MEGAPHONE FOR HATE

DISINFORMATION AND HATE SPEECH ON FACEBOOK DURING ASSAM'S CITIZENSHIP COUNT

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My community too fell victim to social media, as Facebook allowed the Burmese nationalists to spread their toxic and violent hate against us until it was too late for too many. My message to the social media platforms is 'Stop allowing malicious actors to weaponize tools of connection into tools of hate. Learn from your mistakes. Act now."

--Tun Khun, President of Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK. June 2019

"Public discourse is being weaponized for political gain with incendiary rhetoric that stigmatizes and dehumanizes minorities, migrants, refugees, women and any so-called "other"... Hate is moving into the mainstream – in liberal democracies and authoritarian systems alike... By enhancing global resilience against this insidious phenomenon, we can strengthen the bonds of society and build a better world for all.[1]"

--António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General. May 2019

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Introduction

The warnings from the 1930s are ringing again in the 21st century. The explosion of disinformation and hate speech online is threatening democracies and driving violence and persecution against vulnerable communities.

One group identified by the UN as especially vulnerable to hate speech are the over 1.9 million people who were excluded from India's National Register of Citizens (NRC) published in the northeastern state of Assam on 31 August, 2019.

This report investigates that concern and finds that **Bengalis, Muslims in particular, are facing an extraordinary chorus of abuse and hate in Assam on Facebook.**

This is the first report that dissects the nature of this online hatred in Assam and warns that such **dangerous prejudice must not be allowed to influence policies to strip away citizenship rights** from 1.9 million people.

This report also exposes the limitations of **Facebook's artificial intelligence (AI) driven strategy** to detect hate speech. ■

A snapshot of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) process:

The process of updating Assam's register of citizens required the over 33.02 million residents of Assam to come forward with proof of citizenship that they or their ancestors have lived in India since 1971[2]. More than 100 civil society groups from around the world have warned that this could be the biggest exercise in disenfranchisement in the 21st century[3] and destroy the international community's efforts to end statelessness by 2024.[4]

The NRC's publication has precipitated an atmosphere in Assam of "great uncertainty and anxiety", as described recently by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michele Bachelet.[5] Fueling the charged atmosphere is the serious online abuse and hate levelled against some of these excluded communities. Indeed, the UN previously warned of the NRC's potential to stoke "ethnic tensions"[6], and has raised concerns at "the rise of hate speech directed against these minorities in social media."[7]

This report will present a snapshot of the dangerous hate speech and lies being allowed to spread in Assam on Facebook. Avaaz's research primarily took place in the period immediately ahead of the final publication of the NRC.

Of the communities excluded from the NRC, Avaaz found some evidence of hate speech directed against Bengali Hindus, but the majority of hate speech found focused on Bengali Muslims.

For Hindus excluded from the NRC, the government offers hope in the form of a proposed 'Citizenship Amendment Bill.' The Bill will not protect Muslims[8] excluded from the NRC.

The government of India has said those currently excluded from the NRC can appeal at 'Foreigners Tribunals' (FTs), quasi-judicial bodies set up exclusively to decide citizenship status. But these reportedly operate in a highly discriminatory[9] manner. After exhausting their legal options (going all the way to the Supreme Court), people could end up disenfranchised and stateless, facing prolonged detention in prison camps[10].

Tackling hate speech against this backdrop is vital, particularly as Indian authorities threaten to roll out the NRC across India[11]. Despite a request to investigate hate speech, the Indian government has so far failed to respond to the UN in writing, to show whether and how it is doing so.[12]

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[2] Upgradation of National Register of Citizens - https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=106627 (Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs.)
[3] The biggest mass disenfranchisement of the 21st century https://files.institutesi.org/cso-joint-statement-on-assam-nrc.pdf
[4] #ibelong campaign to end statelessness https://www.unhcr.org/uk/ibelong-campaign-to-end-statelessness.html (UNHCR)
[5] UN Human Rights Chief expresses concern about Kashmir situation, asks Centre to ease lockdown https://scroll.in/latest/936764/un-human-rights-chief-expresses-concern-about-kashmir-situation-asks-centre-to-ease-lockdown
[6] Elina Steinerte, Ahmed Shaheed, Fernand de Varennes, E. Tendayi Achiume, "Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention", Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Special Rapporteur on minority issues and Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, 13 December 2018 https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24247 (accessed on 18 July 2019)
[7] UN experts: Risk of statelessness for millions and instability in Assam, India https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2012494.html

[8] "A small portion of Hindu migrants have been left out of the list. They had their own refugee certificates, but that was not taken into account. Anyway, the BJP is committed to passing the Citizenship Amendment Bill in the next Parliament session," Himanta Biswa Sarma told NDTV in an interview https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/assam-nrc-list-bjps-himanta-sarma-on-faulty-assam-citizens-list-the-war-isnt-over-2093609. (September 1, 2019)
[9] "Worse than a death sentence." Inside India's sham trials that could strip millions of citizenship https://www.typeinvestigations.org/investigation/2019/07/29/national-register-citizens-india-assam-bangladesh/
[10] Supreme Court allows release of illegal foreigners detained in Assam with riders https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/sc-release-illegal-foreigners-assam-riders-1522281-2019-05-11
[11] BJP Manifesto 2019 https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5798075-Bjp-Election-2019-Manifesto-English.html
[12] Letter to the Indian government by UN Special Rapporteurs sent on 27 May 2019 https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24614

Key Findings

Avaaz's investigative team found deeply troubling evidence of hate speech being shared on Facebook in Assam. The content found stoked ethnic tensions, especially between Bengali Muslims and Hindus; condoned and incited violence; and targeted minorities, such as the Rohingya refugees in India. There were also several examples of hate speech generated by politicians.

Avaaz analysed 800 Facebook posts and comments relating to Assam and the NRC, using keywords[13] from the immigration discourse in Assamese, and then assessed them using the three tiers of prohibited hate speech set forth in Facebook's Community Standards[14]. **At least 26.5% of the posts and comments found by Avaaz constituted hate speech in our assessment, and the posts have been shared on Facebook over 99,650 times.**

These 99,650 shares, translated into nearly 5.4 million estimated views. This is a very modest estimate, based on hate speech found over a short period of time, and on just one social network. This likely represents a drop in the ocean of the hate that has been drowning Assam through Facebook and other social media, in a state where just 10.25 million people have internet access.[15]

Avaaz flagged 213 of the clearest examples of hate speech directly to Facebook and, to date, the company has removed 96 of them, including posts from an elected official and pages of a member of an Assamese rebel group banned by the Indian Government.

The hate speech posts highlighted in this report were easily found by native Assamese speakers, and yet Facebook's own team had not previously detected any of them before being alerted to them by Avaaz. Indeed, even UN warnings have not spurred Facebook to proactively protect vulnerable minorities on its platform.

Facebook's flawed approach to hate speech reveals why. In most instances, including this one, the platform relies heavily on artificial intelligence (AI) tools to detect hate speech, and relies on human content moderators only to review flagged content, rather than to proactively detect it. The quality of AI hate speech detection relies on it first "learning" from content flagged by native speakers -- AI cannot pick up on the context often necessary to detect hate speech.

But people belonging to the minority groups most directly targeted by hate speech on Facebook and most critical to "teaching" the AI, such as Rohingya in Myanmar or Bengali Muslims in Assam, often lack online access or familiarity with Facebook's flagging tools.

With such a heavy reliance on AI, Facebook has a huge blindspot and has become a megaphone for hate, exacerbating Assam's ethnic tensions generated by the NRC.

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[13] See Annex 1 for a full list of the key words.
[14] https://en-gb.facebook.com/communitystandards/hate_speech
[15] Northeast states lag behind in internet, mobile connectivity (Times of India) https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/northeast-states-lag-behind-in-internet-mobile-connectivity/articleshow/67168080.cms
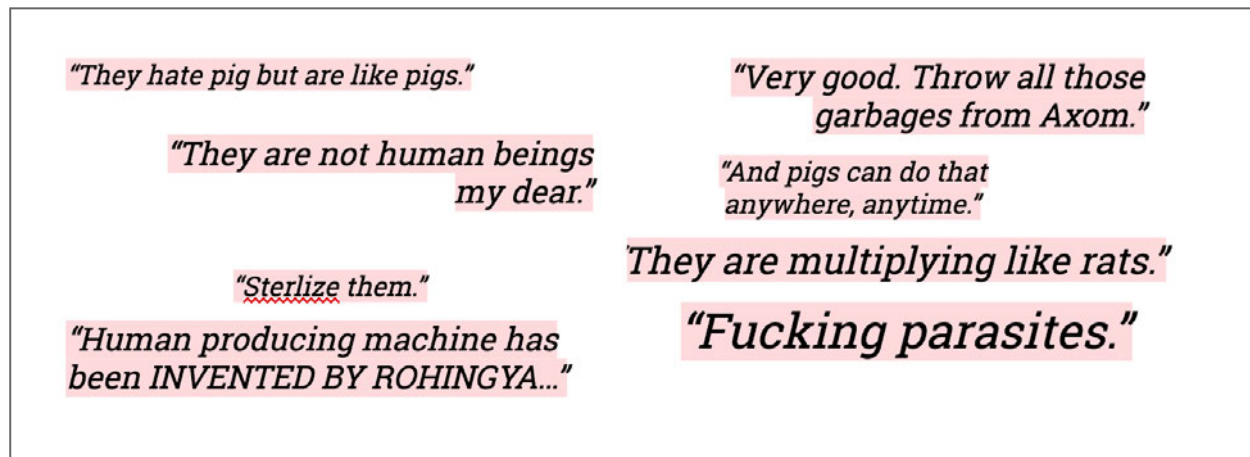
Key findings on hate speech:

- Inter-ethnic hate speech targeting minorities in Assam has been shared tens of thousands of times on Facebook during the NRC process.

- Despite repeated calls from Avaaz to Facebook to proactively enforce with human content moderators its Community Standards on hate speech in Assamese, Bengali and Hindi with a team that understands the issues specific to Assam, Facebook has not yet committed to doing so.

- The 213 examples that Avaaz flagged as hate speech to Facebook were shared over 99,650 times. Facebook has taken down 96 of the posts, pages and comments we reported to them. These were at least viewed 5.4 million times.

- The label "Bangladeshi Muslim" has become a charged term of abuse on Facebook, reflecting assumptions of "foreign-ness" of Bengali Muslims who are described as "criminals," "rapists," and "terrorists", and also depicted as subhuman -- "mosquitoes," "pigs," and "dogs."

- Avaaz found striking similarities between the dehumanising language used to describe minorities in Assam and hate speech directed at the Rohingya community in Myanmar.

- Many regional and national news outlets amplify inflammatory or hate speech of prominent individuals and politicians by directly quoting it in the headlines of the outlets' Facebook posts.

- Protecting "Indian" women from "rape-obsessed foreigners" was a particular theme running through several posts. A member of the Assam state legislature, Shiladitya Dev, published a post, shared over 800 times, claiming those who rape "our mothers and sisters" must be "Bangladeshi Muslims". Facebook took down his post after Avaaz flagged it for breaching its Community Standards.

- Jiten Dutta, a member of the banned group United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA),[16] has called for actions against "foreigners" on Facebook since 2017. Facebook took down at least 7 of his profiles under its "Dangerous Individuals" policy after Avaaz flagged them[17] starting in June. It also took down 4 fan pages which collectively had over 12,900 followers. Facebook refuses to publicly announce Dutta's designation as a 'Dangerous individual' on its platform, while he keeps setting up new profiles.

- "Troll Assamese Media", a page with 15,828 followers was spreading a high volume of hate speech through memes and other images. After Avaaz flagged it to Facebook, it took down the page.

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[16] National Declaration of Assam, 21 April 2017
https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/DeclarationNationalAsom%28ULFA%291967%29_3_20842017.PDF (accessed 18 July 2019)
[17] We flagged his profile to Facebook on 26th June 2019.

Key findings on hate speech (cont.)

"They hate pig but are like pigs."

"They are not human beings my dear."

"Sterlize them."

"Human producing machine has been INVENTED BY ROHINGYA..."

"Very good. Throw all those garbages from Axom."

"And pigs can do that anywhere, anytime."

"They are multiplying like rats."

"Fucking parasites."

This graphic depicts a sample of original English language comments Avaaz found posted in response to a post asking "Are Muslims Mosquitoes or humans?" on the "Troll Assamese Media" page.

II Recommendations

To Facebook

▮ **Take a proactive "zero tolerance" stance against hate speech:**

With UN warnings about the NRC's potential to "stoke ethnic tensions"[18], Facebook should **proactively implement an effective human-led "zero tolerance" policy against hate speech by boosting its own language capacity** in Assamese and other Indian languages; translate Facebook's User Guidelines, Code of Conduct and Community Standards into Assamese, and to review flagged content in Assamese. Facebook should also identify and equip local people - not just organizations - with deep cultural and linguistic knowledge of Assam and international human rights standards to flag content that violates Facebook's Community Standards on hate speech.

▮ **Launch an early warning system within its Strategic Response[19] team to protect vulnerable minorities:**

Facebook should embed within its **Strategic Response** team a transparent early warning system with human content moderation of hate speech and other mitigation measures, particularly where there are UN warnings issued specifically about the rise of hate speech on social media and its "potential destabilising effects" for millions, as in Assam. **This system should act preventatively to avert human rights crises**, not just reactively to respond to offline harm that has already occurred.

▮ **Correct the record on false news and disinformation:**

Given the ethnic tensions present in Assam, false news can fuel dangerous levels of hate speech. **Facebook should notify and provide corrections from independent fact-checkers to each and every user** who has seen content that fact-checkers have determined to be false or purposefully misleading, including if it came from a politician.

▮ **Be transparent on page and post takedowns:**

Publish the rationale[20] for taking down public profiles and/or pages via the Facebook Newsroom, **so its application of its own standards is transparent**, and the issue of hate speech is given the publicity it deserves.

▮ **Launch an urgent human rights audit of impact on minorities:**

Agree to an independent audit of hate speech and other human rights on Facebook in India in Indian languages, starting with Assamese. Facebook has signed up to **comply with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,[21]** which require it to conduct human rights due diligence such as identifying its impact on vulnerable groups like women, children, linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities and others, particularly when deploying AI tools to identify hate speech, and take steps to subsequently avoid or mitigate such harm[22].

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[18] https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24247
[19] Facebook's new rapid response team has a crucial task: Avoid fueling another genocide
https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/facebook-s-new-rapid-response-team-has-crucial-task-avoid-n1019821
[20] Facebook should do this consistent with the Global Network Initiative principles to which it is signed up.
https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/gni-principles/
[21] UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/GuidingprinciplesBusinesshr_eN.pdf
[22] Facebook in the rest of the world - John. G Ruggie - former UN Special Representative for business and human rights -
https://www.business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/John%20Ruggie_Facebook_15%20Nov%202018.pdf

Recommendations to the Indian government

- **Investigate and prosecute hate speech:**

  India must respond to the UN's request to show how it is enforcing its laws to investigate, prosecute and counter hate speech, with a **particular view to how it is protecting minorities.**[23]

- **Ensure no one is made stateless:**

  India must comply with its international law obligations to develop a humane policy in the short-term,[24] with an objective to ultimately adopt legislation, that **protects everyone's right to nationality without reference to religious affiliation or any other kind of discrimination,** particularly for vulnerable minorities, and ensures that any child born in India is not rendered stateless. India should also accede to relevant international statelessness conventions.[25]

- **Protect the rights of those excluded in the appeals process:**

  Those excluded from the NRC should receive full due process of the law in an impartially- administered appeals process at the Foreigners Tribunals (FTs), consistent with Article 21 of the Indian Constitution[26], which ensures the right to life and personal liberty. Crucially, the presumption by the FTs of non-citizenship should be reversed, and the **burden of proving citizenship shifted to the State,** not the individual.[27] The outcomes of cases at the FTs should be published transparently.

- **No coercive action against those excluded:**

  No actions such as arrests or detentions should be taken against anyone left out of the final NRC.[28]

- **Protect refugee populations:**

  India should accede to the Refugee Convention and its Protocol, ratify the Convention Against Torture, and adopt domestic legislation consistent with those frameworks, to **protect refugees within its borders and uphold its non-refoulement obligations.**

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[23] This recommendation is consistent with India's international law obligations under Article 2(1) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Notably the UN requested specific information from the Indian government about "investigations of cases of hate speech and incitement to hatred, in particular by political and religious actors, and the outcomes of such investigations."

[24] https://epapertelegraphindia.com/imageview_281809_15754502_4_undefined_18-07-2019_9_i_1_sf.html?fbclid=IwAR0xFc3oeDjcp4z3dhwxMecDJkoCeSa_9IH205Q-vr5-IFgBWCrpxhosecsg

[25] This recommendation is consistent with India's international law obligations under Article 5(d)(iii) of ICERD and General Recommendation No. 30 of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

[26] Article 21 reads "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law". https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1199182/

[27] This recommendation is consistent with international standards requiring any preference in terms of linguistic, religious or ethnic characteristics in a state's requirements for the granting of citizenship to be reasonable and justified, as identified in the reports of the UN Special Rapporteurs on minority issues to the General Assembly (A/73/205) (paras 50 and 56) and contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/38/52) (para. 67(c)); https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24781&LangID=E

[28] This recommendation is consistent with India's international law obligations under Article 5(c) of ICERD.

Recommendations to the Indian government (cont.)

In an Avaaz-Asia Research Partners poll conducted in India in July 2019[29] we asked the following question:

"The state of Assam is trying to document all lawful Indian citizens in Assam. This list is called the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Millions of people could be left out of the NRC and many could end up in jail without citizenship of any country. The UN has warned that this could lead to a potential humanitarian crisis. One way to resolve the humanitarian crisis is to provide a path to citizenship for everyone left out of the NRC. Do you agree with this proposal?"

- **The majority - 55% of people polled support the proposal of citizenship for all those excluded from the NRC**

- **20% did not support it**

- **25% were unsure or did not know.**

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[29] Online interviews were conducted in India between 16 - 21 July 2019. Interviews were done with 2003 people aged 18 and above. The regional split was North India – 34% , West India – 26%, South India – 23%, East / North East India - 17% The gender split was Male 56% / Female 44%.

Recommendations to the UN and the international community

In its Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech[30], the UN outlined a concrete vision to address hate speech around the world. In India, Avaaz recommends the UN must prioritize the following objectives:

▪ **Monitor and collect data on hate speech against minorities** both on social media and in mainstream media, particularly against the backdrop of the threat of a citizenship exercise like the NRC.

▪ **Support victims of hate speech in Assam,** in particular those excluded from the NRC and ensure there is no escalation in violence against them.

▪ **Engage state and non-state actors** spreading hatred online and offline in India. Bring together stakeholders, including new and traditional media to **ensure all stakeholders take responsibility to stop the spread of hate speech.** Start with Assam as an important test case.

▪ **Engage social media companies** on how they can fulfil UN principles to protect vulnerable minorities and address hate speech in India and encourage partnerships between these companies to **stop the misuse of their platforms by those spreading hate and disinformation.**

30 https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf

Findings

Facebook's Community Standards[31] prohibit the posting of three tiers of hate speech.

Tier 1 encompasses violent and dehumanising attacks or support for such attacks on people or groups of people who share "protected characteristics" or immgration status.

Tier 2 encompasses attacks targeting such individuals or groups of people with statements of physical, mental or moral deficiency, or of disgust or contempt.

And **Tier 3** includes attacks which are calls to exclude or segregate a person or groups of people tantamount to expulsion or political, economic or social exclusion.
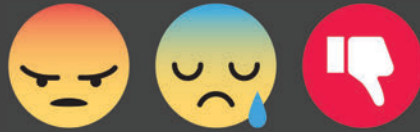
....

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https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/hate_speech

To find hate speech in the NRC context Avaaz established a list of predetermined words and phrases used in the context of the discourse on migration (such as *'miya'* and *'geda'* - pejorative words for Muslims in Assam, *'bohiragato'* - a pejorative word for outsider, *'aboidho nagorik'* which means illegal citizen and *'ana axomiya'* which means non-Assamese.)[32]

We then manually looked at public Facebook profiles and pages of influential individuals and groups in Assam; and also used Crowdtangle, a social network monitoring and content discovery tool, to run a search of those keywords across 102 Facebook pages that had content related to the NRC and Assam. Using both these methods, we then translated and analysed a combined total of 800 comments and posts.

When Avaaz analyzed these entries using Facebook's tiers of hate speech, we found that 26.5% of the 800 **Facebook posts, pages and comments examined in relation to the NRC could be classified as hate speech, largely against Muslims.**[33] 213 entries appeared to correspond to at least one of the three tiers of hate speech and, to date Facebook has taken down 96. These 213 posts were shared over 99,650 times[34] and this is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg. This study focused solely on Facebook,[35] and only on posts and pages that either related to the NRC or to Assam.

Below are key "hate speech" themes Avaaz found on Facebook along with examples illustrating those themes.

Theme 1 - The UN's warning of NRC's potential to stoke ethnic tensions is playing out on Facebook

Theme 2 - 'Dangerous speech' on Facebook is a real world threat in Assam

Theme 3 - Hate speech focused on Rohingya refugees

Theme 4 - Hate speech focused on protecting women from 'rape-obsessed' foreigners

Theme 5 - News coverage amplifying inflammatory speech - 'Call and response' on Facebook.

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[32] Full glossary of key search words in Assamese included at the end of the report as Annex 1.
[33] These findings are echoed in other studies of hate speech on Facebook where Islamophobia was found to be the predominant theme within the hate speech - T. Soundararajan, A. Kumar, P. Nair, J. Greely, "Facebook India: Towards the Tipping Point of Violence: Caste and Religious Hate Speech", Equality Labs, June 2019, https://www.equalitylabs.org/facebook-india-report (accessed 18 July 2019) and Equality Labs, "Facebook India, Towards the Tipping Point of Violence: Caste and Religious Hate Speech", 2019, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58347d04bebafbb1e66df84c/t/5d0074f67458550001c56af1/1560311033798/Facebook_India_Report_Equality_Labs.pdf (accessed 16 July 2019)
[34] This statistic is based on 213 posts and comments coded as Tier 1, 2 or 3, out of a total of 800 posts and comments. Facebook, "Hate speech", Community Standards, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/hate_speech/ (accessed 16 July 2019)
[35] India now has the world's highest number of Facebook users. https://www.livemint.com/Consumer/CvEKdaltF64YycZsU72oEK/Indians-largest-audience-country-for-Facebook-Report.html

THEME 1

The UN's warning of NRC's potential to stoke ethnic tensions is playing out on Facebook

The label "Bangladeshi Muslim" has become a charged term of abuse on Facebook, reflecting assumptions of "foreign-ness" of Bengali Muslims. [36] Muslims are variously described as "criminals," "rapists," and "terrorists", and also depicted as subhuman -- "mosquitoes," "pigs," and "dogs".

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[36] "Although the Bengali origin Muslims in Assam descend from peasant workers brought from the former Bengal and East Bengal starting in the 19th century under colonial rule, they have long been portrayed as irregular migrants. As a result of this rhetoric, Bengali Muslims have historically been the target of various human rights violations, including forced displacement, arbitrary expulsions and killings." https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/SR/Communications/OL-IND-13-2018.pdf

Example 1:

Shiladitya Dev
I love Assam.
Simply sporting a "phulom Gamusa" around the neck and speaking Assamese Language and at the same time encroaching our religious land "Sattra Mati" and rapeing our mother's and sisters....What type of Assamese are they ???
Bangladeshi Muslims aren't they ???

News18 Assam & NE
শিলাদিত্য দেৱৰ পুনৰ বিস্ফোৰক মন্তব্য। 'ডিঙিত গামোচা, মুখত অসমীয়া ভাষা, কিন্তু সত্ৰৰ মাটি বেদখল আৰু জীয়ৰী-বোৱাৰীক ধৰ্ষণ, এয়া কোনে অসমীয়া?'– কংগ্ৰেছ আৰু AIUDFয়ে ডিঙিত গামোচা লৈ সদনত প্ৰতিবাদ কৰা সন্দৰ্ভত কটাক্ষ কৰি এই মন্তব্য।

On 13 March, 2019, this video was shared by an elected representative of the Assam state legislature, Shiladitya Dev of the BJP. In his post he implies that the type of person who

> *"encroach[es] our religous land ... and rape[s] our mother's and sisters" [are] 'Bangladeshi Muslims' aren't they ???"*

The post had 2295 users comments and reactions and 816 shares.

We flagged this post to Facebook on 26 June, 2019, as both a Tier 1 statement comparing "Bangladeshi Muslims" to violent and sexual criminals, and a Tier 2 statement of "moral inferiority." Facebook subsequently took it down. ▪

Example 2:
· ·

In this post from 2018 with 2,000 views, a Facebook user associated with a prominent anti-immigrant Assamese lobby group, posted a video interview with the head of the organisation speaking about the NRC.

In the post, the user writes:

> *"The way we put up mosquito nets not to get bitten by mosquitoes, the same way only if we cover ourselves by law, then only these Miya mosquitoes cannot bite us. The law which will save us from Miya mosquitoes will be like this, 'Taking 1951 as the base year, reservations will be made in terms of acquiring land in Assam, government jobs, commercial license and in educational institutions.'"*

Reference to a group as "Miya mosquitoes" ('Miya' is a pejorative word in Assamese for "Muslim") is a Tier 1 breach of Facebook's hate speech policy. Facebook removed this post after Avaaz flagged the video on 26 June, 2019. ▪

Example 3:

On 27 May, 2018, Jiten Dutta, a member of the "pro-talks" branch of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)[37] which is banned by the Indian government[38], shared a post showing people travelling to an NRC centre.

Jiten Dutta
27 May 2018 · 🔘

চৰ চাপৰিত জনসংখ্যা বিস্ফোৰণ কি দৰে ঘটিছে তলৰ ভিডিঅ টো চাই অনুভৱ কৰক। এই জন বিস্ফোৰণ কঠোৰ আইন প্ৰণয়ন কৰি ৰোধ কৰিব লাগিব। নহলে জাতি শেষ হব।গতিকে হিন্দু বাংলাদেশীৰ লগতে এই দিশটোও অলপ লক্ষ্য ৰখা উচিত হব।

পৰিয়ালটোত কেৱল মানুহেই উৎপাদন হ'ল

14,637 Views

████ is with ████ and **45 others.**
27 May 2018

Dutta writes that "strict laws" are needed to stop "population explosion happening in sandbar areas," (Sandbar areas or river islands in Assam are generally seen as settlements of the Muslim community). The post continues:

> *"Otherwise our nationality will not survive. Along with Hindu Bangladeshis this aspect also needs to be monitored."*

[37]ULFA pro-talk faction threatens 'armed revolution' in Assam if Citizenship Bill passed
https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/ulfa-pro-talk-faction-threatens-armed-revolution-in-assam-if-citizenship-bill-passed/1381358/
[38] ULFA is banned for a variety of "unlawful and violent activities". However, the "pro-talks" group declared a ceasefire with the government of India.
https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/the-ulfa-mutiny/237821

Example 3 (cont.)

This post triggered many anti-Muslim comments. One user wrote:

> *"They are harmful insects. The way by which the fields are destroyed by the insects, in the same way people formed insects destroys the entire country. So, these insects must be destroyed to save our country." (sic)*

Another commented:

> *"They are not humans but animals, that is why they are criminals….They are thieves and dacoits…."*

Almost a year later, Dutta again posted about the NRC, asking: "Are the people aware of what is going to become of the NRC?" He said he was optimistic when 4 million people were initially excluded, but when he learned that most of them were filing appeals, he worried "zero foreigners" will be excluded.

> *"Have the names of all the Bangladeshis get enrolled by hook or by crook? There will be nothing more dangerous than this for the community."*

In reaction, one user commented:

> *"Sir, you break the pause regarding war. Will kill or die; 1000 youths are ready. Please, Sir. Do something."*

Another posted:

> *"There is no alternative but to take arms. Within night, it has to be over. Assamese people can be sold with some money; that is the fear, Sir."*

A third suggested:

> *"It will be okay to burn the houses of the people near the river even now."*

Dutta appears to have operated on Facebook for years, posting a range of provocative speech which we detail later in this report, without being permanently flagged by the platform's network of AI tools and human content moderators. After Avaaz flagged various posts to Facebook on 26 June, 2019, for multiple violations of Tier 1 of its hate speech policy, his primary profile, along with additional duplicate profiles, were taken down.

For further examples of hate speech under this theme, refer to Annex 4 on pg.58 ▪

'Dangerous speech' on Facebook is a real-world threat in Assam

In defining its approach to hate speech online, Facebook acknowledges the 'dangerous speech' framework[39]. Simply put, 'dangerous speech' is:

Any form of expression (e.g. speech, text, or images) that can increase the risk that its audience will condone or commit violence against members of another group[40].

'Dangerous speech' is dangerous precisely because it permeates every aspect of society and normalises, even justifies, feelings of mass hatred and exclusion over time.[41] Importantly, the definition refers to **increasing the risk** of physical violence, not necessarily causing it.[42]

According to the experts who developed this framework, to be considered dangerous,[43] speech is assessed for its message, intended audience, historical/social context, the speaker(s), and the mediums used.

Content we found to be "dangerous speech" during this investigation included threats of the worst kind, with open calls to "kill," "shoot," or forcibly "evict". Much of this content was comments posted by users on the pages of regional news organisations and some even on the profiles of influential people.

[39] Richard Allan, "Hard Questions: Who Should Decide What Is Hate Speech in an Online Global Community?", Facebook Newsroom, 27 June 2017, https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2017/06/hard-questions-hate-speech/ (accessed 16 July 2019)

[40] https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/

[41] As recounted by a witness in the so-called Media Trial in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the operation of the genocide "was not the work done within a day". He described the role of "Radio Machete" as "to pour petrol - to spread petrol throughout the country little by little, so that one day it would be able to set fire to the whole country. See Prosecutor v. Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, Hassan Ngeze, para. 436

[42] Susan Benesch, Cathy Buerger, Tonei Glavinic and Sean Manion, "Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide", Dangerous Speech Project, 31 December 2018, https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/ (accessed 16 July 2019)

[43] Susan Benesch, Cathy Buerger, Tonei Glavinic and Sean Manion, "Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide", Dangerous Speech Project, 31 December 2018, https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/ (accessed 16 July 2019)

Jiten Dutta's 'dangerous' use of Facebook

Jiten Dutta's use of Facebook as a member of a branch of the "pro-talks" faction of the banned Assamese separatist group ULFA, is a prime example of "dangerous speech".

The "pro-talks" group warned of an "armed revolution"[44] last year when the government introduced a Bill to give citizenship to persecuted non-Muslim minorities from neighbouring Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Despite the Indian government's ban on all branches of the organisation,[45] ULFA has benefited from its presence on Facebook to increase its recruitment, according to the Assam police, with a few recruits even announcing their membership of ULFA on Facebook.[46]

Perhaps indicative of the importance of Facebook as a tool by which Dutta's message is spread, one of his followers expressed anger when Dutta's profile was taken down: "Some criminal-gang has hacked and blocked brother Jiten Dutta's Facebook account. Who is this criminal gang is yet to be known. But if it is known, there is no respite for that person/group."

Below are examples of speech that could lead to real world violence and persecution. ∎

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[44] https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/ulfa-pro-talk-faction-threatens-armed-revolution-in-assam-if-citizenship-bill-passed/1381358/

[45] https://mha.gov.in/banned-organisations;
https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/DeclarationNationalAsom%28ULFA%291967%29_3_20842017.PDF

[46] Sadiq Naqvi, Hindustan Times, 10 December 2018,
https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/ulfa-using-social-media-to-gain-foothold-in-assam/story-ZyPSBCYcoRLOEOoYiMG9RN.html (accessed 18 July 2019)

Example 1

. . . . .

On 20 June, 2019, Dutta posted on Facebook admitting to having "evicted a village" "last year" and warning that if the administration did not evict the new village "of suspected people" soon, "we will be compelled to take the matter into our hands."

Screenshots of Jiten Dutta's now taken down post calling on his followers to evict people he suspected of being foreigners. Translation: "In Mulong village, near Dihing river, which comes under Margherita-Lidu police station, some suspected people have set up a village, yet again. Near this area, last year, we had evicted a village. Yet again, some people have constructed houses. If the administration doesn't take any action soon, we will be compelled to take the matter into our hands."

Example 2:

. . . .

Avaaz traced Dutta's use of Facebook to encourage evictions from river island areas or "sand bars" back to at least 2017.
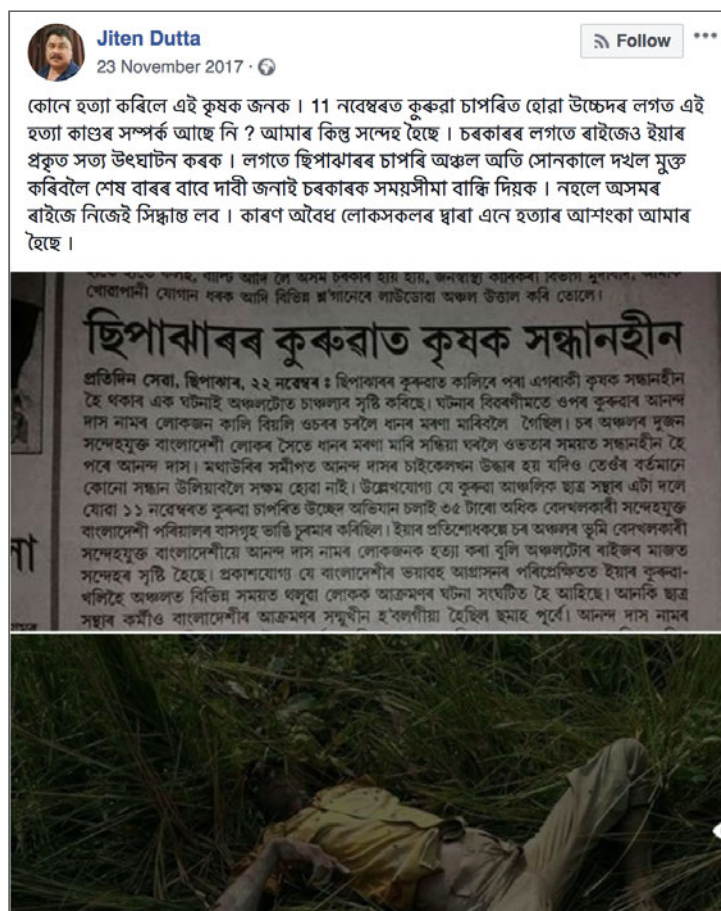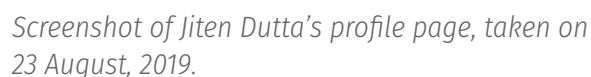

On 23 November, 2017, Dutta posted a picture of a dead body and wrote,

> *"Who killed this farmer? Does this killing have any connection with the eviction that happened in Kuruwa chapori (sand bar) on the 11th of November? We are suspicious about this. Along with government, the public should also find out the truth. Also, request the government for the last time to free the occupied sand bar areas of Sipajhar and give them a deadline. Otherwise the people of Assam will decide for themselves since we are fearful of such killings being committed by illegal people."*

Responses included comments calling for a coordinated attack by the Assamese on Muslims and to repeat the Rohingya genocide. A user wrote:

> *"[w]e want gun solution ....we) hope/expect it from you. Now is the right time to pick up. Public is with you."*

Jiten Dutta's profile page returns a month after Facebook took it down:

Screenshot of Jiten Dutta's profile page, taken on 23 August, 2019.

After Avaaz flagged these pages on 26 June, 2019, Facebook took down Jiten Dutta's profile page and a support page with 2267 followers. It told us it had done so under its "Dangerous individuals and Organisation" policy,[47] and that therefore his profile and any pages supporting him and his profile would also be taken down.

But between June and September 2019, every time Facebook took down Jiten Dutta's profile (Avaaz flagged 7 to them) he immediately started a new one. Fan pages also continue to keep appearing on Facebook, even though Avaaz has already flagged at least 4 with over 12,900 followers combined.

Further, Facebook has not publicly named Dutta as a "Dangerous Individual", nor clarified whether any Facebook users supporting Dutta will also be removed from Facebook under that policy.

Facebook's treatment of Dutta and those supporting his posts, can be contrasted with its treatment of European Facebook users involved in what Facebook terms "organized hate," such as Tommy Robinson in the UK. Facebook banned Robinson for repeatedly breaking Facebook's Community Standards by "posting material that uses dehumanizing language and calls for violence targeted at Muslims". Facebook made Robinson's banning public, explaining in a statement on Facebook Newsroom both the reasons for its action, and making it clear that anyone continuing to voice support for Robinson would also be banned, stating "that praise or support for these figures and groups is also banned."[48] Without this type of transparency, Facebook users will not know it is no longer permissible to endorse or promote Dutta's views on the platform.

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[47] https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/dangerous_individuals_organizations
[48] See
https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/02/removing-tommy-robinson/

Example 3:

. . . . .

Avaaz identified the following posts made by a Facebook follower of Dutta after Facebook's banning of Dutta.

The user's profile is replete with tags to Dutta, and photos of him and Dutta together. His posts demonstrate how Dutta's posts have inspired other users on Facebook to share his attitudes towards forcible eviction of "Bangladeshis" from Assam.

His profile photo proclaims,

> *"I am with Jiten Dutta. I will send Bangladeshis by hands and not by words."*

This post below was also taken down after Avaaz flagged it on 5 August, 2019.
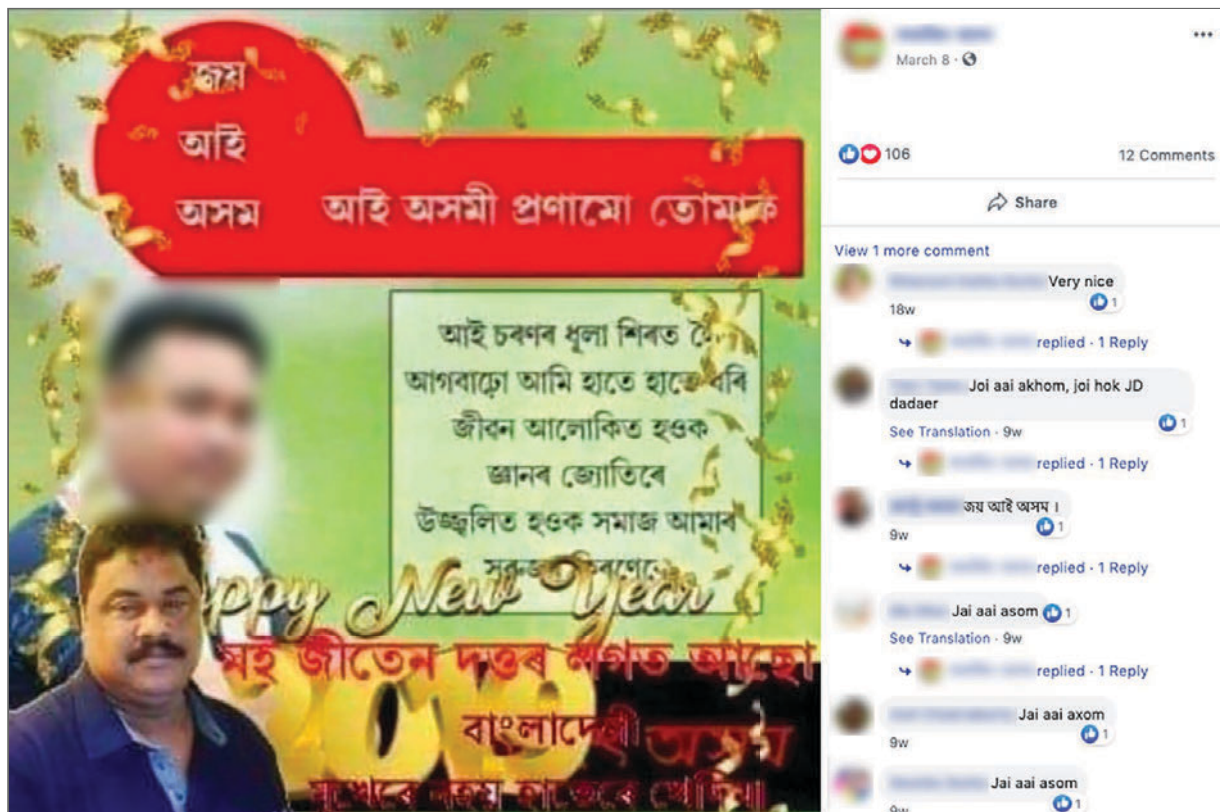
Example 3 (cont.)

Another profile photo proudly asserts,

> *"We have the Heng-dang (reference to a sword used by Ahom rulers who ruled over Assam before British rule) but we have not picked it up yet. But when we do, there is no respite. We are Assamese."*

Example 3 (cont.)

Some of this follower's posts also indicate his support of Dutta's stance on evictions. In the post below, he calls on the local police to evict "all the suspicious people" living by the river who were previously evicted and who reconstructed their houses. Facebook users commenting on the post liken the situation to a previous one in which they apparently resorted to vigilante action,

> *"We need to fight again like the previous time."*

Another user commented,

> *"People should get together and burn it down."*

A third user categorically states,

> *"There is no point telling the police. You all should burn down these houses."*

Dehumanising language is a hallmark of dangerous speech, explicitly included in prohibited Tier 1 hate speech. Avaaz found multiple instances where Assam's Bengali Muslims were characterised as insects, or in some other way less than human and the object of calls for segregation or boycotts. ▪

THEME 3

Hate speech focused on Rohingya refugees

Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar and seeking refuge in India, and specifically Assam, are often perceived of and referred to as "Bangladeshi" by social media users. They have thus become another group targeted by hate speech on Facebook. Authorities estimate there are up to 40,000 Rohingya settled in India, of whom 16,500 have been recognized by the UN as refugees and who are entitled to heightened protections under international law.[49]

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg told the US Senate in 2018, "What's happening in Myanmar is a terrible tragedy, and we need to do more." It is concerning however that Facebook is so far failing to staunch the spread of hate in Assam and that Rohingyas are also coming under attack [50] once again on the platform, from within India. It is now well-documented that Facebook failed to remove the same content in Myanmar in a timely manner. The 400+ page UN special report on Myanmar in August 2018, for example, had examples of anti-Rohingya content that Facebook had NOT removed when the report was published.[51]

Avaaz found striking similarities between the dehumanising language used to describe minorities in Assam and hate speech directed at the Rohingya community in Myanmar. Yet when Avaaz flagged these to Facebook using their online reporting tool, they were not considered a breach of Facebook's Community Standards.

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[49] https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/02/rohingya-refugees-caught-between-india-and-hard-place
[50] 'When Rohingya refugees fled to India, hate followed on Facebook.'
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/14/technology/facebook-hate-speech-rohingya-india.html
[51] https://qz.com/1370519/facebook-removes-accounts-in-myanmar-after-un-report-on-rohingya-abuses/

Table 1: Comparison of hate speech in Myanmar and Assam

Examples of Hate Speech on Facebook[52] before the Rohingya 'genocide'.[53]	Examples of Hate Speech on FB during the NRC updating process in Assam which were NOT considered hate speech by Facebook.
"May the Rakhine people … and all Myanmar citizens be free from the dangers of sons of a dog, grandchildren of a pig kalar, and rapists" *- September 2013*	"Yes they are foreigners…….they are rapists…….they are encroachers. This is beginning…….very soon they are going to demand a part of assam. As they have understood that they are majority now." "Parasites of Assam" *- July 2019*
"Just feed them to the pigs" *- October 2016*	"Should be killed, these dogs!" *- April 2019*
"If it's kalar, get rid of the whole race." *- October 2016*	"Only one thing can save Assam and Bengal.. That is mass massacre of all these infiltrators by our army.. Burma saved herself in the same way.. Identify infiltrators.. Give 30 days time to leave.. After 30 days kick their asses…" *- June 2019*

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[52] https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/myanmar-facebook-hate/
[53] Fact–Finding Mission's report which "found reasonable indications that genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes have been committed in Myanmar". https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13552.doc.html

Table 1: Comparison of hate speech in Myanmar and Assam (cont.)

"We will genocide all of the Muslims and feed them to the dogs." *- This was the name of a page that Facebook took down*	*(Comment thread conversation)* Facebook User 1: "There's just one cure. The Rakhine one - nothing else can happen." Facebook User 2: Which will not be possible. Best solution is forced conversions (gharwapsi) and male sterilisation (nasbandhi). Facebook User1: "Rakhine is possible." *- June 2019*
"Cut off those necks of the sons of the dog and kick them into the water" *- April 2018*	"Immigrants should throw in Bay of Bengal & assure that should not come out by swim." *- December 2018*
"Stuff pig's fat inside the damn kalar's mouth" *- September 2017*	"Systematic killing of Peacefuls should be done." ('Peacefuls' here mockingly refers to Muslims). *- June 2019*
"Pour fuel and set fire so that they can meet Allah faster" *- April 2018*	"There is no point arresting a Geda, they should be encountered." (An "encounter" in the Indian context refers to an extrajudicial killing by the police or security forces.) *- June 2019*

Further specific examples of anti-Rohingya posts and comments found by Avaaz are below and in Annex 5 on pg 68:

Example 1:

In 2015, after the NRC was underway in Assam, a Facebook user associated with a prominent anti-immigrant Assamese lobby group, shared a post in support of protests against Rohingya in Myanmar. He titled the post: *"We are still sleeping,"* implying that Assam/India needs to protest in a similar way.

The post he shared was full of disinformation about Rohingya including claims that there is no such group in Myanmar called Rohingya.

One Facebook user commented that

"[some] major steps are also immediately to be taken at our end also" against these *"bloody Bangladeshis"*.

Avaaz flagged the shared post as disinformation and breaching all tiers of hate speech on 5 August, 2019 to Facebook. The post was taken down.

Example 1 (cont.)

....

Two years later in 2017, when genocidal attacks against the Rohingya were underway in Myanmar, this same Facebook user posted hate speech and disinformation about Rohingya again.[54] The post outlines "myths & facts" about the Rohingya according to the author, and includes as "facts" that Rohingya are "not Burmese", they are actually

"illegal immigrants who illegally entered to (sic) Myanmar from Bangladesh,"

and that Rohingya raped, tortured and killed underaged girls, and that Rohingya killed hundreds of Rakhine people, burnt thousands of houses, and that Rohingya have been trained by Taliban and Al Qaeda.

In summing up his post, he states:
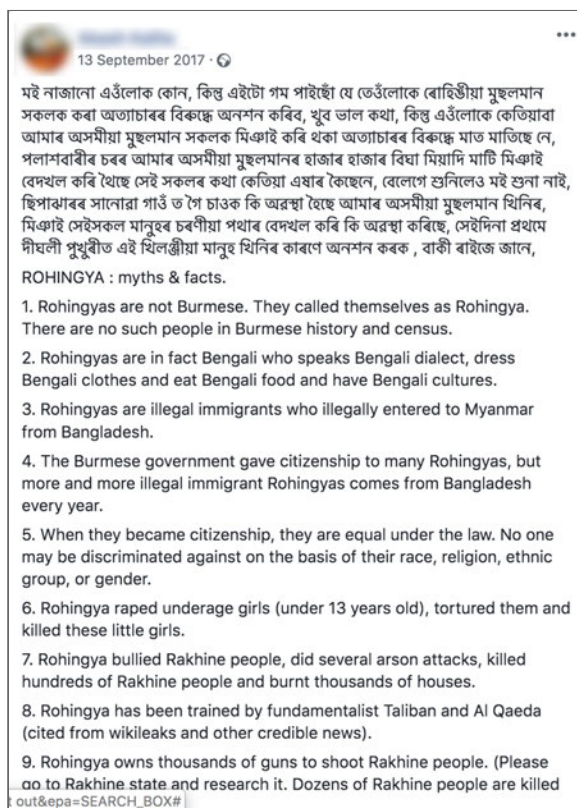
Rohingya are Bengali who illegally entered Myanmar and killed thousands of native Rakhine people.

Government gave citizenship and equal rights to thousands of Rohingya. They built hundreds of mosques and thousands of houses in Rakhine State. Their population extremely increases every year due to illegal immigrant Rohingyas.

They bullied, raped, tortured and killed native Rakhine people every year. In this case, they are systematically attacking Rakhine state and Rakhine people. They killed many Rakhine, and burnt thousands of Rakhine's houses. They made over 30,000 Rakhine people homeless. They were trained by Taliban and Al Qaeda.

The post makes no mention of genocidal attacks against the Rohingya.

We flagged this to Facebook on 5 August, 2019 as a Tier 1 breach of Facebook's hate speech standards but it has not been taken down. ■

[54] https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13552.doc.htm

In an Avaaz-Asia Research Partners poll conducted in India in July 2019[55], the majority –

54% of people polled - said they were in favour of granting Rohingya people fleeing a genocide in Myanmar, refugee status in India.

29% were against it.

17% said they didn't know.

[55] Online interviews were conducted in India between 16 - 21 July 2019. Interviews were done with 2003 people aged 18 and above. The regional split was North India – 34% , West India – 26%, South India – 23%, East / North East India - 17% The gender split was Male 56% / Female 44%.

Hate speech focused on protecting women from 'rape-obsessed' foreigners

Another theme running through the posts and comments was to label all perceived "Bangladeshis", particularly Muslims, as rapists.

Example 1:

On 9 September 2019, just days after the NRC list had been released BJP's Assam legislator Shiladitya Dev shared a video with over 1.8 million views on his timeline saying "Wake up Hindus." In the 5-minute long video the female speaker peddles disinformation and conspiracy theories about Islam and Muslims and warns:

> *"They are saying their namaz (Muslim prayer) so that they can destroy us."*

> *"Until there is even one Hindu alive, until then they have a problem. Until then they have been told to do jihad and until then they have been told to commit atrocities on our mothers and sisters."*

Towards the end of the video she alludes to the use of Facebook to spread these conspiracy theories saying:

> *"All we do is get angry on Facebook and stop there." "All of you who are recording this on Facebook, or on your mobile phones, this isn't just something you record on your mobile but in your hearts."*

The original text under the video defiantly asks whether this is "hate speech" or "facts"? Shiladitya Dev proceeded to share it with over 6,366 of his own followers.

We flagged this to Facebook on 16 September, 2019 and it was taken down. But Facebook failed to explain why its own systems had failed to detect the video which had been online for more than a month and shared over 32,000 times already.

Example 2:

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On 26 March, 2018, a Facebook user associated with a prominent anti-immigrant Assamese lobby group, posted two photographs of women who were allegedly raped and later died with the headline *RAPE FESTIVAL ASSAM*. The post called for female foeticide to be made legal in Assam to prevent Hindu women from being born and later raped by "Bangladeshi Miyas". This post was shared the following day by the leader of the lobby group.

Such images and calls to action propagate the dangerous stereotype of "Bangladeshi Miyas" as rapists, and as such constitute a specific breach of Facebook's standards. The post is a direct attack on people for their national origin -- a protected characteristic under Facebook's Community Standards -- and Tier 1 "Dehumanizing speech" because it includes a "reference or comparison to Violent and sexual criminals".[56] The post is additionally problematic because it calls for the legalisation of female foeticide, a crime widespread in India. Avaaz first brought this post to Facebook's attention on 26 June, 2019 but Facebook did not act to take it down. We flagged it again in a letter to Facebook to seek clarity on their policy but received no response. The post was finally taken down on 16 September, 2019 with a confirmation that it did, in fact, violate the platform's community standards. ▪

[56] Facebook, "Hate speech", Community Standards, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/hate_speech/ (accessed 16 July 2019)

Example 3:

· ·

An Assamese member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu nationalist volunteer organization that is widely regarded as the ideological parent organization of the BJP[57], posted a video of a live chat titled "Start giving poison to daughters". The video had 2,600 views. It features an RSS member chatting with a Hindu priestess. During the chat, the RSS member claims

> *there is an international conspiracy called "love jihad and land jihad" and that when the Muslim population grows above 30%, as in Kashmir or Assam, "they launch attacks."*

The Hindu priestess then advocates -

> *for people to start poisoning their daughters in order to avoid being raped by Muslim men.[58]*

Such a call to violence to start "poisoning daughters" is a Tier 1 breach of Facebook's Community Standards.

We flagged this video to Facebook on 5 August, 2019 and it has subsequently been taken down.

For more examples of hate speech portraying Bengali Muslims as rape-obsessed refer Annex 6 on pg 72:

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[57] https://www.hindustantimes.com/lok-sabha-elections/how-sangh-shaped-bjp-s-victory-march/story-ze26WiD949AakyIphY9Q8O.html
[58] Shri Guruma Radhika Saraswati, "Start poisoning daughters", Facebook profile, 1 July 2019, https://www.facebook.com/shriguruma.radhikasaraswati/videos/242082566746546/ (accessed 16 July 2019)

THEME 5

## News Coverage Amplifying Inflammatory Speech - 'Call and Response' on Facebook

Avaaz found several regional and national media outlets directly quoting inflammatory speech or hate speech by politicians and government officials in news posts, often in headlines without any context, counterpoint or challenge. Once posted on the outlets' Facebook pages, these posts triggered high engagement rates with long comment threads replete with vile speech calling for violence or celebrating violent acts.

Example 1:

On 26 March, 2018, a media outlet shared its own news video in which Shiladitya Dev, an elected BJP representative of the Assam state legislature, states

"I was wrong. Not 80%, 95% crimes have the involvement of Bangladeshi Muslims".

This represents a Tier 1 breach of Facebook's hate speech standards as it targets Bengali Muslims and implies that nearly all are 'criminals'. The video received 2,894 reactions, was shared 542 times, and was viewed over 165,000 times.
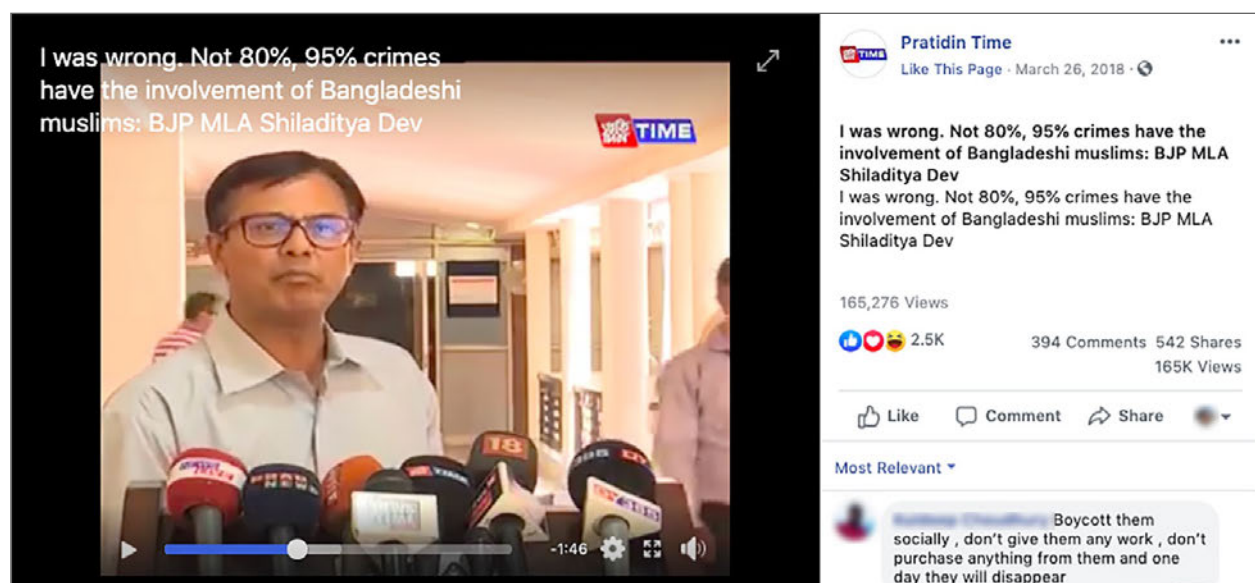
In response to the post, one Facebook user said,

"Boycott them socially, don't give them any work, don't purchase anything from them and one day they will disappear."

We flagged this comment to Facebook as Tier 3 hate speech calling for economic exclusion, but Facebook said it did not breach its community standards.

Another commenter invoked the Holocaust in response, to the suggestion of an economic boycott,

> *"That's a bad idea actually... if this idea is implemented the Geda's will start looting each and every person that comes in contact with them... so the one and only solution is to either kick them out of the country or take a final step that's THE FINAL SOLUTION that was implemented by the nazis during ww 2 ..."*

Avaaz flagged this comment as an example of Tier 1 hate speech to Facebook, and it was taken down.

Example 2:

Some Assamese Muslim poets have reclaimed the word *'Miya'*[59] and refer to their work - in which they protest the suffering of their community as a result of the NRC process - as *'Miya* poetry' written in the *'Miya'* dialect. Leading Assamese nationalists and intellectuals have opposed[60] this genre of poetry, and recently criminal complaints were filed against several Muslim poets in Assam on the basis that the poems promote religious "enmity between different groups and "criminal conspiracy""[61].

[59] https://sabrangindia.in/article/i-am-miya-reclaiming-identity-through-protest-poetry
[60] https://caravanmagazine.in/communities/assam-against-itself-miya-poets-asserting-identity-intimidation-fir
[61]https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/10-including-poets-booked-on-charges-of-promoting-enmity-between-different-groups/story-1rEFdbisHOvafWVjl8mycI.html;
https://indianexpress.com/article/north-east-india/assam-fir-against-10-for-poem-on-assams-citizenship-row-5825929/?fbclid=IwAR2l93GyIWf3VYEt3vCNntkYc56aEA1RIDa0CnBR-XbDc_3kSoFY7gyRuE

Example 2 (cont.)

News 18 Northeast, a leading 24 hour news channel in Assam, with 913,311 Facebook followers, posted an original news video about the Miya poets featuring a stereotypical image of

> *a Muslim man wearing a skull cap but brandishing a machete in his hand.*

In the video, the headline

> *'Xenophobic Axomiya (Assamese)!'*

blares above four consecutive messages that scroll through the video:

> *'Dangerous conspiracy under the cover of Miya poetry';*
> *'Blueprint of disrupting the peace in Assam through Miya poetry';*
> *'Muslim young women are victims of gangrape in Assam'; and*
> *'Threat of destroying the state machinery'.[62]*

A Facebook user commented on the post that:

> *"We should line them up and shoot them";*

another referred to the poets as the

> *"Rohingya of Assam. It is even dangerous to educate them. They fight against Assam? They conspire."*

A third user warned that

> *if "we" do not "stop our reliance on Miyas … we Assamese will get wiped out, only Miya will remain."*

The video was posted on 9 July, 2019, and has been viewed 65,200 times.

We flagged this post and video to Facebook as a Tier 1 violation of hate speech standards on 17 September, 2019, but Facebook has not taken it down. ▪

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[62] https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2077025329267599

News outlets have a legitimate responsibility to report on hate speech, but they need to do so in a responsible manner. In this case, the broadcast news station itself spread hate speech both through its orginal broadcast and on Facebook by departing from mere "reportage" of the incident, and editorializing the facts to include visual images and text that portrayed Muslim men to be rapists, terrorists, and criminals.

This becomes doubly problematic because in an Avaaz - Asia Research Partners poll conducted in India in July 2019[63] we asked people to rank their preference of news sources and found that the highest preference was for television news.

TV - 41%
Newspapers - 21%
Online news sites - 19%
Radio - 13%
Social media - 5%

We also asked people which source of news they trusted the most and television was the top choice again.

[63] Online interviews were conducted in India between 16 - 21 July 2019. Interviews were done with 2003 people aged 18 and above. The regional split was North India – 34% , West India – 26%, South India – 23%, East / North East India - 17% The gender split was Male 56% / Female 44%.

Example 3:

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On 31 July, 2018, Raja Singh, a BJP legislator in the southern Telangana state Legislative Assembly, was quoted as saying,

> *"If the illegal Bangladeshis don't go back like gentlemen, they should be shot, thrown out at gunpoint to ensure India's safety."*

Several media outlets, including DNA India, Time8 and Kolkata 24/7, reported on his statements. Time8 used the full quote in a Facebook post linking to its story.

TIME8
1 August 2018 · 🌐

"If the illegal Bangladeshis don't go back like gentlemen, they should be shot, thrown out at gunpoint to ensure India's safety"

TIME8.IN
Assam NRC Draft | Shoot illegal Bangladeshi settlers if they don't return: BJP MLA

Example 3 (cont.)

Again, Facebook users responded to the post with large volumes of supportive comments. Several users praised Singh's statement, one user stated he was

"100% correct" and that anyone who "loves India" should "100% support" him.
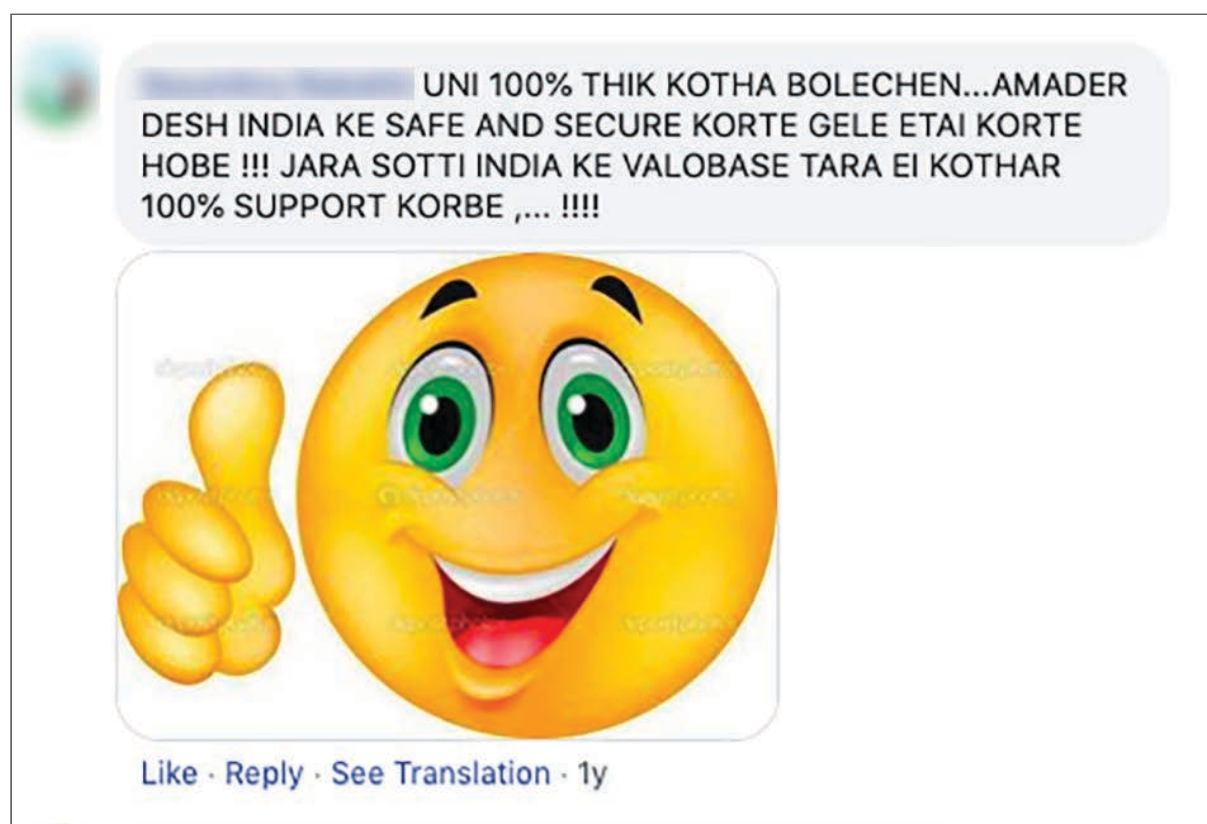
Another suggested,

"Their voting card should be cancelled immediately"

and then

"later they should be shot."

Avaaz flagged many such comments to Facebook, but in the end did not have the capacity to flag everything that met the criteria for hate speech on media outlet pages.

For more examples of inflammatory speech from politicians refer to Annex 7 on pg 75:

Avaaz's research concludes that Facebook remains an enabling platform for hate speech. It's platform is being weaponized to push propaganda and hate against some of the most vulnerable people in Assam who are on the precipice of losing all their rights. ▪

Facebook's "zero tolerance" hate speech policy failing Assam's most vulnerable minorities

Avaaz engaged with Facebook[64] during the evidence-gathering process of this report and repeatedly emphasized the potential consequences of hate speech in Assam. We were in written communication with the Facebook team requesting clarity on policy questions and received limited comments for publication. We had two video calls and a face-to-face meeting with relevant Facebook staff.

We asked Facebook to commit to proactively enforcing its Community Standards on hate speech in Assamese, Bengali and Hindi and to assign a team that understands local history, culture and the faultlines of Assamese society. Facebook told us it has capacity in Assamese. **It refused to commit to deploying a team specifically tasked with proactive monitoring by human content moderators of hate speech in Assam at this sensitive period.**

The following is an on-the-record statement Facebook offered Avaaz on 27 July, 2019
....

"We want Facebook to be a safe place for all people to connect and express themselves, and we seek to protect the rights of minorities and marginalized communities around the world, including in India. We have clear rules against hate speech[65], which we define as attacks against people on the basis of things like caste, nationality, ethnicity and religion, and which reflect input we received from experts in India. We take this extremely seriously and remove content that violates these policies as soon as we become aware of it.

To do this, we have invested in staff in India, including dedicated content reviewers, who have local language capabilities and an understanding of the country's long standing historical and social tensions. We've also made significant progress in proactively detecting hate speech on our services, which helps us get to potentially harmful content faster.

But these tools aren't perfect yet, and reports from our community are still extremely important. That's why we're so grateful to Avaaz for sharing their findings with us. We have carefully reviewed the content they've flagged, and removed everything that violated our policies. We will continue to work to prevent the spread of hate speech on our services, both in India and around the world."

Avaaz sent Facebook more evidence after this statement was shared. As of 19 September, 2019, Facebook had acted only upon 96 of the 213 potential breaches of its Community Standards that we flagged. It did not act with urgency in addressing several serious breaches of its community standards and repeatedly failed to commit to proactive compliance with its standards, despite lessons learnt from the Rohingya crisis and the UN's warnings about the rise of hate speech in Assam. ■

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[64] The Facebook staff we spoke with included Natasha Jog, Election Integrity Head in India, Meg Chang, Public Policy Manager Elections, Shivnath Thukral, Public Policy Director, India & South Asia, Devika Malik, Head of Hate Speech Monitoring in India, Varun Reddy, Facebook Public Policy Manager, Alex Warofka, Product Policy Manager, Human Rights and Freedom of Expression, and Bill Xie, Regional Program Manager, Strategic Response.
[65] https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/hate_speech
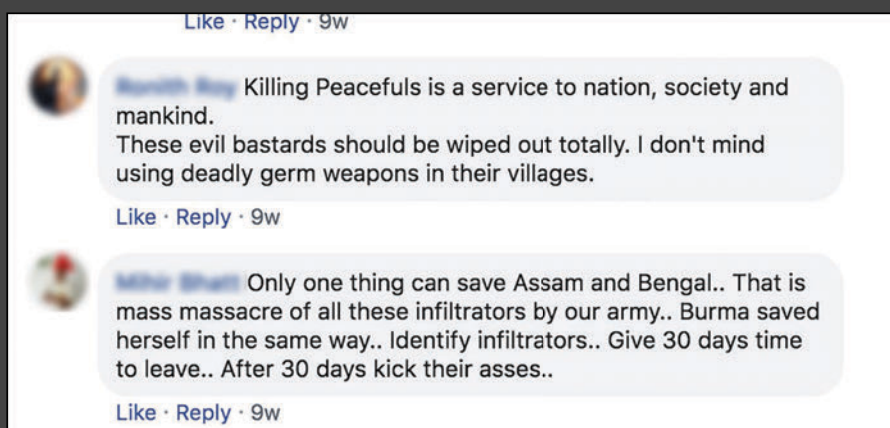
Flaws in Facebook's methodology:

Avaaz has detected serious failures and inconsistencies in Facebook's "zero tolerance" approach towards hate speech on its platform.

We appreciate issues of scale, and that Assamese is a relatively unusual language on the platform. We understand that at present, Facebook detects hate speech on its platform by relying on users to flag content and also by relying heavily, and increasingly so[66], on AI tools to detect particular kinds of language.[67] Facebook claims that in the first quarter of 2019, AI tools allowed it to proactively detect 65.4% of hate speech on its platform before users reported the content.[68]

But Assam is a vivid example of where Facebook's methodology for detecting hate speech fails to protect the most vulnerable minorities from serious online attacks.

1. First, **Avaaz asked but did not receive any confirmation that Facebook conducted or planned to conduct any proactive human-led content reviews for hate speech in Assamese prior to Avaaz's request**, despite three UN letters sounding the alarm bells about an emerging crisis in Assam, the most recent of which highlighted its concern about the rise of hate speech. Nor did we get confirmation that there is adequate capacity - or intention - within the Facebook team to conduct these proactive investigations now.

2. Second, in relation to machine learning, we note with concern that **even as late as 2018 with the NRC reaching a critical phase,** Facebook's AI tools were not translating content from Assamese[69], the language of one portion of hate speech identified in our investigation. During Avaaz's research between June and July 2019, Facebook's AI tools were still not translating content from Assamese into English.

3. Third, Facebook's **content moderation of hate speech,** even in English, works inconsistently. Avaaz flagged over 50 comments via Facebook's online flagging tool. Comments that clearly violated Facebook's Community Standards were not taken down, as reflected in Table 1 on pg 30 earlier. For instance: We flagged the following open call for genocidal violence in English, and Facebook responded that it did not breach its Community Standards. The "Peacefuls" here mockingly refers to Muslims. *(overpage)*

[66] https://newsitn.com/fb-faucets-subsequent-gen-ai-to-assist-it-detect-hate-speech-information-opinion/; https://www.pcmag.com/news/368104/facebook-taps-next-gen-ai-to-help-it-detect-hate-speech
[67] https://research.fb.com/category/natural-language-processing-and-speech/
[68] https://transparency.facebook.com/community-standards-enforcement#hate-speech
[69] https://engineering.fb.com/ml-applications/expanding-automatic-machine-translation-to-more-languages/

Flaws in Facebook's methodology (cont.)

4. Fourth, Facebook's approach to **using AI tools rests on a faulty premise: that all users have equal access to the flagging mechanism on Facebook's platform. Automated detection can only begin to function when there are an adequate number of posts flagged in the first instance** from which classifiers can be built, or in simpler terms: humans need to flag content to train Facebook's AI tools to detect hate speech on its own. But, as we see in the Assamese context, the minorities most directly targeted by hate speech on Facebook often lack online access or the understanding of how to navigate Facebook's flagging tools. No one else is reporting it for them either, so **AI tools fail to be effective in the Assamese context.** As a result, the predictive capacity of AI tools in Assamese is likely weak, and will continue to be, which means little content will make its way to a human moderator for content review.

5. Fifth and finally, Facebook cannot continue to conduct "business as usual" in its approach to hate speech in Assam. When the **UN has called the situation "a potential humanitarian crisis",** coupled with a concern about online hate speech, Facebook must amplify its response. Importantly, *locally trained human capacity* is needed to mitigate against possible future harm, or to remedy the harm that has already occurred, to those vulnerable populations. In situations like Assam, Facebook needs to establish a transparent early warning system with human content moderation of hate speech. AI tools cannot be relied upon so heavily to understand context extrinsic to the speech itself, such as human culture, "a phenomenon too fluid and subtle to be described in simple, machine-readable rules".[70] ▪

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[70] https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/27/18242724/facebook-moderation-ai-artificial-intelligence-platforms

ANNEX 1

Research Design and Methodology with Glossary of Key Words in Assamese

To find hate speech in the NRC context, Avaaz established a list of predetermined words and phrases used in the context of the discourse on migration (such as *'miya'* and *'geda'* - pejorative words for Muslims in Assam, *'bohiragato'* - a pejorative word for outsider, *'aboidho nagorik'* which means illegal citizen and *'ana axomiya'* which means non-Assamese.)

We then manually looked at public Facebook profiles and pages of influential individuals and groups in Assam; and also used CrowdTangle, a social network monitoring and content discovery tool, to run a search of those keywords across 102 Facebook pages that had content related to the NRC and Assam. The words appeared in 1554 posts of those pages. Using both these methods, we then translated and analysed a combined total of 800 comments and posts posted since the NRC exercise began.

ANNEX 1 (CONT.)

Research Design and Methodology with Glossary of Key Words in Assamese

1. Lungiwala - pejorative word for someone who wears the male sarong. Usually associated with Muslims.

2. Miya - pejorative word for Muslim in Assam

3. Geda - pejorative word for Muslim in Assam

4. Aboidho nagorik - illegal citizen

5. Ana axomiya - non-Assamese

6. Bohiragato - pejorative word for outsider

7. Dariwala - pejorative word for anyone with a beard - tends to refer to Muslim men

8. Jehadi - this word is used interchangeably with the English word "terrorist".

9. Jinnar bongshodhor - Relative of Jinnah (Jinnah is the founder of Pakistan)

10. Land hungry - pejorative term for Muslim in Assam seeking to illegally encroach land

11. Mullah - a Muslim cleric

12. Bangladeshi - used pejoratively to refer to undocumented migrants

13. Infiltrator - this word is starting to be used much more than the milder term "illegal immigrant"

14. NRC - National Register of Citizens

15. Rohingya Muslims - a community from Myanmar that survived a genocide two years ago; many members of this community found refuge in India

16. Chapori / Char - relating to the sand bar / river areas of Assam where poor Muslim communities most often reside

This methodology delivers a snapshot of the hate speech circulating in Assam, but because it is limited to specific key words and phrases, it is not exhaustive.

In our estimation even our narrow sample of 78 hate speech posts, shared 99,650 times had at least 5.4 million views.

Viewership calculation for videos:

Facebook provides viewing data for videos. We followed Facebook's definition of what constitutes a "view," that is, a viewing experience that lasts three seconds or longer.

Viewership projection for images and text:

Facebook discloses the number of views for videos, but for posts containing only text and image content the platform displays only the number of shares and other interactions, such as likes or comments. Therefore, in order to estimate viewership for text and image content we designed a metric based on the publicly available statistics of the Facebook videos analyzed in our study, taking into account the total number of video views and dividing it by the total number of video interactions. Facebook reports a "video view" only after three seconds, while an image or text can be considered as "viewed" and having an actual impact in less than three seconds. Therefore, the estimation of total views in this study is a conservative one and likely lower than the content's actual total viewership.

Engagement rate calculation for images and text:

We computed an Assam-wide metric called the video engagement rate, which we calculated by dividing the total video views by the total video interactions for all 102 public pages considered in our report. We considered all videos published by these pages between 1 January, 2018 and 1 June, 2019. Based on the video views/interactions, the Assam-wide video engagement rate was 20.95 views per interaction. We then added together the total number of documented interactions with text and image content, and multiplied it by the video engagement rate to estimate total views. Because we only carried out our calculations based on documented interactions of the posts included in our analysis, and that data was only available for a subset of the total number of pages on which we compiled evidence, our final estimate of total views is very likely lower than the actual total viewership of all removed content and therefore can be considered a conservative figure.

In summary, our calculation of estimated views looks like this:

Step 1: (total video views) / (total video interactions) = (video engagement rate)

Step 2: (video engagement rate) x (documented interactions) = (estimated views)

	Total views	Interactions	Ratio (Views/Int)
Owned videos	4,750,000,000	225,300,000	21.08
Shared videos	29,360,000	2,780,000	10.56
Total	4,779,360,000	228,080,000	20.95
Estimated views	**5,491,399**		

ANNEX 2

Avaaz's campaigns and record of investigations into social media disinformation networks

Avaaz is campaigning against the epidemic of online disinformation and hateful content and our research teams have a track record of finding networks that escaped Facebook's detection mechanisms.

- Avaaz uncovered vast disinformation networks in at least 6 different EU countries that reached over 750 million views ahead of the crucial 2019 EU parliamentary elections. Facebook took these networks down. Read the full report here.

- Avaaz brought to light the massive spread of fake news during the French Yellow Vests protests. Read the full report here.

- Avaaz uncovered vast disinformation networks ahead of the Brazilian elections in 2018. Read more about it here.

- Avaaz coordinated a "victims of fake news" tour with social media companies in Silicon Valley. You can read the open letter to the heads of Facebook and others here.

ANNEX 3

Facebook's Community
Standards Section
on Hate Speech as of
21 June, 2019

11. Hate Speech:

Policy Rationale

We do not allow hate speech on Facebook because it creates an environment of intimidation and exclusion and in some cases may promote real-world violence.

We define hate speech as a direct attack on people based on what we call protected characteristics — race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, caste, sex, gender, gender identity, and serious disease or disability. We also provide some protections for immigration status. We define attack as violent or dehumanizing speech, statements of inferiority, or calls for exclusion or segregation. We separate attacks into three tiers of severity, as described below.

Sometimes people share content containing someone else's hate speech for the purpose of raising awareness or educating others. In some cases, words or terms that might otherwise violate our standards are used self-referentially or in an empowering way. People sometimes express contempt in the context of a romantic break-up. Other times, they use gender-exclusive language to control membership in a health or positive support group, such as a breastfeeding group for women only. In all of these cases, we allow the content but expect people to clearly indicate their intent, which helps us better understand why they shared it. Where the intention is unclear, we may remove the content.

We allow humor and social commentary related to these topics. In addition, we believe that people are more responsible when they share this kind of commentary using their authentic identity.

Click here to read our Hard Questions Blog and learn more about our approach to hate speech.

Do not post:

Tier 1 attacks, which target a person or group of people who share one of the above-listed characteristics or immigration status (including all subsets except those described as having carried out violent crimes or sexual offenses), where attack is defined as

- Any violent speech or support in written or visual form

- Dehumanizing speech such as reference or comparison to:

  – Insects

  – Animals that are culturally perceived as intellectually or physically inferior

  – Filth, bacteria, disease and feces

  – Sexual predator

  – Subhumanity

  – Violent and sexual criminals

  – Other criminals (including but not limited to *"thieves," "bank robbers," or saying "all [protected characteristic or quasi-protected characteristic] are 'criminals'")*

- Mocking the concept, events or victims of hate crimes even if no real person is depicted in an image

- Designated dehumanizing comparisons in both written and visual form

11. Hate Speech (cont.)

Tier 2 attacks, which target a person or group of people who share any of the above-listed characteristics, where attack is defined as

- Statements of inferiority or an image implying a person's or a group's physical, mental, or moral deficiency
  - Physical (including but not limited to *"deformed," "undeveloped," "hideous," "ugly"*)
  - Mental (including but not limited to *"retarded," "cretin," "low IQ," "stupid," "idiot"*)
  - Moral (including but not limited to *"slutty," "fraud," "cheap," "free riders"*)
- Expressions of contempt or their visual equivalent, including (but not limited to)
  - *"I hate"*
  - *"I don't like"*
  - *"X are the worst"*
- Expressions of disgust or their visual equivalent, including (but not limited to)
  - *"Gross"*
  - *"Vile"*
  - *"Disgusting"*
- Cursing at a person or group of people who share protected characteristics

Tier 3 attacks, which are calls to exclude or segregate a person or group of people based on the above-listed characteristics, where exclusion is defined as:

- Explicit Exclusion which includes but is not limited to "expel" or "not allowed".
- Political Exclusion defined as denial of right to political participation.
- Economic Exclusion defined as denial of access to economic entitlements and limiting participation in the labour market,
- Social Exclusion defined as including but not limited to denial of opportunity to gain access to spaces (incl. online) and social services.
- (We do allow criticism of immigration policies and arguments for restricting those policies.)
- Content that describes or negatively targets people with slurs, where slurs are defined as words commonly used as insulting labels for the above-listed characteristics.

11. Hate Speech (cont.)

Facebook [updated] Tier 2 of its Community Standards Section on Hate Speech on 23 August, 2019. If our investigation had used this new standard, we would have flagged far more content because the new language is better defined. Tier 2 violations are now defined as:

Tier 2 attacks, which target a person or group of people who share any of the above-listed characteristics, where attack is defined as

- Statements of inferiority or an image implying a person's or a group's physical, mental, or moral deficiency

  - Physical *deficiencies* are defined as those about:

      Hygiene, including but not limited to: *filthy, dirty, smelly*

      Physical appearance, including but not limited to: *ugly, hideous*

  - Mental *deficiencies* are defined as those about:

      Intellectual capacity, including but not limited to: *dumb, stupid, idiots*

      Education, including but not limited to: *illiterate, uneducated*

      Mental health, including but not limited to: *mentally ill, retarded, crazy, insane*

  - Moral *deficiencies* are defined as those about:

      Culturally perceived negative character trait, including but not limited to: *coward, liar, arrogant, ignorant*

      Derogatory terms related to sexual activity, including but not limited to: *whore, slut, perverts*

- Other statements of inferiority, which we define as:

  - Expressions about being less than adequate, including but not limited to: *worthless, useless*

  - Expressions about being better/worse than another protected characteristic, including but not limited to: *"I believe that males are superior to females."*

  - Expressions about deviating from the norm, including but not limited to: *freaks, abnormal*

11. Hate Speech (cont.)

- Expressions of contempt or their visual equivalent, which we define as:

  – Self-admission to intolerance on the basis of a protected characteristics, including but not limited to: *homophobic, islamophobic, racist*

- Expressions that a protected characteristic shouldn't exist

- Expressions of hate, including but not limited to: despise, hate

- Expressions of dismissal, including but not limited to: don't respect, don't like, don't care for

- Expressions of disgust or their visual equivalent, which we define as:

  – Expressions that suggest the target causes sickness, including but not limited to: *vomit, throw up*

  – Expressions of repulsion or distaste, including but not limited to: v*ile, disgusting, yuck*

- Cursing at a person or group of people who share protected characteristics, such as:

  – Referring to the target as genitalia or anus, including but not limited to: cunt, dick, asshole

  – Profane terms or phrases with the intent to insult, including but not limited to: fuck, bitch, motherfucker

  – Terms or phrases calling for engagement in sexual activity, or contact with genitalia or anus, or with feces or urine, including but not limited to: suck my dick, kiss my ass, eat shit

ANNEX 4

The UN's warning of NRC's potential to stoke ethnic tensions is playing out on Facebook

Continued from pg 20 - below are further examples under Theme 1 - The UN's warning of NRC's potential to stoke ethnic tensions is playing out on Facebook

Example 4:

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Avaaz flagged a video for the rap song "Bangladeshi" to Facebook on 26 June, 2019 when we saw it on the page of Troll Assamese Media (TAM). We also flagged several other posts on the TAM page for hate speech and hateful images. The entire page with 15,828 followers was subsequently taken down by Facebook. But as of 17 September 2019, this song, with violent lyrics targeting "Bangladeshis," a Tier 1 violation of the hate speech standards, is still available on the Facebook page of "Magical Assam" with 158,853 followers as this report goes to print.
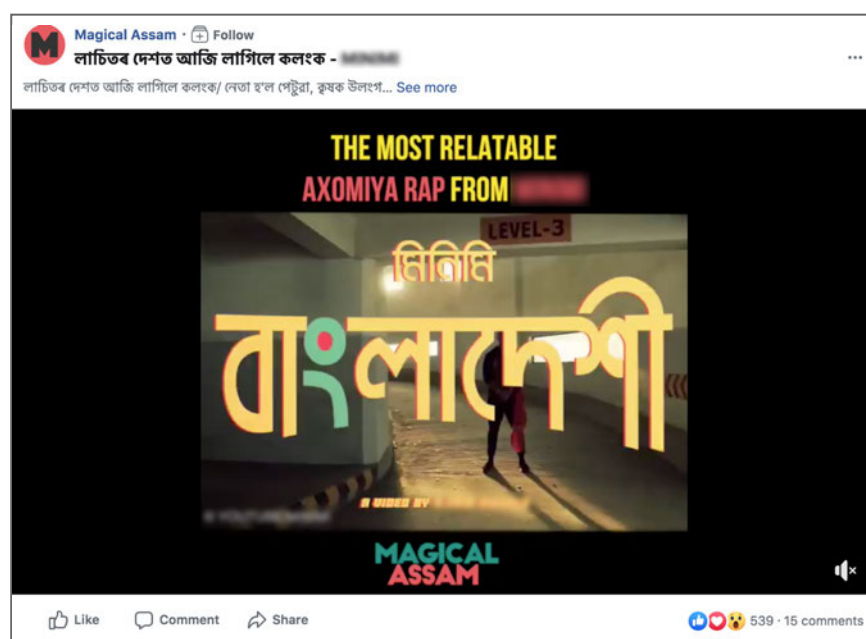
Lyrics of popular Assamese rap song "Bangladeshi", available on Facebook and on YouTube.	
Axomote aani bule bhorabo bidexi *Tuli lau jodi hengdang* *Dangi theng, ari lungi polabo* *bangladeshi….* *Atithi bhogaban amar karone* *Kintu bahiragotok mar dhai dhai* *Kati korim duseu jodi uthey prosno* *Aai matrir astitva uporot* *Xokolu ghorote ase toruwal* *Ase dhar, ase kar mor-har* *Pahuwal asomiya ulai aah* *Kor aami luit roktato*	*("Foreigners may be brought and filled up in Assam,* *If we pick up our hengdang (traditional sword),* *The Bangladeshi will run lifting their legs, leaving their lungi (a male sarong)….* *The guest is godlike for us* *But beat up the foreigner repeatedly* *We will cut them into half if question arises* *Of the existence of motherland* *Every house has a sword* *It is sharp, whoever has the courage to die,* *Come out, you brave Asomiyas (Assamese),* *Let us make the Luit (the biggest river in Assam) red.")*[71]

This video was also flagged via Facebook's online flagging tools but Avaaz was notified that this song does not violate Facebook's Community Standards on hate speech.

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[71] Suraj Gogoi and Abhinav Borbora, "In the Guise of Protest Music, Assamese Artists Churn out Hate Speech", The Wire, 9 May 2019, https://thewire.in/the-arts/assam-protest-music-citizenship-bill-hate-speech (accessed 16 July 2019)

Example 5:

On 4 November, 2018, Initiative United North East, a page with 15,829 followers posted the following:
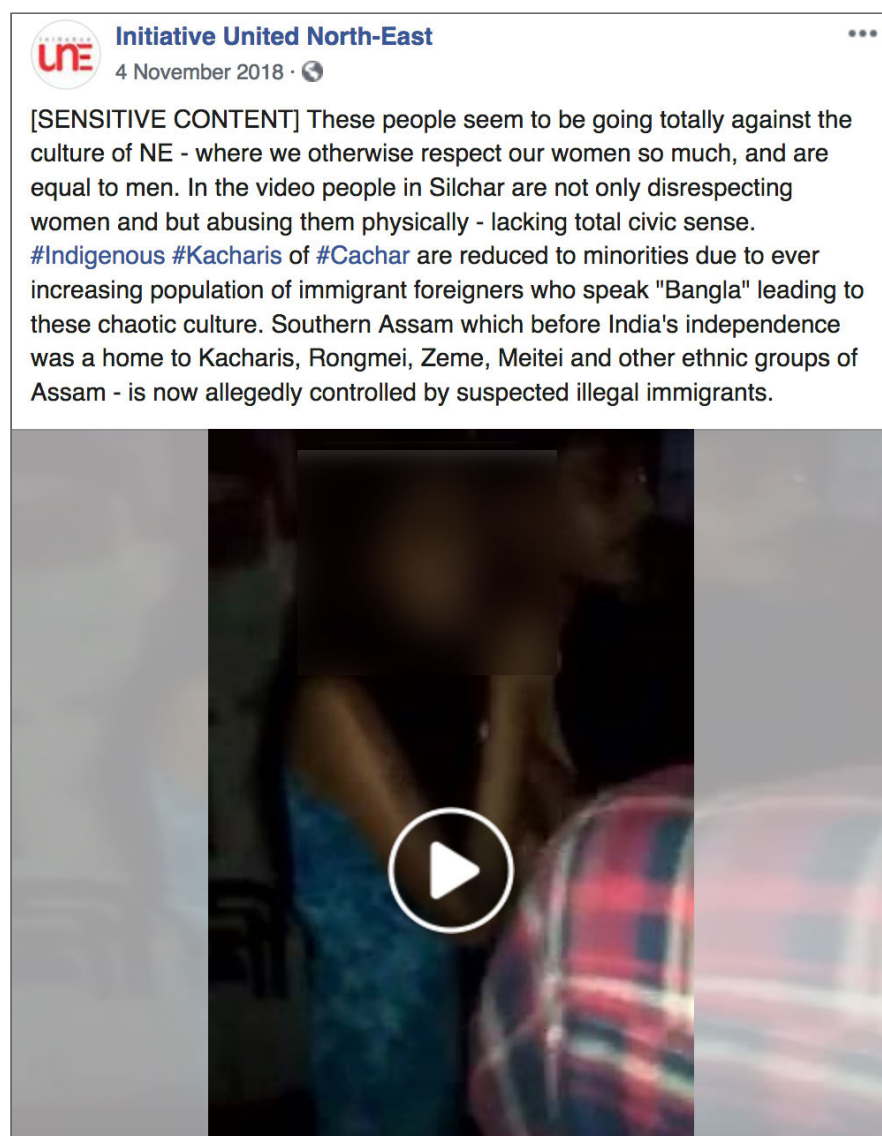
The incident referred to in the post involved

> *men allegedly beating up a woman, and was attributed to the "ever increasing immigrant foreigners who speak "Bangla.""[72]*

We flagged the post to Facebook as a breach of its Tier 2 hate speech standards on 26 June, 2019, and it was subsequently taken down. ◾

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[72] Facebook page, Initiative United North-East https://www.facebook.com/pg/UnitedNE/about/?ref=page_internal (accessed 18 July 2019). The non-profit organisation claims to want to spread the message of "love, peace and unity."

Example 6:

....

On 18 August, 2019, a page called NRC: Get out Bangladeshi, a page with 5,164 followers posted a video of people holding the Indian and Bangladeshi flags, singing the national anthem and claimed that this was "evidence" of the presence of "Bangladeshis" in India.

It wielded a threat to Hindu Bengalis that if their loyalty is divided they need to go back to Bangladesh. The exact text said:

> *Hello Hindu Bengalis, you kicked out from your country Bangladesh by your brother Muslim Bengalis, but you have still lovely feeling for Bangladesh!!! If it is, then please go back to your homeland - Bangladesh and stay in peace there with your brother Muslim Bengalis. "GET OUT BANGALDESHI" (sic)*

We flagged this to Facebook on 16th September, 2019 as a Tier 3 breach of its community standards but it did not consider this a violation. ▪

Example 7:

································

On 9 July, 2019, Asomiya Zindabad, a page which promotes Assamese nationalism, posted a hostile response directed at so-called *"Miya Muslims"* in the form of a poem.
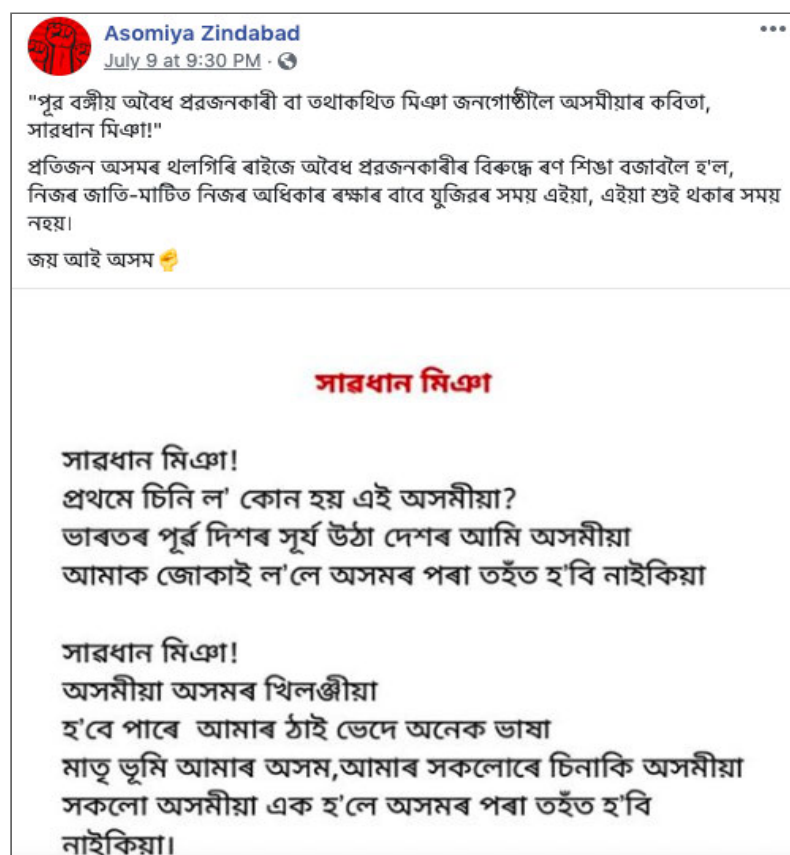
The post states that the poem below is

> *"[a] poem from indigenous Assamese to the illegal immigrants of East-Bengal origin or the so-called Miya community, 'Beware Miya'. It is now time that every indigenous Assamese need to give war cry against illegal immigrants. This is the time to fight for our nationality and land, our rights. This is not the time to lie down and sleep. Hail Mother Assam."*

Example 7 (cont.)

The first stanza of the poem, entitled *"Beware Miya"* goes on to say:

> *"Beware Miya!*
>
> *First know who is this Assamese.*
>
> *We are the Assamese of the India's Eastern lands where the sun rises*
>
> *If you trigger us you will become extinct from Assam."*

It continually repeats the refrain that Miyas "will become extinct from Assam" if they do not heed the warnings of the poem. The last stanza directly references the NRC:

> *"Beware Miya!*
> *You claim yourself as Assamese*
> *But the document you submit to prove that you are Indian are fake*
> *Because in reality you are illegal foreigners from East Bengal*
> *Assamese will no more lie dormant against the foreigners*
> *If Assamese wake up you will become extinct from Assam"*[73]

On 5 August, 2019, we flagged this post to Facebook as a Tier 1 and Tier 3 violation of its standards on hate speech, but Facebook did not consider it a breach of its community standards. ■

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[73] The full translation of the poem is here:
Beware Miya
Beware Miya!
First know who is this Assamese.
We are the Assamese of the India's Eastern lands where the sun rises
If you trigger us you will become extinct from Assam

Beware Miya!
Assamese are the indigenous of Assam
It may be the case that we have many language for according to places
Assam is our motherland, our very familiar Assamese
If all these Assamese unite you will become extinct from Assam

Beware Miya!
We are calm Assamese
But don't play with our calm nature
Please read the page of Assamese history
If you disturb us you will become extinct from Assam

Beware Miya!
You claim yourself as Assamese
But the document you submit to prove that you are Indian are fake
Because in reality you are illegal foreigners from East Bengal
Assamese will no more lie dormant against the foreigners
If Assamese wake up you will become extinct from Assam

Example 8:
....

On 11 July, 2019, a Facebook user identified as an official within a prominent anti-immigrant Assamese lobby group, posted a video about the plight of Assam's Muslims from the "char" areas or river islands in Assam. He wrote about the video,

> *"These Miyas are the example of those who make a hole in the same plate in which they eat."*

Responses to the post included comments referring to Muslims as

> *"parasites", "foreigners", "rapists", and "encroachers."*

Example 8 (cont.)

বৰ দৰদী মানুহ... এখেতৰ প্ৰকৃত পৰিচয় টো কাৰোবাৰ জ্ঞাত নেকি ...? জানিলে অকণমান জনাবচোন ... দুটামান কথা সুধিম তেখেতক ।।

Amit Shah called them as 'termites'.

Like · Reply · 1w

Parasites of Assam.

Like · Reply · 1w

↳ replied · 2 replies

Axom Bangladesh hobo aru kom dinot

Like · Reply · See translation · 1w

Yes they are foreigners.......they are rapists.......they are encroachers.
This is begining.......very soon they are going to demand a part of assam. As they have understood that they are majority now.

Like · Reply · 1w · Edited

We flagged these comments and post on 5 August, 2019 as Tier 2 hate speech violation but Facebook did not consider these a breach of its community standards. ▪

Example 9:
....

Responding to a post about birth rates amongst Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, a post on the now removed Troll Assamese Media page asked "

> *Are Muslims mosquitoes or human?"[74]*

The question provoked a range of dehumanising comments.

Comments posted in Assamese referred to Rohingya Muslims as

> *"Production machines they are #Bangladeshi", "crazy people" who "invented" "human producing machines" because "they eat sex.. sleep sex, drink sex.. laugh sex.. cry sex… chase sex.. run sex, game sex, smile sex… no time for other activities … sex.. sex. sex…"*

and it was suggested that,

> *"If they are made to sleep with the dogs and cats, then population will reduce more."*

A graphic made for this report with a sample of the original English language comments posted in response can be found in section II on Key Findings on hate speech.

These examples above are an indication of the different inter-ethnic tensions coursing through Assamese society about who does and doesn't belong in Assam. The NRC's legitimacy is being questioned by all sides.[75] As official declarations are made to unite Hindu nationalism and Assamese nationalism around Bengali Muslims as a common enemy, hate speech directed against them is likely to worsen.[76] ▪

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[74] Post taken down: https://www.facebook.com/TAMAxom/posts/1917651775191950 (accessed June 26, 2019)
[75] National Register of complaints - https://www.theweek.in/theweek/statescan/2019/09/06/national-register-of-complaints.html
[76] 0:55 The news report states that the minister has asked the 11 thousand newly elected Panchayat representatives to openly speak in support of Citizenship Amendment Act. In his lecture, the minister however referred to it as 'Hindu Citizenship Act'. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=466571947406586&id=222943518436098

Example 10:

On 1 November, 2017, Jiten Dutta, called on his followers to evict "Bangladeshi Muslims" from their homes. He complained,

> *"Even after the local populace had drawn the attention of the administration, no measure was taken. We are obligated to protect our lands.*
>
> ***If the administration doesn't evict them, then within the coming 10 days, we will free the same lands with the help of our local youths' strength.***
>
> *We are asking for the cooperation of the people of the area.*
>
> ***Thank you to those people who have been sent for the collection of facts."***

The post received supportive comments invoking violence, including at least one suggesting the methods akin to that used against the Rohingya in Myanmar be brought against "Bangladeshi Muslims", whilst simultaneously praising the Indian nation and Hindu state:

> ***"The village of Bangladeshi Miya should be burnt; Assam should also take the idea of Myanmar. Jai Hind!" (Long live India!).***

Another user commented that

> Muslims should be ***"chased, run after and killed"***

and a third that

> ***"the Bangladeshis should be shot at and killed, brother."***
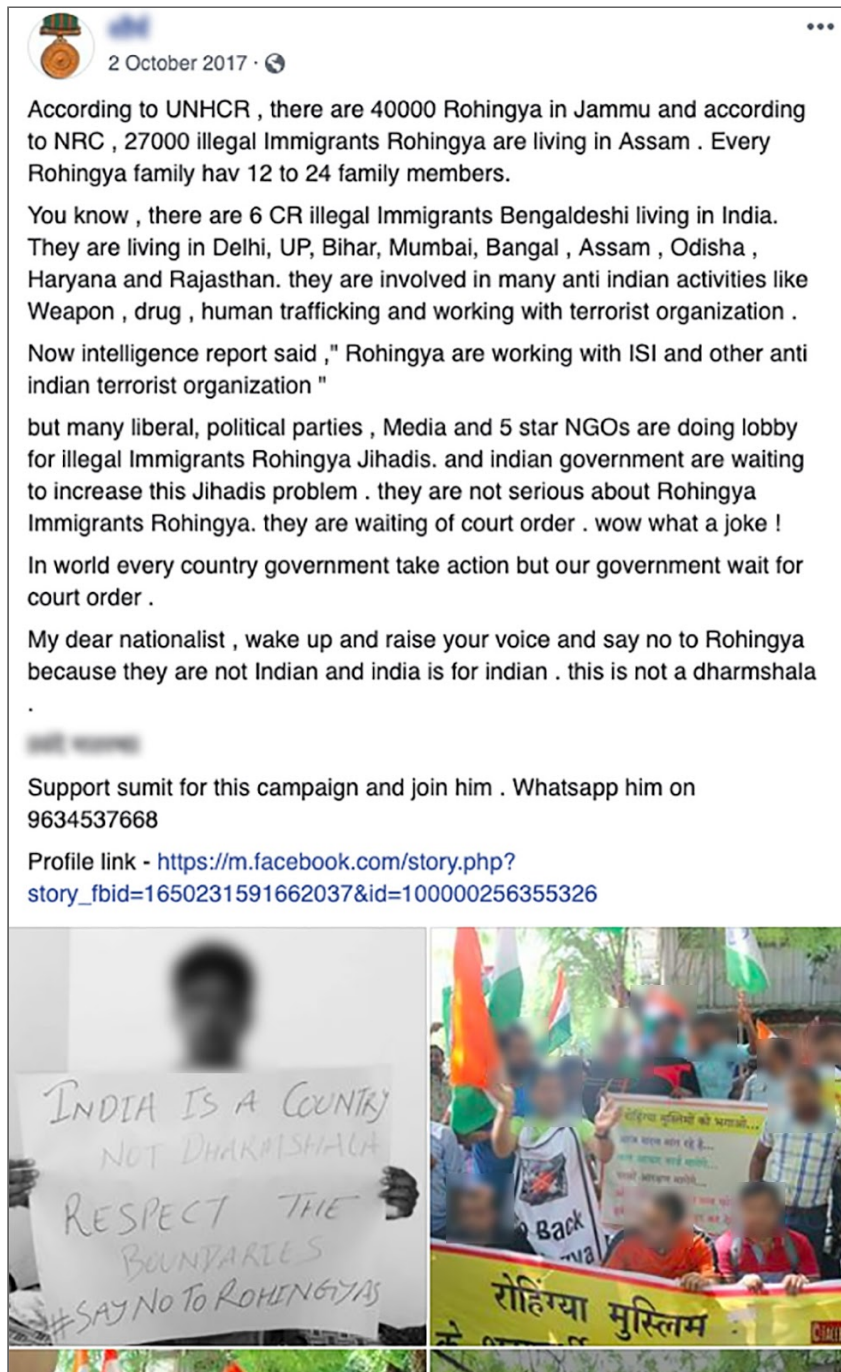
ANNEX 5

Hate speech focused on Rohingya refugees

Continued from pg 34 - below are further examples under Theme 3 - Hate speech focused on Rohingya refugees

Example 2:

· ·

In this post, which was cross-posted across pages, Rohingya are referred to as "Jehadis" and as working with "terrorist organizations."

This page has 460,351 followers. Avaaz flagged the post to Facebook on 26 June, 2019, as a violation of Tier 1 of its hate speech standards, and they took down the post.

Example 2 (cont.)

This page above has 4,637 followers and proclaims itself to be a page for supporters and fans of the RSS - the Hindu nationalist organisation widely regarded to be the ideological parent body of the BJP.[77]

After we flagged this post on 26 June, 2019, Facebook took it down. ■

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[77] https://www.hindustantimes.com/lok-sabha-elections/how-sangh-shaped-bjp-s-victory-march/story-ze26WiD949AakvIphY9O8O.html

Example 3:

. . . .

In this post, a Facebook user commends Ashin Wirathu, a Burmese Buddhist monk widely regarded as the spiritual leader of the anti-Muslim movement in Myanmar[78], and for expelling Rohingya from Myanmar. The user celebrates his violent, hateful rhetoric to saying, *"If you know him you are Awesome,"* and *"This guy send chills down the spine of any Rohingya in Assam."*

Facebook took down Wirathu's profile[79], known as the "Burmese bin Laden" in early 2018. Yet when we flagged this post to Facebook on 5 August 2019, they did not take it down.

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[78] https://www.economist.com/prospero/2017/07/17/two-documentaries-probe-myanmars-religious-strife; https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/may/12/only-takes-one-terrorist-buddhist-monk-reviles-myanmar-muslims-rohingya-refugees-ashin-wirathu

[79] Nationalist monk known as the 'Burmese bin Laden' has been stopped from spreading hate on Facebook - https://time.com/5178790/facebook-removes-wirathu/

ANNEX 6

Hate speech focused on protecting women from 'rape-obsessed' foreigners

Example 4:

. . . .

The page "Troll Assamese Media", posted several hateful memes about Muslims and gained over 15,000 followers in 4 years. It categorised itself on Facebook as a "news and media" page.

On 25 April, the image above was posted, stereotyping Muslim men as casually contemplating rape. ■

Example 5:

. . . .

Another example from the same page is a meme, posted on 2 April, 2018 depicting the protagonist of a popular Netflix series as an idle "Bangladeshi Muslim" man, waiting to rape women.

Avaaz flagged these posts to Facebook on 26 June, 2019 as being in breach of their Community Standards. Facebook took down the entire TAM page 15,828 followers. ■

ANNEX 7

News coverage amplifying inflammatory speech - 'Call and response' on Facebook.

Continued from pg 45 - below are further examples under Theme 5 - News coverage amplifying inflammatory speech - 'Call and response' on Facebook.

Example 4:

In September 2018, Amit Shah, President of the BJP, is reported to have said that

"Bangladeshi migrants" in Assam are like "termites".[80]

He repeated similar comments in a BJP campaign speech in April 2019.[81,82] Shah was appointed as Indian's newest Minister of Home Affairs in May 2019.[83]

The Facebook page of the news outlet Kolkata 24x7 posted a news report from its website covering his September 2018 remarks with the headline:

"'Almost 40 lakh illegal migrants have been identified in Assam. These migrants are like termites.' Amit Shah warns that all illegal migrants will be thrown out."

The post received incendiary comments from Facebook users. One user wrote,

"They are hungry dogs, not termites. All these 'Kanglu' (derogatory term for Bangladeshi) dogs should be kicked in their butts and thrown out from India and Indian Facebook pages."

Avaaz reported it to Facebook on 5 August, 2019 as Tier 1 dehumanizing speech and it was removed. ■

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[80] https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bangladeshi-migrants-are-like-termites-amit-shah/article25017064.ece; The use of the word "termites" was justified by an Indian government spokesperson on Al Jazeera as "perfectly apt." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmicA_S8Zy8
[81] https://www.reuters.com/article/india-election-speech/amit-shah-vows-to-throw-illegal-immigrants-into-bay-of-bengal-idUSKCN1RQ1YD;
[82] https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/lok-sabha-2019/story/bjp-amit-shah-hindu-refugees-mamata-banerjee-1499691-2019-04-11
[83] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-politics-shah-quotes-factbox/factbox-indias-new-home-affairs-minister-amit-shah-in-his-own-words-idUSKCN1T10U7

Example 5:

On 3 January, 2019, Kolkata 24/7 reported the comments of Dilip Ghosh, President of the BJP in West Bengal as its headline.

He reportedly said,

> *"The Muslims who have come from Bangladesh are trying to create communal riots. We will not let them stay in India. If BJP comes to power in state we will throw them out of the state holding their neck."*

Kolkata24x7
January 2 · 🌐

'বাংলাদেশ থেকে আসা মুসলিমরা এখানে দাঙ্গা বাঁধানোর চেষ্টা করছে, তাঁদের ভারতে থাকতে দেওয়া হবে না। রাজ্যে বিজেপি ক্ষমতায় আসলে ঘাড় ধাক্কা দিয়েই বের করে দেবে।

See Translation

KOLKATA24X7.COM
'বাংলাদেশ থেকে আসা মুসলিমদের ঘাড়ধাক্কা দিয়ে তাড়াবে বিজেপি'
Read the latest Bengali news on politics, sports, business, entertainmen...

👍❤️😂 3.6K   664 Comments   602 Shares

The post attracted hateful inter-ethnic comments. One user stated,

> *"The largest amount of poor people are there in Rendia. Most beggar is in Rendia. The people of Rendia defecate in the open. How can you think that we will go that Rendistan?*
>
> *(Rendia is a combination of Rendi, a derogatory word for sex worker and India, and Rendistan, a derogatory term for India, land of sex workers.)*
>
> *I am not sure even if you get to eat twice a day, your son of beggars, you mallus."*

After Avaaz flagged the comment to Facebook as Tier 2 hate speech for expressing "inferiority based on national origin", it was taken down. ▪

Example 6:

. . . .

Satyam - News from Assam, a self-identified news outlet, with 9,031 followers, posted the following:

> *"Geda will always be geda. Start economic non-cooperation against Gedas."*

(Geda is a pejorative word for Muslims in Assam.)

> *"1. Don't buy anything from gedas*
>
> *2. Don't give anything to geda beggars*
>
> *3. Don't donate to geda institutions*
>
> *4. Don't give contribution to geda functions*
>
> *5. Don't employ a geda as a daily wage labor*
>
> *6. Don't employ a geda service man in your company*
>
> *7. If you agree, then please share."*
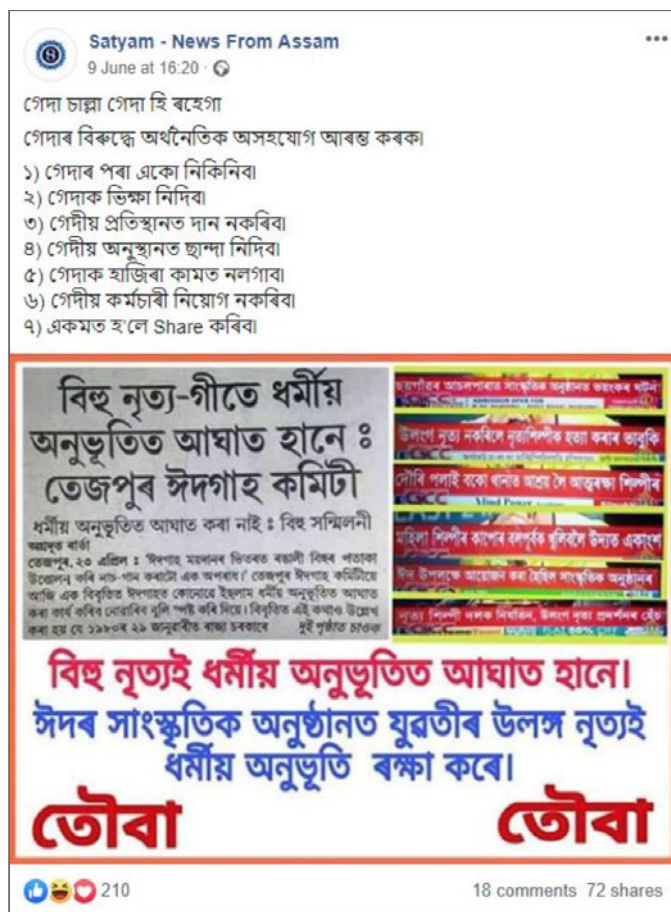
We flagged this to Facebook on 26 June, 2019 as a Tier 2 hate speech violation and Facebook took it down. ■

AVAAZ

MEGAPHONE FOR HATE

DISINFORMATION AND HATE SPEECH ON FACEBOOK
DURING ASSAM'S CITIZENSHIP COUNT

October 2019

For all enquiries about this report please contact media@avaaz.org