam sentiments in India, Myanmar, and Thailand emerged before the AQ attack in 2001. The hatred against Muslims in India and Myanmar has been prevalent since British colonialism in South and South-East Asia. The emergence of AQ in the late 1990s and ISIS in 2013 justify the pre-existing Islamophobia. Only Islamophobia in South Korea can be attributed to acts and terror groups based on Islam. This is primarily due to xenophobia, coupled with South Korea's proximity to Western countries and the powerful influence of Western media.

There are four similar Islamophobic components in these countries. First, the government and society view Islam as a different society. The link between politics and the majority religion that dominates the socio-political and economic life triggers Islamophobia. For instance, India's population mainly comprises Hindus, while Myanmar and Thailand have Buddhism. South Korea consists mainly of atheists but is heavily influenced by Protestant groups. It turns out that the majority religion is used as the basis for identity and nationalism, making it easy for society to identify Muslims as a different group.

Political leaders often differentiate the minority from the majority by providing convenience and privileges to the majority. For instance, the wave of protests by Muslims against guarantees of citizenship that benefit Hindus was not supported by political parties in India (Ahmed, 2020). The voices of Muslims were insignificant to the interests of Indian political parties.

Second, Islamophobia occurs as Islam is often associated with violence, aggressiveness, threats, and terrorism support. India, Myanmar, and Thailand governments face direct conflicts with Muslims, which justifies the government acting decisively against them. Although the South Korean government has no conflict with Muslims, its close relationship with the US and the influence of the Western media have exaggerated their opposing view.

Third, except in South Korea, Islamophobia appeared when Islam was seen as a political ideology. The separation of India and Pakistan based on religion in 1948 and the emergence of separatist movements in Myanmar and Pattani, Thailand, confirm the Islamophobic component.

Lastly, hostility towards Islam and Muslims is a justification for discriminatory actions that trigger Islamophobia in India, Myanmar, Thailand, and South Korea. Hostility is triggered when Muslims are seen as "other and different," especially when it relates to the issue of majority-minority groups, such as in India, Myanmar, and Thailand. Such hostility encourages discriminatory actions, ranging from rejection in South Korea to hate speech on social media in Thailand. Even in some cases, these actions escalated into violence, expulsion, and mass killings.

Islamophobia in India, Myanmar, and Thailand has threatened human and national security, primarily through riots, religious conflicts, and separatist movements. In some cases, the state governments ignore and deliberately make policies and regulations that give privileges to the majority religious group and harm Muslims. In such situations, other countries' support for Muslims, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, might lead to conflicts between countries. Therefore, international or regional organizations should ensure stability and deal with the situation.

Among all regional organizations in the Indo-Pacific region, the Association of South East Asian Nations or ASEAN is closely affected by Islamophobia for three reasons. Firstly, Myanmar and Thailand are ASEAN member-states. Secondly, India and South Korea are important and strategic partner countries for ASEAN and the members of ASEAN +6. Thirdly, ASEAN has achieved its primary goal; maintaining the region's peace, security, and stability through political, security, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation among its member-states and strategic partners.

ASEAN is concerned with national and regional security and human security. It subsequently formed a commission that deals with human rights - the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) - in 2009. The issue of Islamophobia should have been effectively addressed. However, ASEAN faces three challenges related to its internal conditions and the principles in the ASEAN Charter, including (1) the principle of non-intervention in domestic affairs, (2) the principle of centrality amid numerous bilateral and multilateral cooperations of their member-states, and (3) the weakness of the ASEAN Human Rights Commission, especially in dealing with the Rohingya issue.

Regarding the principle of non-intervention, there are concerns that ASEAN cannot overcome Islamophobia in the region. Indra and Utama (2018) stated that this principle hindered ASEAN from imposing strict sanctions on Myanmar and Thailand. It is vital to determine how this organization deals with Islamophobia without changing or violating its fundamental principle.

Consequently, Haacke (2008) noted that ASEAN prefers diplomacy and "peer pressure" rather than imposing sanctions in dealing with undesirable situations. Therefore, more intensive diplomacy by maximizing capacity building is an alternative for maximizing its instruments in managing Islamophobia issues. It might focus more on problem-solving human security due to Islamophobia collaboratively instead of blaming certain parties.

To overcome the challenge of ASEAN centrality, its member-states and partners should expand the realm of diplomacy to enhance their ability to deal with negative issues (Julianto, Mulyaman, and Damarcanti, 2022). The multilevel, multidisciplinary, and multidimensional exceptional diplomacy demonstrate the central role and ASEAN's capacity to discuss and find solutions to various problems that threaten peace, security, and stability in the region, including the consequences of Islamophobia.

Regarding the weakness of the ASEAN Human Rights Commission, the Rohingya issue is the biggest challenge. This may involve strengthening the institution, building a proper structure, selecting competent and trusted people, and developing the necessary mechanism for giving reprimands and creating a sense of urgency. Itasari (2020) stated that with the establishment of the ASEAN Human Rights Commission, member states should have preferred a regional solution to an international one. Governance and problem-solving mechanisms are more likely to be selected if the rules adhere to the regional countries' conditions.

### Conclusion:-

Islamophobia negatively affects Muslims in Indo-Pacific, especially in India, Myanmar, Thailand, and South Korea, as they experience discrimination, rejection, persecution, expulsion, and killing from various backgrounds. This study proves that, except in South Korea, Islamophobia existed long before the AQ and ISIS appearance, rooted in colonialism legacy, political tensions between the majority and minority groups, and the Islamic-based separatism movement. The rise of Islamist terrorist attacks after 2001 exacerbated the pre-existed discrimination. Islamophobia has clearly threatened national security, regional stability, and human security.

Therefore, ASEAN needs to take strategic steps to deal with Islamophobia, such as:

1. Ensuring the ASEAN Charter and ASEAN Declaration of Human Rights are genuinely implemented by considering the respect, promotion, and protection of the fundamental rights of ASEAN citizens.
2. Bringing the issue of human rights violations and humanitarian crises based on Islamophobia into ASEAN dialogue mechanisms attended by ASEAN members and partner countries such as India and South Korea.
3. Exercising particular approaches and dialogues with member countries and partners are conducted gradually and systematically to build mutual trust and find the best solution for Muslims, especially in Myanmar, Thailand, and India.
4. Strengthening the ASEAN agencies, particularly the ASEAN Human Rights Commission, in dealing with human rights violations, including the issue of Islamophobia.

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