

Comment by Michael C H Jones

The dividing lines between West Asia, East Asia and ASEAN are arbitrary but they can obviously be justified by reference to membership of the Association of South East Asian Nations, namely Burma in the west and Vietnam in the East. Historically in culture, economics and politics both India and China have from century to century influenced each of the ten member states like the ocean and sea tides, rising and falling in a multitude of ways. However unlike Japan neither has sought to militarily dominate the region.

In this respect Bangladesh is part of West Asia, or previously the British Indian Sub-continent of South Asia, together with Pakistan. The Muslim population of the three nations is somewhere in the vicinity of 450-500 million - Pakistan 170 million, India 140 million, Bangladesh 140 million and as a result there are strong cultural connections among themselves and with other Muslim nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia to the south.

Therefore the Bangladesh move towards governance based on a secular state has ramifications not only for the Great Power in the region, India, but also for the Islamic States such as Iran and Saudi Arabia and the Jewish State of Israel. Religious Exclusivity and Fundamentalism in thinking has undermined all peace efforts in West Asia since the end of colonialism after World War 11. Turkey has been the only successful stable democratic Muslim State. Is Bangladesh a leader among the new social democratic states of the region? Like Egypt can Bangladesh achieve political stability and emerge as a economic tiger?

It will take more than words and slogans from Western Governments, the UN and the G20. As with everything these days what will be the China role?

References

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