



# FORCED MIGRATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON HUMAN SECURITY: REFLECTIONS ON ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH

**Professor Dr. S.M. Anowara Begum<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Dr. S.M. Anowara Begum is the Professor of the Department of Political Science, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. She also held the office of the Esteemed Member of Bangladesh Public Service Commission.

## ABSTRACT

*The Rohingya is an ethnic minority group in Myanmar that has due to persecution, crossed into neighboring Bangladesh over decades, laying uneven pressure on the scarce resources of Bangladesh. Providing basic provisions of their life like food, shelter, and healthcare have been the utmost priorities at the moment and also for the rest of the period until the return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar. Rohingya refugees are seriously at the risk of human trafficking. Health security and food security are the evolving challenges in the makeshifts where refugees are living. Even, there is the likelihood of increasing happening of such incidences and aggravating the local social and cultural harmony among the local citizens and the Rohingya refugees. Bangladesh has been commendable throughout its diplomatic efforts to keep the persistent pressure on Myanmar for repatriation of Rohingya refugees. Bangladesh is relentlessly coordinating and communicating with donors and other relevant stakeholders to come forward to solve this problem permanently by putting pressure on the Myanmar government to take back its citizens by creating a safe and secured environment. UN endeavor is to be persistent to enforce the recommendation of Annan Commission by imposing diplomatic force on Myanmar.*

**KEYWORDS:** Rohingya Refugee; Ethnic Cleansing; Human Security; National Security; Repatriation

## INTRODUCTION

Human security denotes human dignity. The term human security propagated by UNDP in the post-cold war era intends to focus on individuals coming across values and goals such as dignity, equality and solidarity. The Rohingya is an ethnic minority group in Myanmar that has due to persecution, crossed into neighboring Bangladesh over decades, laying uneven pressure on the scarce resources of Bangladesh. Rohingya issue has been textbook example of ethnic cleansing navigated by the civil-military administration of Myanmar. Influx of Rohingya refugees has been in Bangladesh since the 1970s and their number has surpassed 700,000 (Islam, 2018). Strangely, Bangladesh is now hosting about a million Rohingya refugees those results in serious concern of human security.

Myanmar government from the very beginning was very reluctant to take back their nationals, the Rohingya despite the robust diplomatic endeavor of Bangladesh government across level. Although in the repatriation of Rohingya to their homeland will be ambiguous in coming days and at the same time, their stay in Bangladesh might be continuing for a longer period of time. Apparently, providing basic provisions of their life like food, shelter, and healthcare have been the utmost priorities at the moment and also for the rest of the period until the return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar. The Rohingya crisis has been emerged as potential threat to Bangladesh's internal stability. Bangladesh, therefore, has been in a great fix struggling to

realise the national interests of the country, and uphold human security issues of Rohingya all at once. The Rohingya is an ethnic minority group in Myanmar has crossed into neighboring Bangladesh over the decades, laying uneven pressure on the scarce resources of Bangladesh.

Without doubt, human security has been the emerging paradigm for understanding global vulnerabilities whose proponents challenge the traditional notion of national security by arguing that the proper referent for security should be the individual rather than the state. The objective of human security is to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, in a way that is consistent with long-term human fulfillments (UNDP, 1994). Human security takes its shape from the human being: the vital core that is to be protected. Institutions that undertake to protect human security will not be able to promote every aspect of human well-being.

How Bangladesh is struggling with diplomatic endeavor to harness regional and global power to bring in an amicable solution to this emerging crisis despite the position of China and India on the side of Myanmar on Rohingya issue? And what kinds of arrangements the host government has, to deal with this additional population living in Bangladesh paying attention to human security until their repatriation have been the central questions of this undertaking? The study is based on content analysis and therefore, the study broadly undertook a survey of important articles, books and other sources pertaining to the study topic.



This review of the professional literature relevant to the study findings helped to contextualize the research.

### **Influx of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: Historical Evidences**

The Muslim population of northern Rakhine State, known as Rohingya, constitutes an ethnic, linguistic and religious minority group<sup>1</sup>. They are from Arakan, a mountain range separating it from central Myanmar, it had been an independent kingdom until 1784. It is named by the present regime as the Rakhine state. Two major ethnic races, the Rohingya (Muslims) and the Rakhine (Buddhists) inhabit in Arakan. Both the races stand at almost equal proportions inside Arakan. Rohingyas trace their ancestry to Arabs, Moors, Pathans, Moguls, Bengali and some Indo-Mongoloid people in early Muslim settlements at 7th century (review the time, Islam was initiated in 6<sup>th</sup> century) with a distinct culture and civilization of their own (Ahmed, 2010). Therefore, it is also recognized that they are physically, linguistically and culturally similar to South Asians, especially Bengali people.

Although during the Burmese post-independence period Rohingya's claim of separate ethnic identity was recognized by the democratic government of Premier U Nu (1948-1958), they became stateless without a legal nationality in 1962 when the new military rule denied citizenship, and many of them have been forced to migrate to Bangladesh, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia since 1978. Even though they were able to migrate to the preferred destinations, their sufferings have not ended upon reaching new shores (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2002). Thus, the irony of fate is that the Rohingya has been confined to a cycle of acute discrimination, escape, trafficking, poverty, detention, extortion and deportation.

In 1824, the British East India Company invaded Burma and through the Anglo-Burma war the whole of Burma including Arakan was brought under the Indian system of Administration. During the colonial rule the British were not interested in the national integration of diverse communities in Burma. On the contrary, those divisions were used for prolonging colonial rule with its policy of divide and rule. The Nationalist Leader General Aung San convened a conference of all ethnic groups at Pang long in 1947 (Karim, 2000). It was agreed that all states would be given regional autonomy with the provision of seceding after 10 years of Independence.

The constitution caused immediate ethnic insurrection which became worse after 1958, even though, the Prime Minister U Nu had declared Buddhism as the state religion of the country to appease the ethnic groups, as a great majority of them were Buddhists. The government dismissed many Muslim officers and replaced them with Buddhists in Arakan. By 1962 the civilian government had also collapsed and the army took over. In 1977, The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) inflicted heavy casualties on the Rohingya masses by launching a major offensive under the code name of

<sup>1</sup> The term "Rohingya" to refer to the Muslim population of Rakhine State is not acknowledged by the Government of Myanmar. Many Muslims of Northern Rakhine State identify themselves as such and the term is also used by international organizations.

King Dragon to register the citizens and prosecute the illegal entrants.

The nation-wide campaign started in Rakhine State, and the mass arrests and persecution, accompanied by violence and brute force, triggered an exodus in 1978 of approximately 200,000 Rohingyas into Bangladesh (Gain, 1992). Within 16 months of their arrival, most were forced back after bilateral agreements were made between the governments of Burma and Bangladesh. Some 10,000 refugees died, mostly women and children, due to severe malnutrition and illness after food rations were cut to compel them to leave.

The state Peace and Development Council (SPDC), supreme body of the regime rejects the existence of a separate ethnic group called Rohingya. They are not recognized as one of the 135 national races by Myanmar government. As per the rules stated in section 3 of the 1982 citizenship Law, the Rohingyas are not considered to be a National ethnic group and therefore, they are not qualified to obtain full citizenship. However, the family list only indicates names of family members and date of birth. It may not indicate place of birth, which in-effect prevents people from furnishing conclusive evidence of birth in Myanmar as required by the 1982 Law.

Thus the theoretical entitlement to citizenship for Rohingya becomes meaningless in practice. In fact, the 1982 act was specially designed effectively to deny the Rohingya the right to a nationality because the promulgation of this law took place soon after the Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh during 1978 had been repatriated (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Thus, human security dilemma as a part of non-traditional crisis is evident in case of Rohingya, which disrupts the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

### **Human Security for the Rohingya Refugees living in Bangladesh**

It is apparent that the number of Rohingya refugees has crossed half a million since the beginning of the crisis from August 24, 2017. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), Rohingya issue has been textbook example of ethnic cleansing navigated by the civil-military administration of Myanmar. Influx of Rohingya refugees has been in Bangladesh since the 1970s and their number has surpassed 500,000. Strangely, Bangladesh is now hosting about a million Rohingya refugees those results in serious concern of human security. Experience suggests that the Myanmar government has been very reluctant to take back their nationals, the Rohingya despite the robust diplomatic endeavor of Bangladesh government across level (Lewis, 2018). It gives the impression that the repatriation of Rohingya to their homeland will be ambiguous in coming days and at the same time, their stay in Bangladesh might be continuing for a longer period of time. What we could perceive, providing basic provisions of their life like food, shelter, and healthcare have been the utmost priorities at the moment and also for the rest of the period until the return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar.

Prolonged stay is bringing about pitiable human security condition of Rohingya community. The Rohingya refugees who are downright marginalized are seriously at the risk of human trafficking. It is evident that international



human trafficking gangs are actively looking at this situation to mishandling the vulnerability of the Rohingya for abusing. Mentioning stubborn Rohingya crisis as potential threat to human security, UN agencies working in Bangladesh have been in appeal to the international community for adequate fund to provide them basic supplies for survival. It is the experience of different countries which hosted refugees during many humanitarian crises that international supports lessen over time if the refugee crises continue (UNICEF, 2019). In this kind of situations, the decisive economic affliction of humanitarian support to the refugees falls on the host country.

Given their living space mostly located in Teknaf-Cox's Bazar areas, the refugee earmarked areas are adjacent to the settlements of the local citizens. Once, many awkward incidences happened between them causing law and order situations. In the future, with increasing number of the refugees and sheltered close to the native citizens' settlements there is the likelihood of increasing happening of such incidences and aggravating the local social and cultural harmony among the local citizens and the Rohingya refugees. Security concern particularly non-conventional (human security), is another challenge that Bangladesh is already facing and it will intensify further in the future with the influx of the Rohingya refugees over the years. Bangladesh government has been accredited for providing them with various facilities, including shelter, food and medical care despite many limitations (Uddin, 2018).

Health security and food security has been the evolving challenges in the makeshifts where refugees are living. The pitiful state of people's shelters illustrates how utterly unsustainable and unsafe this life is. Humanitarian community working in Cox's Bazar needs to prioritise repairing and replacing the battered shelters so that people have some protection against the elements, and are provided with at least some basic comfort and dignity.

Apparently food insecurity within the displaced Rohingya refugee population is turning out in Bangladesh. This has been resulting in malnutrition with refugee population and if not the food situation improves on an urgent basis, there is likelihood that more Rohingya children could even meet life-threatening event. We should keep it in mind that, the country has to rely on the food grains for domestic consumption. Meanwhile, the government of Bangladesh took many steps for resolving the Rohingya crisis while various forces, including the Armed Forces, police, Border Guard of Bangladesh and Rapid Action Battalion along with the civil administration, public representatives and general people are providing necessary services to the Rohingya.

As regards economic security, the bulk departure of Rohingya in Bangladesh would endanger the market balance. This may result in unstable labour market as supply will be more than the demand Bangladesh has at present. Jobless people will seek whatever means necessary to make a living and this sort of unhealthy completion in the labour market will seriously threaten the social cohesion. Cultural differences perhaps remain as major challenges of the Rohingya refugees to come across other associated encounters. I find language has been the utmost impasse to adopt with the changed circumstance and this is the reason why children of this settlers have been suffering from self-imposed fence to get

light of education. The existing public health conditions in the camps are unsatisfactory due to poor sanitation facilities, poor water quality, space limitation and increased population.

A recent report published in the Daily Star shows that, transnational human-trafficking syndicate committed serious crime against the Rohingya from 2012 to 2015. In a six-year investigation on human trafficking in Thailand and Malaysia, Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) and Fortify Rights, a nongovernment rights body have found the evidences. The time series research findings also signpost that, during 2012-15, more than 170,000 people boarded ships from Myanmar and Bangladesh bound for Malaysia and Thailand, and the trade over Rohingya is estimated to have generated between \$50 and \$100 million a year (Daily Star, 2019). This speaks about the serious threats towards human security of Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh. It is revealed from the report produced by Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) on Rohingya Crisis and Response hosted led by IOM that, Bangladeshi Immigration and Passports Department has registered 971,627 people through biometric registration (UNDP, 2018).

### **Diplomatic Efforts of Bangladesh Government for their Repatriation**

Bangladesh is making every effort in a professional fashion to harness regional and global power to end in amicable solution of this emerging crisis despite the position of China and India on the side of Myanmar on Rohingya issue. We have noticed both countries are having huge strategic and economic interest in Myanmar. Even Russia seems like compassionate to Myanmar on this issue. Bangladesh government has been experienced over the months while unveiling their diplomatic efforts in persuading Myanmar to repatriate the refugees. However, the reality suggests that Bangladesh government may not succeed in sending all of them back even in a single go with the utmost diplomatic niche. Therefore, we may think of some long-term solutions to deal with this additional population in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is making every effort in a professional fashion to harness regional and global power to end in amicable solution of this emerging crisis despite the position of China and India on the side of Myanmar on Rohingya issue. We have noticed both countries are having huge strategic and economic interest in Myanmar. Though Myanmar holds no major importance in Russian policy – no geopolitical interests are at stake there, while Moscow's attitude to the issue in the UN could potentially to upset its Muslim allies, for instance Iran. Unexpectedly, At least 1,300 Rohingya Muslims had crossed into Bangladesh from India since the beginning of this year as fears of deportation to Myanmar spark an exodus (Islam, 2019). New Delhi has faced sharp criticism for turning members of the persecuted minority over to Myanmar despite the army there being accused of atrocities against the Rohingya.

The Bangladesh government has been making diplomatic efforts in persuading Myanmar to repatriate the refugees over the months but in reality, it is highly unlikely the Bangladesh government will succeed in sending the refugees back to Myanmar in a shortest possible time. Myanmar and Bangladesh agreed in late 2017 to complete the



return of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees within two years, notwithstanding international doubts that they will be held in forbidding detention camps that may result in another round of cruelty both physically and psychologically (UNHCR, 2019).

The second attempt to start repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar on 22 August 2019 was turned out to be futile, as no refugees showed willingness to go back to Arakan. They have again demanded their citizenship with right to freedom of movement and access to all opportunities. Myanmar has yet to address the systematic persecution and violence against the Rohingya, so refugees have every reason to fear for their safety if they return. It has now been apparent that, achieving durable solutions requires the Myanmar government to address the fundamental issues of equal rights and ensure that all communities in the Rakhine State can live in safety, access basic services and pursue livelihoods opportunities.

Apart from her speech in the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina joined a high-level side-event on the situation of Rohingyas in Myanmar organised by the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh and the OIC Secretariat at Conference. She put forth a fresh set of four proposals on how the Rohingya crisis could be resolved when she addressed the UNGA apprising the world leadership of the current situation. As Bangladesh and India have continued to consolidate their political, economic, trade and cultural relations as well as have built a comprehensive institutional framework to promote bilateral cooperation over the decades, India must come forward to join hands with Bangladesh government for swift repatriation of Rohingyas. We also expect China will remain beside Bangladesh to resolve this prolonged crisis.

## CONCLUSION

Considering the gravity of sufferings Rohingya refugees face, humanitarian, political, law and order, security, development and environmental concerns must be prioritized rethinking different phases of enforcement. The international community is working closely with the Government of Bangladesh and Myanmar respectively to assist them in working towards voluntary, safe and dignified returns. They believe, only harmonious returns can break the decades-long cycle of displacement Rohingya community is experiencing. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2018 between the Government of Myanmar, UNHCR and UNDP is intended to ensure that refugees receive information on the situation in their places of origin and this MoU keeps a provision allowing Rohingya refugees to visit their home villages and other areas where they may choose to return. In its 43rd session, UNHRC has adopted the resolution on 22 June 2020 by a vote of 37 in favour, 2 against and 8 abstentions, calling upon Myanmar to ensure voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingya refugees.

UN agencies, international and national NGOs and government bodies are in a collective effort aiming at delivering protection to refugee women, men, girls and boys, provide life-saving assistance and foster social cohesion. If this problem lingers for a longer time, it may encourage creating pockets of radicalism and that may create problems of uncertainty and instability not only for Myanmar and Bangladesh but for the entire region. UN Security Council

must bring the resolution to facilitate the investigation on violation of human rights and thus ensure an international supervision for safe repatriation as well as initiate a visit to the Rohingya refugee camps by the Security Council again to force the government of Myanmar for setting up "safe zones" for people of all backgrounds in conflict-torn parts of Myanmar.

## REFERENCES

1. Ahmed, Imtiaz (2010) *The Plight of the Stateless Rohingyas: Responses of the State, Society & the International Community*. Dhaka, University Press Limited.
2. Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (2002) *Banglapedia: The National Encyclopedia*. Dhaka, The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.
3. Daily Star (2019) *Human Trafficking: Rohingyas faced horrific crimes*. Dhaka, Daily Star.
4. Gain, Philip (1992) *Rohingyas: Who Really is their Friends*. Dhaka, SHETU.
5. Human Rights Watch (2012) *Bangladesh: Assist, Protect Rohingya Refugees Humanitarian Aid Desperately Needed; Crisis Situation in Burma Continues*. New York, Human Rights Watch.
6. Islam, Mohammad (2017) *How can Bangladesh utilise human security for rural development*. London, LSE South Asia Centre.
7. Islam, Mohammad (2018) *Considering the consequences for human security: the influx of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh*. London, LSE South Asia Centre.
8. Islam, Mohammad (2019) *India should support Bangladeshi diplomatic efforts to repatriate Rohingya*. New Delhi, South Asia Monitor.
9. Karim, Abdul (2000) *The Rohingyas: A Short Account of their History and Culture*. Chittagong, Arakan Historical Society.
10. Lewis, David (2018) *The view from Cox's Bazar: assessing the impact of the Rohingya crisis on Bangladesh*. London, LSE South Asia Centre.
11. UNDP (1994) *New Dimensions of Human Security*. New York, Oxford University Press.
12. UNICEF (2019), *Bangladesh: Humanitarian Situation Report No. 46 (Rohingya Influx)*. Dhaka, UNICEF.
13. UNHCR (2019), *Joint Response Plan for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis*. Dhaka, UNHCR.
14. UNDP (2018), *Environmental Impact of Rohingya Influx*. Dhaka, UNDP.
15. Uddin, Nasir (2018) *Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: Five Challenges for the Future*. London, LSE South Asia Centre.