

The threat of terrorism and Rohingyas in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Myanmar's Rohingya people are an ethnic minority. Being denied their right to citizenship, thousands of Rohingyas have entered Bangladesh. This situation creates pressure on its scarce resources. Bangladesh allowed the Rohingya floods due to humanitarian grounds and provided them with temporary shelters and other assistance. However, now it has become a burden on its massive population as some Rohingya refugee organizations rely on drugs and arms trafficking for funding. In contrast, others have close ties to different extremist groups. Due to its significant effects, there are valid reasons to consider it a security risk for Bangladesh. This article explains that the Rohingya crisis potentially threatens Bangladesh's internal security stability. It also shows that the repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar can provide a permanent solution to these problems.

Keywords:

Bangladesh, Rohingya, refugee crisis, threat, terrorism, and control.

Introduction:

Myanmar's Rohingya people are an ethnic minority. The military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine state in 2017 compelled the Rohingya population to enter Bangladesh. Being denied their right to citizenship, thousands of Rohingyas have entered Bangladesh. This situation creates pressure on its scarce resources. Their stay in Bangladesh has presented a security issue in their host country. The Bangladeshi government initially refused to welcome them, emphasizing security issues. Eventually, Bangladesh opened its border after considering Rohingya's vulnerability, the needs of the local and global populations for rescue, and its commitment to humanity. Refugees, however, are no longer pleased with the facilities Bangladesh and other organizations offer. Alternatively, they are engaging in criminal and militant actions that diversify and intensify the current issues. These activities are putting significant pressure on the economy and endangering international relations.ⁱ Presently, the refugees are a threat to regional and Bangladeshi security, as well as to terrorism. In South Asia, the threat of terrorism has consistently been a problem. The connection between refugees and terrorism appears to be giving this issue a new form, with

ⁱ Wolf, S. O. (2014). The Rohingya crisis: A security perspective from Bangladesh.

countries like Bangladesh acting as safe havens for Rohingyas. They have been uprooted from their homeland Myanmar. Terrorism is one of the leading causes of forced migration and, as a result, a contributor to the present refugee crisis worldwide. So there is a "link between terrorism and migration".ⁱⁱ Since the Rohingyas were forced to flee their homes, the Rohingya refugee situation is a humanitarian concern. Bangladesh is required to provide shelter for the Rohingya as a country of first asylum, but Bangladesh cannot do so, given the burden on its massive population. Some refugee organizations also rely on drugs and arms trafficking for funding, while others have close ties to extremist groups. Due to its significant effects, there are valid reasons to consider it a security risk for Bangladesh. This article explains that the Rohingya crisis potentially threatens Bangladesh's internal security and stability. It also shows that the repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar can provide a permanent solution to these problems.

The origin of the Rohingya crisis:

The Rohingyas the 'most persecuted minority in the world. They have long been subjected to extreme racial discrimination and state-sanctioned brutality in Myanmar. The Rohingyas have endured massacres, ethnic cleansing, torture, extrajudicial killings, property destruction, rape, and numerous other human rights crimes while being refused citizenship in their own country of origin.ⁱⁱⁱ Myanmar's actions towards Rohingyas have been tagged as a 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing.'^{iv} Due to such action, Rohingyas were forced to flee their homes several times and enter for shelter in Bangladesh. In 1978 more than 200,000 Rohingyas and 1991, more than 250,000 Rohingya's fled to Bangladesh because of severe state repression in the Rakhine state of Myanmar.^v Bangladesh allowed the Rohingya floods due to humanitarian grounds and provided them with temporary shelters and other assistance. In 2012, an outbreak of inter-ethnic violence resulted in an attempt at ethnic cleansing seeking to force the Rohingya people out of their home country Myanmar. It drives nearly 200,000 Rohingyas to take refuge in Bangladesh.^{vi}

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) played the leading role in Myanmar's military operations and attacked the Rohingyas in 2017. More than 700,000 Rohingyas

ⁱⁱ Schmid, A. P. (2016). Links between terrorism and migration. International Centre For Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) ICCT Research Paper.

ⁱⁱⁱ IBRAHIM, A. (2016). The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide (London, Hurst & Company).

^{iv} United Nations (UN) News Centre, 2017 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/564622-un-human-rights-chief-points-textbook-example-ethnic-cleansing-myanmar>.

^v Ashraf, A. A. (2021). Humanitarianism, national security, and the Rohingya refugee policy of Bangladesh. *Strategic Analysis*, 45(3), 184–206.

^{vi} Martin, M. F., Margesson, R., & Vaughn, B. (2018). The Rohingya Crises in Bangladesh and Burma. *Current Politics and Economics of South, Southeastern, and Central Asia*, 27(3/4), 333–375.

were forced to flee Myanmar and took shelter in Bangladeshi refugee camps.^{vii} At the beginning of 2018, the number extended to nearly 1 million. Such a Rohingya influx raises substantial security concerns for Bangladesh.

Terrorism threat for Bangladesh:

There has long been a connection between Bangladesh's national security issues and the influx of Rohingya refugees. All international refugees increase the host country's national security in new ways and have the potential to raise issues for the country's political, socioeconomic, and environmental security.^{viii} In the case of Rohingyas in Bangladesh, different security concerns are often highlighted in the different reports.

Instability, trafficking, smuggling, and killings along the border with India are just some of the political issues that the Rohingya refugees are posing dangers to the host country.^{ix}

They mainly engage in many criminal activities because of their neglected living conditions and quick money, even if it means hiding out in the local jungle with small arms. At least 20 organized armed gangs currently operate in the camps housing Rohingya refugees. In the last five years, internal fighting between these gang groups has resulted in the deaths of 101 Rohingya, including three women who were killed in gunfights with security forces. In 2021, the murder of Mohammad Mohib Ullah, a well-known community leader who advocated for the safe repatriation of the Rohingya, brought the issue of security and criminality in the camps into sharp focus both domestically and internationally. After the murder, steps were taken to handle the security situation. However, the measures could not yet stop criminal activity there.^x

The Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar district are a prime location for Islamic extremist recruitment. Due to their vulnerability and desperation, the stateless Rohingya people will likely turn violent to protect their interests. The Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) are notorious for their militancy. These groups are fighting for the Rohingyas' autonomy or independence. When these organizations were first established, their operations were limited to Arakan. However, after several pushes and the distress of not being able to seek asylum in Bangladesh, they

^{vii} Rohingya emergency. (2019 July 31) UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/rohingya-emergency.html>(Accessed on 9/10/2022).

^{viii} McColl, R. W. (1993). The creation and consequences of international refugees: Politics, Military and Geography. *GeoJournal*, 31(2), 169–177.

^{ix} Lewis, D. (2018). The view from Cox's Bazar: assessing the impact of the Rohingya crisis on Bangladesh. *South Asia@ LSE*.

^x Violence and criminal activities in Rohingya camps, August 11 2022, Available at- <https://bangladeshpost.net/posts/violence-and-criminal-activities-in-rohingya-camps-92062>(Accessed on 11/10/2022).

have greatly expanded in the Bangladeshi Southeastern area. In addition, the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF), Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), Tehrek-Azadi Arakan, and Rohingya Patriotic Front (RPF) continue to be active along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border and call for a separate Islamic state.^{xi} The Rohingya youth struggle with religion, education, and employment and are at risk of participating in militant actions.^{xii} Additionally, some Rohingya organizations actively collaborate with banned Islamist groups like Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami (Huji). Asian security services have reported that Jemaah Islamiyah terrorists, linked to al-Qaeda, are hidden in the Rohingya camps.^{xiii} Hence, they are threatening the security issues of Bangladesh.

Concerns have been raised about the recruitment efforts of transnational terrorist organizations, including the Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), and the Islamic State (IS), as well as their declarations of 'humanitarian jihad' on behalf of the Rohingyas in Myanmar.^{xiv} The Rohingya militants are also collecting funds and aid from different middle-east based groups.^{xv} For example, the Islamic State (IS) declared in its online publications, mainly in Dabiq, that the group would establish a stronghold in Bangladesh to launch an attack on Myanmar.^{xvi} These actions put both countries in danger. The Rohingya militants put tremendous pressure on its nerve. It may be possible that terrorist organizations within the Rohingya can spread to other parts of Bangladesh. After the Islamic State attacked a restaurant in Dhaka in 2016, which resulted in the which of 20 hostages and the RSO fighters' attacks on the Myanmar border forces in 2016 and 2017, which showed their strength. The Bangladeshi government's position on the alleged connections between the Rohingyas and militant groups has strengthened.^{xvii}

^{xi} Milton, A. H., Rahman, M., Hussain, S., Jindal, C., Choudhury, S., Akter, S., ... & Efirid, J. T. (2017). Trapped in statelessness: Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 14(8), 942.

^{xii} Lewis (fn 9).

^{xiii} Yasmin, K. (2017). Rohingyas' Debate and 1951 International Refugee Convention: A Security Concerns Analysis. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 8(4).

^{xiv} Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS), 2017

^{xv} Yasmin (fn 13).

^{xvi} Bashar, I. (2017). Exploiting the Rohingya crisis by jihadist groups: Implications for Bangladesh's internal security. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 9(9), 5–7.

^{xvii} Beech H (2017). Rohingya militants vow to fight Myanmar despite the disastrous cost. *The New York Times*, September 17. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/17/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-militants.htm>

Bangladesh is concerned about its security due to the booming illegal small weapons trade along the border. The Border Guard of Bangladesh patrols the 129-kilometre border from a single border outpost (BOP). Refugees who have been pushed back dwell in the border forest and engage in smuggling. However, Bangladeshi law enforcement seizes large amounts of weapons and explosives during operations. However, there are also chances that smugglers can avoid arrest by using false information provided in advance by refugees in the camps. Through the Chittagong Hills Tracts, arms traffickers sell their illegal arms to insurgents in Thailand and Myanmar. Criminals and terrorist organizations may eventually threaten Bangladesh's internal security if Bangladesh and Myanmar do not work together to stop the illicit trade of arms in the border regions.^{xviii}

The fact that Myanmar is a 'narco-state' where prominent traffickers have transformed into significant investors and guiding lights in its new political order only exacerbates the issue. As a result, there will be a significant rise in illicit drug trafficking, especially in nearby countries, with frustrated people like the Rohingyas serving as transporters, 'intermediaries,' or traffickers in this highly lucrative industry.^{xix} The illegal drug trade in the border region has led to an increase in drug addiction in Bangladesh, which will have long-term on the country's internal security. This concern is supported by the existing drug trafficking networks that import 'Yaba' into Bangladesh from Myanmar.^{xx} Also, there has been concern that local drug traffickers may exploit the Rohingyas in their illicit trade and distribution. It can endanger Bangladesh's security situation.^{xxi} The Rohingyas are now engaged in serious crimes like robbery, burglary, sexual harassment, cybercrime, and running illegal SIM and hundi trading by their 20 or more gangs. These organized armed Rohingya refugee groups are also running youth gangs. In addition, they are grabbing local people's lands in numerous ways.^{xxii}

In addition, only 805,673 of Bangladesh's more than 1.1 million refugees have registered through the joint UNHCR-Bangladesh government registration process. Rest of the Rohingyas residing erratic lives throughout the country. They pose security risks by mixing with Bangladeshis and conflicts with the local populations. For instance, in the

^{xviii} Islam, M. S. (2020). Communal peace in Bangladesh after Rohingya crisis: An assessment of different approaches to community development. *Journal of prevention & intervention in the community*, 48(3), 256–271.

^{xix} Haque, E. (2018). Socio-political impacts of Rohingya refugees on Bangladesh. Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Migration Policy Center.

^{xx} Pressley L (2019). Yaba: the cheap synthetic drug convulsing a nation. BBC News, April 24. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-48041414>

^{xxi} Bhattacharjee, A. (2017). Rohingya crisis: Policy options and analysis. Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies. Available at: <https://bipss.org.bd/pdf/Rohingya-Policy%20Brief.pdf>

^{xxii} Violence (fn 10)

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), which are situated near the southern borders of India and Myanmar, Bengalis and tribal tribes are frequently involved in ethnic disputes that cannot be resolved through the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord. Many refugees are involved in criminal activity and intergroup violence in stressful conditions.^{xxiii} Because of these problems, the government does not allow refugees to travel freely. However, by ignoring this restriction, they continue to look for ways of going out of camps, either legal or illegal.^{xxiv}

Threat to human and social security:

Antisocial activities are increasing amongst the unregistered Rohingya people. There are no educational and health services for Rohingya children in the camps. Many young Rohingya women are sold into India's and other Arab countries' sex marketplaces because of the need for money. The social vices that plague the Rohingya community are commercial sexual exploitation, fraudulent marriages, fake work proposal, and the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections that threaten social life and jeopardize the stability of the border region between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Bangladesh is in a terrible situation as a result of the massive increase in population. The Rohingya labourers' low wages have a severe effect on the working conditions of local workers. Bangladeshi labourers are prepared to work for higher money than the Rohingya. This creates anger which leads to conflict and general unrest in the area.^{xxv} Instances of violence between Buddhist and Muslim groups, notably the attack on Buddhist temples and monks in Ramu, Cox's Bazar in 2012, which the Rohingya Muslims attributed. It warns that the Rohingya influx could worsen social and cultural balance.^{xxvi} The overseas labour market, remittances, and relations in Bangladesh are threatened by refugees. Many Rohingyas travelled to the Middle East with fake passports made in Bangladesh. They kept attempting to identify themselves as Bangladeshis while engaging in various crimes that damaged Bangladesh's reputation. As illustration, Saudi Arabia arrested many Rohingyas for their criminal activity. It could cause a decline in Bangladesh's labour market and remittances abroad. Saudi Arabia, the largest labour market for Bangladeshi

^{xxiii} Parnini, S. N. (2012). Non-traditional Security and Problems of Rohingya across the Bangladesh-Myanmar Borders. *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 283-292.

^{xxiv} Moses, F., & Kengatharan, S. (2018). Bringing Rohingya refugees off-track of long-term economic vulnerability in Bangladesh. *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)*, 3(1), 42-50.

^{xxv} Jahan, T. (2021). Refugee Protection Challenges and Chances in Asia. (ITD).

^{xxvi} McPherson P and Uddin ASMS (2019) Rohingya in Bangladesh face a tide of hostility as welcome turns into fear. Reuters, September 17. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-bangladesh/rohingya-in-bangladesh-fa>

migrant workers, would be damaged due to the Rohingya crime.^{xxvii} In this situation, it is apparent that the Rohingyas are responsible for putting extra pressure on Bangladesh's economic, environmental, social, and safety issues.^{xxviii}

Legal protection:

The two primary international legal tools for protecting refugees are the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1961 to provide refugees with assistance and legal protection. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 is considered a milestone in international law. Many regional tools deal with refugee protection.

Bangladesh does not have any specific framework for refugees. In Bangladesh, the prospect of refugee terrorism makes it challenging for the administration to address the refugee situation. In Bangladesh, foreigners, asylum seekers, and visitors are all treated under some outdated legislation. Bangladesh is not a signatory of the Refugees Convention of 1951 and its' Protocol of 1967. Bangladesh is a party to necessary international human rights instruments. Therefore, she is obliged to extend protection for the Rohingyas within the territory.

In reality, it is a long-standing bilateral issue between Bangladesh and Myanmar. It ought to be resolved by practical cooperation between these two countries. However, Myanmar is not helping to resolve the issue.^{xxix} Bangladesh's worry may grow as a result of China's mediating role and India's silence on the problem. China has not been acting as a mediator in the repatriation of the Rohingya. The deep water port of China and the special economic zone in Rakhine State could be the causes of that. So, China's role could bother Bangladesh. Bangladesh's anti-Indian sentiment increased due to India's inaction regarding the Rohingya situation.^{xxx}

Conclusion and Recommendation:

The connection between refugees and terrorism is something that only currently has seen a noticeable increase. Refugees' feelings of anger and insecurity are greatly influenced by frustration and isolation, which can make them vulnerable to both good and bad influences from outside sources. These refugees are pushed in positive and negative directions by

^{xxvii} Rahman, U. (2010). The Rohingya refugee: A security dilemma for Bangladesh. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 8(2), 233–239.

^{xxviii} Parnini (fn 23).

^{xxix} Abedin, M. J. Quest for a Refugee Policy for Substantive and Sustainable Solution to the Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh.

^{xxx} Bhuiyan, H. K. (2017, December 7). UNHRC Special Session on Rohingyas: Resolution with voting frustrates

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their desire for a better life. The most concerning situation is the Rohingya refugee issue. The Rohingya refugees are creating potential dangers to Bangladesh's security. If the issue of the Rohingyas is not addressed immediately with a focus on justice and rights, the refugee camps could be turned into a terrorist breeding ground. It will cause problems for Bangladesh and the surrounding area. Despite the national security interest, Bangladesh has to clarify its role in the Rohingya matter to solve this issue. To address Rohingya refugee issues and emerging challenges, some recommendations include:

- Bangladesh should take the required actions to handle security threats, such as implementing a more rigid control system.
- To prevent the Rohingyas from engaging in illicit activities such as human trafficking, the drug trade, terrorism, etc., law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh must exercise caution.
- The Bangladeshi government needs to tighten security and safety procedures in the Rohingya camps.
- To address the Rohingya refugee problem, the government of Bangladesh should continue to be actively involved in diplomacy, particularly with regional allies.
- To satisfy the needs of refugees, the Bangladesh government may ask for assistance from the international community.
- Myanmar must first fulfil the citizenship rights demands because refugees refuse to return to Arakan without being granted that. Repatriation of refugees can permanently end the problem.

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