

The Protracted Rohingya Refugee Crisis: A Growing Incertitude for Bangladesh, the Rohingyas, and the Regional Countries

Md. Forkan Elahi Anupam¹ Sabrina Afrin Mustafa²

Abstract

The protracted Rohingya refugee crisis is one of the most significant ongoing refugee crises in the world. The Rohingyas have been facing decades of discrimination, statelessness, and targeted violence in Myanmar which forced them to cross the Bangladeshi border to save lives. The Rohingyas entered Bangladesh after violent attacks in 1978, 1991-1992, and 2016. The recent influx of Rohingya refugees in 2016 surpassed previous records, raising the number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh to 1.2 million. This significant number of refugees has not only created a humanitarian crisis but also security risks. Though, the host country is getting humanitarian assistance from international communities to support the refugees the security risks are getting less attention. This study emphasizes the security aspects of this refugee crisis. It explains that the protracted Rohingya refugee crisis has created a multi-dimensional traditional and non-traditional security risks. The host country is at the risk of several national security issues and the Rohingyas are also facing a human security crisis. This crisis has also posed non-traditional security risks to the regional countries simultaneously. It also explains the necessity of immediate attention to resolve the crisis permanently by short-term and long-term measures.

Keywords: *refugee, security, traditional, non-traditional, Rohingya, citizenship, rehabilitation.*

Introduction

The Rohingya refugee crisis is one of the most significant ongoing refugee problems in the world. “The Rohingyas” have been declared the “most

¹ Deputy Director, BCS Administration Academy

¹ Senior Assistant Secretary, Energy & Mineral Resources Division

persecuted ethnic minority” by the United Nations (Kingston, 2015) because of the deprivation of rights and miserable living conditions they are experiencing in Myanmar. The Rohingyas in Rakhine states fled to neighbouring Bangladesh to save their lives from 1978 to 2017 in several stages. This paper argues that the Rohingya refugee crisis is not only a humanitarian issue but also has created multi-dimensional traditional and non-traditional security risks for the host country. It explains how the protracted Rohingya refugee crisis has affected the local population, environment, law-and-order situation and posed multi-dimensional traditional and non-traditional security threats for the host country. It also emphasizes the human security issues related to the refugee camps and how failure to resolve this issue may destabilize the regional countries. In the end, this paper proposes a few recommendations for resolving the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Refugees and security

The refugee flow has been identified as a phenomenon that occurs when the bond between the people and their government is broken (Stein, 1986). Johnson (2011) argues that the host countries are not always willing to accept refugees especially when the number is significantly high. Because of the inability of the host country to provide proper resources and security for the refugees, the camps become susceptible to attack by both internal and external threats and hence make the refugee crisis more severe. Since the refugee camps are located in rural areas, far from the city, and the camps are supported by aid organizations with food and other reliefs, the camp areas are vulnerable to attack from external armed groups of the host countries (Johnson, 2011). The demographic pattern of the camps along with the geographical position defines the security threat of the camp that is calculated with an opportunity and willingness framework. Johnson (2011) has proposed five hypothesizes with his framework:

Hypothesis 1: The higher the proportion of males residing in a camp, the lower the likelihood of an attack on the camp.

Hypothesis 2: The higher the level of young refugees, the higher the likelihood of an attack on the camp.

Hypothesis 3: The larger the camp, the greater the likelihood of an attack.

Alternative Hypothesis 1: Ongoing conflict in the host or home state will increase the likelihood of an attack on a refugee camp.

Alternative Hypothesis 2a: The presence of lootable resources in the HOST state will increase the likelihood of an attack on a refugee camp.

Alternative Hypothesis 2b: The presence of lootable resources in the HOME state will decrease the likelihood of an attack on a refugee camp.

Johnson (2011) emphasized demographic engineering within the refugee camps to ensure the safety and security of the camps. In an alternative approach, he proposed deployment of security forces by the host country to reduce the attack on the camps which is less likely to be done by the host country because of the burden of extra spending. This framework focuses on the internal safety and security of the refugees in the camp and emphasizes a multi-level approach to ensure security for the refugees.

Mandel (1997) has identified mass refugee flows as a burden rather than an asset for the host country in this century which is experiencing the refugee crisis more than ever in history. He has identified three major security risks: 1. A perceived increase in economic and environmental burden, including an inability to provide food, shelter, clothing, employment, and social services 2. A perceived increase in political risk, including internal stability (worsened by a flow of arms) and violation of native practices, and 3. Perceived increase of external pressure on local culture, ethnic practices, religious, linguistic matters, livelihood, etc. Mandel (1997) argues that the third world has a long historical record of hospitality towards the refugees, and the developed and developing countries have different approaches to the refugee dilemma. The developed countries are more concerned about the economic risk of accepting refugees but the developing countries are more concerned about the political disruptions.

Haque (2016) has discussed the protracted Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh focuses on the involvement of Rohingyas with terrorist organizations and the risk of cross-border conflict between terrorist groups which may create a border crisis between Bangladesh and Myanmar. He also discussed the non-traditional security threats like environmental degradation and the drinking water crisis in that region because of the protracted refugee establishment. As the recent influx of Rohingya arrived in 2017, so there is no mention of that in the discussion of Haque's (2016) article.

O'Driscoll (2017) has focused on the internal security matters of the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar region. He has emphasized the severe resource scarcity in the camps because of the arrival of the recent influx of Rohingyas in 2017. Conflict among different groups for the drinking water crisis, drug business, internal power politics, competition in the job market, and limited accommodation facility is focused on in his discussion.

This paper discusses the background of the Rohingya refugee crisis initiated when the bondage between the Myanmar government and the Rohingya

community was broken (Stein, 1986). As Johnson (2011) argues about the host country's unwillingness to welcome the refugees, Bangladesh was unwilling to welcome the Rohingyas because of its high population density. The Rohingyas have been a burden for Bangladesh as Mandel (1997) argues because of the high density of refugee flow in a small geographic area. This paper discusses how the high density of refugees has created multi-dimensional security threats for the host country. It discusses that considering the Rohingya refugee crisis from the humanitarian crisis perspective doesn't provide the whole picture of the problem, rather the security implication of the host country needs to be considered. However, the security implications of the refugee crisis for the host country and the local community have not been addressed in the existing literature. So, there is enough scope for research to focus on how the protracted Rohingya refugee crisis has posed a multi-dimensional security threat to the host country, the Rohingyas, and the cross-border regional communities.

Methodology

Research Design

The research adopts both quantitative and qualitative approaches, focusing on the synthesis of existing scholarly works and reports. By utilizing secondary data, the study seeks to identify trends, themes, and insights that articulate the complex relationship between refugee influx and national security. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of existing knowledge, facilitating an understanding of how the Rohingya crisis poses security challenges in Bangladesh.

Data Sources

The study relies primarily on secondary data sourced from:

Academic Journals: Peer-reviewed articles provide a robust framework for analyzing the intersection of international security policy and refugee movements. Journals such as the *Journal of International Affairs*, *International Security* and *Refugee Survey Quarterly* contain valuable insights into the dynamics of security risks and policy responses related to Rohingya refugees.

Official Reports: Reports published by recognized entities, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Bank, and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), provide vital statistical data and analyses regarding the Rohingya crisis. These reports serve as foundational documents that provide context to the crisis and its security dimensions.

Government Publications: Materials released by the Government of Bangladesh, including policy papers, action plans, and security assessments,

are critical for understanding national responses to the refugee influx and the implications for domestic security.

Think Tanks and Research Institutions: Analysis of think tanks, such as the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) and the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), offer nuanced perspectives on security policy debates surrounding the Rohingya crisis, helping to contextualize the findings within broader international relations theories and frameworks.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process involves a systematic review of the literature. The following steps outline this process:

Literature Search: A comprehensive search was conducted using academic databases such as JSTOR, Taylor and Francis, Emerald, Google Scholar, and SSRN. Keywords including “Rohingya refugees,” “Bangladesh security,” “international security policy,” and “refugee crisis impact” guided the search. This search targeted articles published within the last decade to ensure currency and relevance.

Selection Criteria: Selected articles and reports were evaluated based on their relevance, credibility, and methodological rigour. Emphasis was placed on peer-reviewed articles and official reports from recognized organizations. Sources were chosen for their analytical depth, empirical data, and theoretical contributions to the subject matter.

Data Extraction: Key themes, findings, and arguments from the selected literature were extracted and organized categorically. Themes included security risks posed by the refugee crisis, national policy responses to the influx, humanitarian challenges, and the broader implications for regional stability.

Thematic Analysis: The extracted data underwent a thematic analysis to identify patterns and relationships. Thematic coding was employed to group similar ideas and arguments, allowing for the identification of overarching issues impacting Bangladesh’s security landscape. This qualitative analysis illuminated how the Rohingya crisis intersects with national and international security policies.

Limitations

While the methodology relies heavily on secondary data, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

Dependence on Available Literature: The study is constrained by the existing body of literature, which may not encompass all dimensions of the Rohingya

crisis or its security implications. Gaps in data or biased representations in certain articles could influence the overall findings.

Temporal Constraints: Secondary data reflects the state of knowledge at a particular time. As the situation regarding the Rohingya refugees evolves, newer developments may not be captured in the existing literature, necessitating further studies to keep pace with emerging trends.

Interpretative Bias: The interpretation of secondary data is inherently subjective; thus, there is potential for researcher bias in emphasizing specific themes over others.

Ethical Considerations

Although the research predominantly utilizes secondary data, ethical considerations remain paramount. The argumentation must respect the dignity and rights of the Rohingya refugees, avoiding sensationalism or misrepresentation of their plight. All selected sources are critically analyzed to ensure that the research contributes meaningfully to the discourse without undermining the suffering or resilience of displaced populations.

Background of the problem

‘Rohingya’ is a small ethnic group of Myanmar who has been described as the ‘most persecuted ethnic minority’ by the United Nations (Kingston, 2015) and their origin in Rakhine state dates back to the 7th century when Arab Muslim traders settled in that region (Parnini, 2011). After the independence of Myanmar from British colonial rule in 1959, the government of Myanmar started showing discrimination towards these people and denied them their citizenship rights according to the citizenship law, 1982. In 1978, 200,000 Rohingyas and in 1992 another 250,000 Rohingyas crossed the border seeking refuge in Bangladesh because of military intervention in the Rakhine state of Myanmar (Al Imran and Mian, 2014). The protracted Rohingya refugee crisis turned into a severe crisis when 650,000 Rohingyas crossed the border of Bangladesh after violence erupted in the Rakhine state of Myanmar on 25 August 2017. After a coordinated attack by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on 30 police posts and army bases in the north of Myanmar’s Rakhine state, in the townships of Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung, the Myanmar Army conducted a military attack towards Rohingya people who assist the ARSA in conducting its terrorist activities (Al Imran and Mian, 2014).

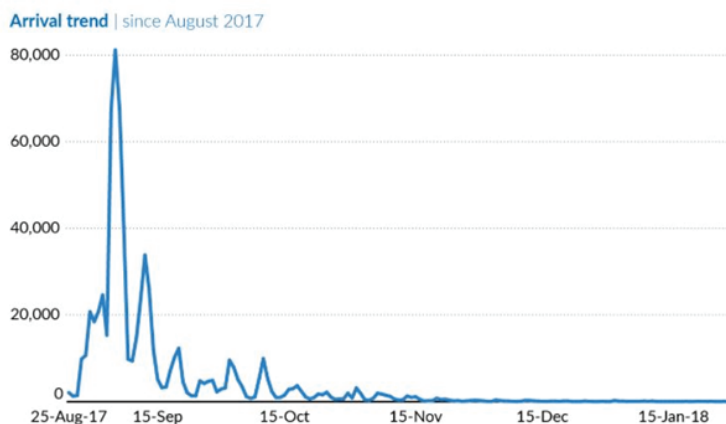


Figure: Arrival trend of Rohingya in Bangladesh after the military intervention in 2017

Source: UNHCR

Figure 1 shows that on 25th August 2017, the refugees started crossing the border of Bangladesh. The influx of Rohingyas gradually reached the peak of 80,000 refugees per day in early September 2017 and gradually decreased until mid-January 2018 when Bangladesh closed the border. UNHCR has established refugee camps in Cox's Bazar to provide accommodation to the Rohingyas.

Figure 2 shows the location of the camps and the number of refugees staying in those camps. Several 860,243 Rohingyas are living in these camps. Kutupalong refugee camp in Ukhaupazilla is the largest camp where 581,390 refugees are living. The total number of Rohingya refugees (including those living outside the refugee camps) is 1,092,136 and has been considered the fastest growing refugee crisis of modern times (Ware and Laotides, 2019). The camps have limited capacity to provide accommodation facilities to the Rohingyas but nearly 96 children give birth every day (Das, 2013). This kind of high birth rate of Rohingyas has made the situation more difficult. So, the government of Bangladesh has arranged a new accommodation for the Rohingyas on an isolated island called "Bhashanchor" and shifted 32,560 refugees already (RRRC, 2024).

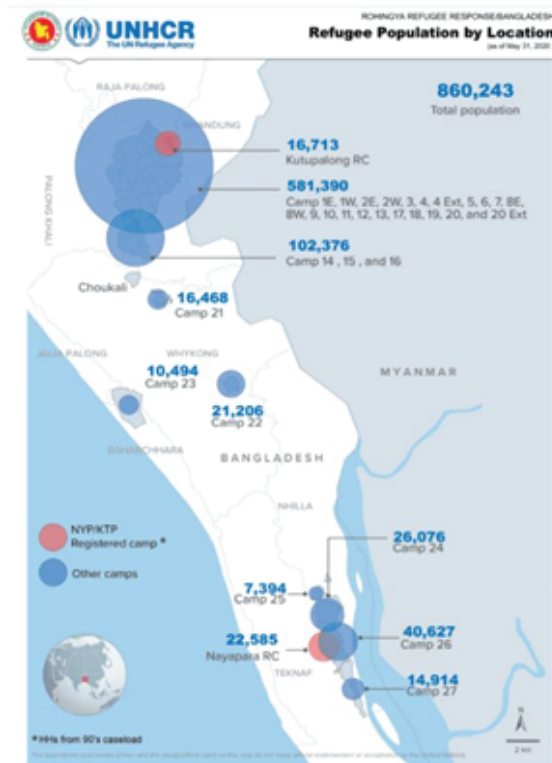


Figure 2: Location of the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar
Source: UNHCR

The protracted Rohingya refugee crisis has raised multi-dimensional security risks for the host country and the Rohingyas. Four guerilla groups who are fighting for independence against the government of Myanmar have affiliations with the Rohingya ethnic community and they use the Rohingya areas in Rakhine state as their military base (Parvez, 2021). As the Rohingyas have been deprived of their citizenship rights by the government (Cheesman, N., 2017; Haque, M.M., 2017) and often oppressed by the Myanmar army, they have formed ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army), a guerilla group controlled from Saudi Arab, to fight for their rights (Tarabay, 2017; Fair, 2018). The Myanmar government's discriminatory attitude towards the Rohingya community has created the crisis into a refugee crisis and Bangladesh, as the host country of the refugees is facing security risks of the crisis.

Multi-dimensional Security threat to Bangladesh:

- **Traditional Security threats**

⇒ **Terrorist threat to national security**

The recent influx of Rohingya refugees has deteriorated the anti-terrorism achievements of the host country (Halim, 2023) since the rapidly evolving jihadists' activities in the Rohingya community are on the increase and these jihadists also crossed the border to seek refuge in Bangladesh after the outbreak of violence in Rakhine state (Bhattacharjee, 2024; Bashar, 2017). The defense ministry of the host country reported that at least 11 armed militant groups are actively competing with one another to establish dominance within the camps and these armed militant groups are getting arms and money from abroad (HRW, 2023). Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), also known as Harakah al-Yaqin, a Saudi-based armed group has been conducting operations against the discrimination towards the Rohingyas (Hossain et al, 2021). The Myanmar army's counter-insurgency attack over the ARSA provoked the Rohingyas to get involved with radical Islamic jihadist groups. Both IS (Islamic States) and Al-Qaeda Central's released statement calling for a revenge attack against Myanmar using Bangladesh as a base camp has created security concerns for the highest authority (Bashar, 2017). Asian security service reports showed the affiliation of Jemaah Islamia with Al-Qaeda and the presence of militants in Rohingya refugee camps which severely poses a terrorist threat to the host country (Halim, 2023). The risk of Bangladeshi land being used as an ARSA base in the fight against the Myanmar army has raised the risk of cross-boundary border conflict. Besides, some prohibited small jihadist groups in Bangladesh have reacted to the issue in the name of saving Islam which may deteriorate the inner stability of the country. So, the country is facing terrorist threats domestically and internationally regarding this issue which has been a major national security concern.

⇒ **Bilateral relationship deteriorating threat**

The Rohingya refugee crisis has created bilateral disputes between these two countries as Myanmar claims Rohingyas are illegal migrants from Bangladesh and denies them citizenship rights. On the other hand, Bangladesh's effort to use diplomatic channels to impose international pressure on Myanmar to resolve the issue has posed tension between their bilateral relation (Panini, 2013). Bangladesh has three-sided borders with India and with Myanmar, the land border length is 270 kilometres which has the potential to be used as a commercial transit route between these countries that may contribute to economic development. Previously these two countries demarcated their maritime boundary through ITLOS's judgment on 14th March 2012 which raised diplomatic tension between them and the ongoing refugee

crisis has added further challenges for maintaining a peaceful bilateral relationship which is crucial for both of the countries (Parnini, 2013). From the beginning of the incident, Bangladesh along with international humanitarian agencies tried to find possible solutions for the Rohingyas through diplomatic channels and started negotiations with the Myanmar government. Both countries formed a joint working group with 30 members for the repatriation process but no significant progress happened so far (Halim, 2023). Moreover, the concurrent war between the government military force and the militant groups has posed uncertainty regarding any possible repatriation process. So, from the state security perspective, the tension raised by the refugee crisis needs further attention and a proper immediate solution for mitigating the bilateral security threat between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

- **Non-traditional security threats**

- ⇒ **Excessive pressure on the local population and job market**

Bangladesh has been described as the most densely populated country by the World Bank with a population size of 173 million and 1315 people living in every square kilometre (World Bank, 2023). Table 1 shows that official records of UNHCR declare that 749,820 refugees entered the camp area after 25 August 2017 (Ware and Laoutides, 2019). Currently, the total number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is 1,003,394 (UNHCR, 2024a).

New Arrivals reported by location, Pre-existing and total Rohingyas			
Location	Population prior to Aug influx	Total influx (Individual)	Total Population (combined)
Makeshift Settlement / Refugee Camps			
Kutupalong Expansion ¹	99,495	211,725	311,220
Kutupalong RC	13,901	20,000	33,901
Leda MS	14,240	11,859	26,099
Nayapara RC	19,230	15,000	34,230
Shamlapur	8,433	27,742	36,175
Grand Total	155,299	288,326	441,625
New Spontaneous Settlements			
Hakimpura	140	52,412	52,552
Burmapara/ Tasnimakhola	100	27,841	27,941
Roikhong/Unchprang	-	28,556	28,556
Jamtoli / Thangkhal	72	32,273	32,345
Baggotha/Potibonia	50	20,642	20,692
Grand Total	362	161,724	162,086
Host Community			
Cox's Bazar Sadar	12,485	2,805	15,290
Ramu	1,600	1,395	2,995
Teknaf	34,437	37,920	71,607
Ukhia	8,160	31,107	39,559
Naikhangchhari (Bandarban)	-	16,200	16,200
Total Rohingyaa	212,343	537,477	749,820

Table 1: Number of Rohingya refugees registered in the camps

Source: ICSG

These refugees have imposed excessive pressure on the local food supply-chain management system. Figure 3 shows that the World Food Program has enlisted Bangladesh in the “Global Report on Food Crises – 2023” because of the increasing food crisis in the Cox’s Bazar district mentioning that 967,765 Rohingya refugees (UNHCR, 2024a) and 3,76,500 local Bangladeshi people are experiencing food shortage (WFP, 2024). Though under the UNHCR program relief programs have been conducted in the camp areas, increasing demand for commodities for camps has created resource scarcity in that locality. Besides, for accommodation purposes of the Rohingyas, a 15 square kilometer land area has been used for the Kutupalong refugee camp which is the largest refugee camp in the world (UNHCR,2024b). On 07th January 2024, a devastating fire ravaged Camp 05 and destroyed almost 800 shelters making 7,000 refugees homeless (UN, 2024). High population density within the camp and low rescue facility have made the camps susceptible to vulnerability which poses threats to the local population at the same time.

The recent influx of refugees has posed security threats to the local community differently. Several NGOs initially started training programs for refugees to create job opportunities (Taufiq,2019) which has been stopped by direct intervention of the government. However, young Rohingya refugees have been taking training opportunities and getting involved in the job market illegally at a significantly cheap wage rate. It has created an unemployment problem for the local community (Idrish et al 2024; Taufiq,2019). So, this massive influx of refugees has created an unprecedented threat in the accommodation, food supply, and employment sectors of that region (Halim, 2023).

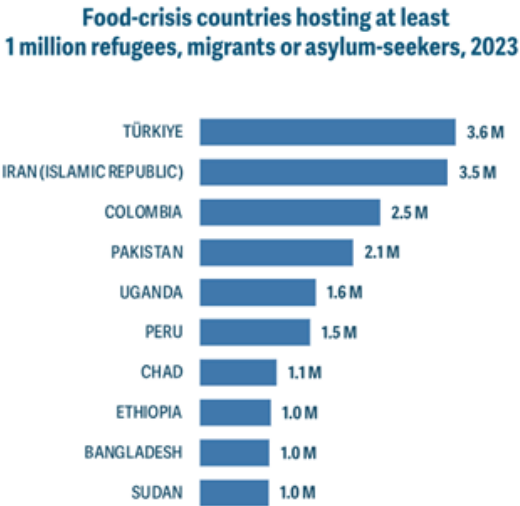


Figure 03: Bangladesh in the refugee hosting food insecurity list-2023
Source: FSIN, 2023

Rohingyas have created challenges in the overseas job market of Bangladesh, which is the second-highest foreign remittance earning sector of the country. The overseas labor market of Bangladesh is primarily focused in the middle-east region. 250000 Rohingya refugees who were staying in the camps for a long time managed Bangladeshi passports by collecting identity cards from local councilors in illegal channels and went abroad to seek a future by joining the labor market. However, these Rohingyas have been involved in different criminal activities and created an 'image crisis' among Bangladeshi workers (Mahmud, 2018). Dannecker (2005) discusses the criminal activities committed by the Rohingyas, bearing Bangladeshi passports, in Malaysia, are gang rape, armed gang robbery, and murder. Previously, Malaysia banned Bangladeshi workers in the labor markets for Bangladeshi (Reuters, 2007) and this important remittance incoming sector is facing a threat that may affect the national economy (Mahmud, 2018). Considering this great concern and the severity of the problem this Rohingya refugee crisis needs to be solved to eliminate the further chance of affecting the overseas labour market of Rohingyas.

⇒ **Security Threat to the Environment**

The recent influx of refugee flow has imposed unbearable pressure on the environment of the Kutupalang, and Balukhali regions of Cox's Bazar district. Deforestation in massive areas for creating accommodation arrangements for refugees who arrived in 2017 has created a security threat to the eco-system and cutting hills in indiscriminate ways has created landslide risk in respective areas (Banerjee, 2024; Taufiq, 2019). Halim (2023) gives a reference that the Cox's Bazar Hill forest harbours 56 reptile species, 13 amphibian species, and 286 bird species collectively represent nearly 50 percent of the country's biodiversity. The entrance of the mass Rohingya influx in that region has posed a massive threat to that part of the country's biodiversity (Halim, 2023). Figure 5 shows the intensity of the deforestation that has taken place by the Rohingyas in different camp areas. The largest Rohingya refugee camp "Kutupalong" is situated in Ukhiya upazila where 2336 acres of forest have been deforested by the refugees and it has posed a severe environmental security threat to that region (Parveen, 2024; Akhter et al, 2020; Hammer and Ahmed, 2020).

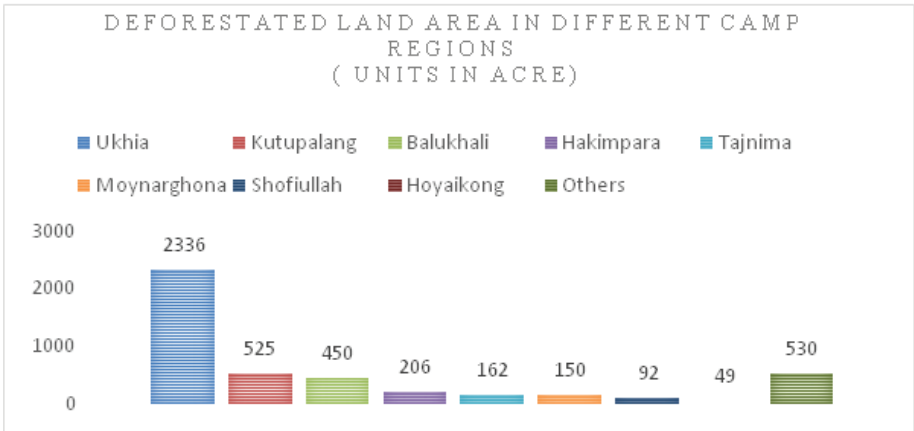


Figure 5: Deforested land area comparison among different camp regions
Source: Akhter et al (2020)

The refugee camps built by UNHCR have limited capacity to accommodate more than 1 million refugees in those regions and newly arrived refugees have managed their arrangements by cutting hills in an unplanned way and risking their lives during rainy seasons when those areas become vulnerable to the landslide (Banerjee,2024; Akhter et al, 2020; Hammer and Ahmed,2020).

Excessive pressure on freshwater sources has created water scarcity in Tekhnaf and outside regions of Kutupalang camp. UNHCR has arranged 5731 tube wells and automatic pumps to ensure freshwater supply(Akhter et al, 2020). Table 2 shows that excessive extraction of fresh water, nearly 15 million gallons daily, has lowered the groundwater level and water quality both physiologically and microbiologically. Banerjee (2024) emphasized that extraction of groundwater in an unplanned way has already deteriorated the water quality and lowered the groundwater level which turned many tube wells into non-functioning. Streams and wells, previously known as sources of clean water, were contaminated with waste runoffs which deteriorated the water availability condition (Banerjee, 2024; Hammer and Ahmed, 2024). Still, 56% of refugees suffer from water scarcity for drinking and household purposes because of the unavailability and distance of water sources.12,650 water samples and found faecal contamination in 28% of water sources and 73.96% of storage sources and usage of contaminated water in household matters has made malaria, dysentery, and diarrhoea a common phenomenon in camps(Banerjee, 2024; Hammer and Ahmed, 2024; Akhter et al, 2020).

Sl. no	Parameter	Unit	Method/Instrument Used	Result				WHO Limit
				Storage 2	Tubewell 2	Storage 4Ext	Tubewell 4Ext	
1	pH	-	Hanna HI 8424 pH Meter	5.38	5.43	7.12	7.06	6.5-8.5
2	Turbidity	NTU	HF Scientific DRT-100B Turbidity Meter	0.2	0.7	1.0	4.0	Max. 5
3	Residual Chlorine	mg/L	DPDC Colorimetric Method using HACH DR-2000	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Min 0.2
4	Dissolved Oxygen	mg/L	BOYN 820 Do Meter	5.84	5.71	6.07	6.12	-
5	Total Coliform	cfu/100 mL	Membrane Filter Technique	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
6	Fecal Coliform	cfu/100 mL	Membrane Filter Technique	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Table 2: Physiological and microbiological parameters of tube well waters in Rohingya refugee camps, Source: MDPI

Pit latrines, arranged for the refugees have severely contaminated the water sources because of the limitation of the sewerage system, and human waste that has been directly thrown in the Naf river is polluting the water. So, the environment in the camp area is experiencing a security threat severely and the imbalance caused already may need a long time to recover.

⇒ **Crime, drug trafficking, arms, and violence threat**

The establishment of the Rohingya refugee camps has brought a severe security threat to the law-and-order situation in the Kutupalang and Balukhali camp areas (Das, 2017). In 2019, the highest number of violent deaths happened, 110 murders, and 178 gunfight deaths occurred in the refugee camps in that year (Taufiq, 2019). HRW (2023) shows that at least 86 violent deaths happened in 2023, 40 violent deaths happened in 2022 within the camp areas. In 2024, 64 violent incidents were recorded which caused 72 violent deaths till October 2024 that were related to drug trafficking, sexual assault, and mob violence, and both Rohingyas and the local community members were victims (Prothomalo,2024). In 33 Rohingya refugee camps, at least 11 armed militant groups activity has been reported by the Ministry of Defense of the host country (HRW, 2023). Densely populated camp areas and resource scarcity incite competition among these groups for resources and dominance. As the Rohingyas have been living under exploitation in Myanmar without formal education and cultural practices, they lacked social norms which resulted in violence breaking out in the camp areas regularly (Taufiq,2019).

Rohingyas involvement with armed jihadists and the ARSA group has deteriorated the law-and-order condition of the region, especially at night when the severity of drug trafficking and prostitution activities occur. Myanmar is a part of the international drug trafficking “Golden Triangle” route. Image 2 shows how drugs are being trafficked from Myanmar to regional countries. A major

percentage of drugs has been trafficked from Myanmar but after the Rohingya settlement in 2017, drug trafficking occurrences have increased significantly (Taufiq, 2019). The most popular drug that has been carried by the Rohingyas is Yaba (a synthetic tablet made of Methamphetamine and Caffeine) and Myanmar is the only country where this drug is produced currently. A significant percentage of teenagers in Bangladesh is gradually becoming dependent on this drug and the government is at risk of losing its potential human resource because of the Yaba drug. Figure 7 shows the trend of Yaba drug seizure by the Department of Narcotics of Bangladesh from 2015 to 2024.



Image 2: International drug trafficking route
Source: The Economist

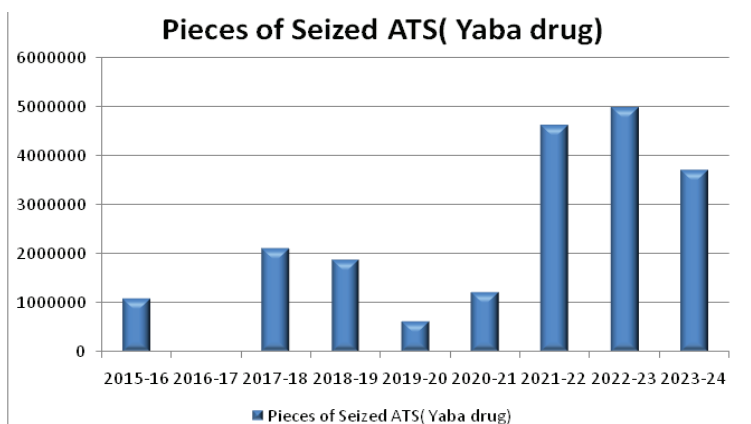


Figure 7: Seizure of ATS (Yaba drug) in Bangladesh
Source: Annual Report 2023-24, Department of Narcotics, Bangladesh

As Rohingyas are suffering from human security threats and don't have any income source in Myanmar, they have been compelled by drug dealers to carry drugs within the route in exchange for safe arrival at refugee camps with a small amount of money in Bangladesh from Myanmar. The increasing violence in the camp areas has resulted from the profit sharing of illegal drug business among different Rohingya groups that pose national security towards Bangladesh (Nath, 2024; Islam, 2023; Parvin, 2019).

Security threat to Rohingyas: Human security

⇒ Living standards of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh

The Rohingyas are living in a few refugee camps in Bangladesh (Burma Para Camp, Kutupalong Camp, Kutupalong extension Camp, Jamtoli Camp, Hakimpara Camp, etc.) and the highest number of refugees 311,220 are living in Kutupalong extension camp (O'Driscoll, D., 2017) which is reasonably high in comparison with the standard camp size of 20,000 refugees. The significantly high number of refugees has created a shortage of resources in the camp and this resource scarcity has created internal conflict between different groups of Rohingyas in the camps. After the recent COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, 1.2 million people experienced food insecurity and required urgent food and livelihood assistance in Cox's Bazar and over 70 % of them were Rohingya refugees (FSIN, 2021). Currently, 889,400 Rohingya refugees are experiencing the vulnerability of food assistance (FSIN, 2021). The proportion of refugee households with insufficient food consumption increased from 42 % in 2019 to 50 % (REVA 3, April 2020). Besides, the shortage of accommodation facilities and sewerage systems has created different challenges for the Rohingyas to live in the camps.

Considering the high density of refugees in the camps and resource scarcity in Cox's Bazar, the government of Bangladesh has established a separate accommodation plan for the Rohingyas on a remote island called "Bhasan Char". Initially, the government has arranged accommodation for 100,000 Rohingyas spending \$300 million (Hossain, 2020). In two phases, the government has already shifted 20,000 refugees to that island. Though, the refugees have willingly gone to the island because of the poor living conditions in the refugee camps gradually the island seems to them as an isolated prison. Besides that, the height of the island is very low compared to the sea level. So, currently, these 20,000 Rohingyas on the island are at risk of cyclone flow tide in the island.

⇒ **Law and order situation in the camps**

The Cox's Bazar Rohingya camp areas are highly crime-intensive zones (ACAPS, 2020) where the local law enforcement agencies can't control the crime occurring in effective ways. Kidnapping, drug trafficking, and rape are a few common crimes that had been happening regularly. In a report by IRC published in 2019, it has been mentioned that Rohingya families with relatively high money are susceptible to kidnapping and there is no example of recovering missing persons from criminals by the police those kidnapped people are sold to human trafficking groups, who send these people in different countries over boat crossing the ocean (IRC, 2020). Moreover, Rohingyas are used by local drug mafias as a carrier of drugs within the host country as Cox's Bazar is the hot spot for drug selling in the country. Rohingyas are crossing the Bangladesh-Myanmar border through the Naff river and carrying the drug in a different risky way avoiding the Border security forces of both countries and carrying the drug in Bangladesh. It creates severe life-threatening risks for the Rohingya people.

⇒ **Risks of natural disasters**

The Rohingyas after entering Bangladesh in 2017, indiscriminately cut the hills of the Cox's Bazar to arrange their accommodation and it severely affected the geographical environment of that region. The refugee camps prepared for the refugees are now at risk of a landslide because of the indiscriminate and unplanned land cut from the hills by the Rohingyas (O'Driscoll, D., 2017). Especially, in the rainy season, the water flow from the hilly areas may cause landslides over the refugee camps which may cause loss of life. Moreover, Cox's Bazar is a highly cyclone-prone area in Bangladesh, the country regularly experiences cyclones each year (Alam et al, 2020). The government of Bangladesh has identified the district of Cox's Bazar as a cyclone-prone zone and constructed two-storied cyclone centres centers for the people to provide accommodation during the cyclone. Still the houses in the refugees' camps are built with tin and bamboo which are severely vulnerable to a Hurricane (Alam et al, 2020).

The 20,000 Rohingyas in the Bhasan Char Island of Noakhali district are also at risk of flow tides of cyclone. The Bangladesh Army has constructed a 9-foot-high dam around the island to protect the refugees from tidal waves (Hossain, 2020) but the risk of cyclones can not be ignored. So, the refugees on the island are staying on that isolated prison-like island in the face of risks of life-threatening cyclone flow tides.

⇒ **Fire outbreaks in Rohingya camps**

The refugee camp areas are densely populated with Rohingyas and the houses constructed for them are very close which has created a risk of the quick spread of fire. There are a few incidents of fire outbreaks which were controlled successfully with minimum loss but the last fire outbreak on 22nd March 2020 severely affected the Balukhali refugee camp of Cox's Bazar. According to the UNHCR report, the fire killed at least, 15 Rohingyas, and more than 48,000 people in the camp lost their accommodation (Mahecic, 2021). At the same time, the 9500 shelters that were burnt in the accident also included more than 1,600 important infrastructure facilities vital for daily operations, including hospitals, learning centres, aid distribution points, and a registration centre which stopped the daily operation of the UNHCR operation in that camp area (Mahecic, 2021). The latest fire outbreak on 07th January 2024 destroyed 800 shelters causing 7000 refugees to be homeless (Ganguly and Paul, 2024). This sudden accident of fire outbreak has endangered the lives and livelihood of the refugees in the camp. So, this refugee life doesn't ensure the life security of the Rohingya people in the camp who deserve a happy and prosperous life with all the facilities provided by their government in their motherland.

⇒ **Risk of losing citizenship rights in own country**

The Rohingyas are an ethnic minority group currently living refugee life in Bangladesh who have been deprived of citizenship rights in Myanmar. The Myanmar government doesn't officially acknowledge the existence of Rohingyas but rather addresses these people as outside settlers from Bangladesh. The Rohingyas had to give human labour in different jobs without any salary in Myanmar, even though they could not give birth to a child without permission from the government. Currently, a major portion of that community is living in Bangladesh as a refugee who deserves to get citizenship from their government. However, this protracted refugee crisis in Bangladesh has also posed a risk to them of losing the chance of getting their citizenship rights in Myanmar. Myanmar's junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, after taking power in the country on 1st February 2021 expressed his doubt on the repatriation issue of Rohingyas from Bangladesh mentioning the absence of this community in official documents (Reuters, 2021). This position of the current military regime has deteriorated the scope of advancement in the repatriation process. So, the problem must be addressed immediately to ensure citizenship rights for these people in their country so that they can have happy and prosperous lives.

Security threat to the regional countries

⇒ Illegal border crossing by Rohingyas

The Advisory Commission on Rakhine state, chaired by Kofi Anan presents a report “TOWARDS A PEACEFUL, FAIR AND PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR THE PEOPLE OF RAKHINE” which addresses that the regional countries have been hosting a large number of Rohingya refugees as a result of irregular migration. Any kind of destabilizing issue regarding the Rohingyas may affect the regional stability. Besides the 1.2 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, the number of Rohingyas living in Malaysia (almost 100,000), India (17,730), Indonesia (582) and Thailand (119) (Taylor, 2020). The Rohingyas often attempt to cross the land border of India and the Indian Ocean by fishing boats to enter different countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand (Fuller and Cochrane, 2015). They are arrested by security guards of respective countries. Rohingyas are often affected by different diseases because of their long stay in the ocean and die in the boat, for example, 400 Rohingyas who attempted to enter Malaysia by crossing the sea by fishing boat were rescued by the Bangladesh Navy and 30 of them died in the boat (Peterson and Rahman, 2020). The Advisory Commission has expressed concern that such type of irregular migration may destabilize the region as after 25th August 2017, the number of irregular migration incidents has increased significantly.

⇒ Potential escalation of terrorism and regional instability

The Rohingya refugee crisis has posed several security challenges for the East Asian countries. Procrastination in resolving the problem by the international community may encourage the refugees to seek support from extremist groups who are active in that region. After the recent crisis in 2017, different terrorist groups like IS, and Al Qaeda expressed their solidarity with the refugees to fight against the Myanmar Army for revenge (Barker, 2017). So, failure in immediate settlement of the crisis may intensify the problem. Besides this, four guerilla groups are currently fighting against the government of Myanmar currently for independence: the United WA State Army, the Kachin Independence Army, the Karen National Liberation Army, and the Arakan Army (Parvez, 2021). The significant influence of Major General TwanMrat Naing, Chief of the Arakan Army in the Rakhine state may attract the Rohingyas to get support from this guerilla group and get involved in armed conflict with the government of Myanmar which may deteriorate the repatriation issue and prolong the crisis for undefined time (Parvez, 2021).

From the preceding analysis, it becomes evident how multi-dimensional security threats posed by the Rohingya refugee crisis are impacting the national

security, social cohesion, and economic stability of the host country. Social Tensions and Local Conflicts, Criminal Activities and Human Trafficking, Environmental Degradation, Health and Sanitation Risks, Economic Strain, Regional Instability and Geopolitical Pressures, and Security and Extremism Concerns – these multi-faceted challenges have turned this issue into a growing uncertainty for Bangladesh. At the same time, the ongoing crisis has forced the Rohingya community people to move towards uncertainty. These people are victims of the situation and are currently in the trap of losing citizenship rights in Myanmar. So, this refugee crisis needs immediate attention from the global community to settle the issue.

Recommendation

⇒ Repatriation of the refugees

The Rohingya who crossed the border under the terror of armed intervention of the Myanmar army should be allowed to return to their country following the terms of the “Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities” of UNHCR. On 23 November 2017, the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an MoU on the repatriation of the Rohingyas and established a joint working group to negotiate the details. Myanmar agreed to repatriate the verified refugees. Bangladesh handed over the information of 106,000 refugees in 2018-2019 and 492,000 in 2020 but the Myanmar government achieved little progress in the completion of the verification process (Taylor, 2020). The verification process needs to be completed to speed up the voluntary repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar.

⇒ Citizenship Verification

As the Advisory Commission on the Rakhine state says, the citizenship verification process conducted by the government stumbled several times and the Rohingyas remain deprived of citizenship in Rakhine. The Myanmar government should ensure all benefits for the 4000 verified Rohingyas in Rakhine state and establish a specific timeline for the citizenship verification process. It'll encourage the Rohingya refugees to participate in the voluntary repatriation process.

⇒ Resettling Rohingya in other countries

Resettlement of Rohingyas in other countries can be considered as an alternative option. In 2017, Canada offered to accept a limited number of Rohingya women from Bangladesh who were victims of sexual violence in Myanmar and the UN tried to resettle 1000 Rohingyas in the USA, Canada, and a few European countries (Das, 2017). This small number of Rohingya

resettlement in other countries will not reduce the intensity of the problem. Repatriating verified Rohingyas in Myanmar and resettling the rest of the Rohingyas in the USA, Canada, and European countries may help to make a permanent solution to the problem.

Conclusion

The Rohingya refugee crisis, as no significant progress is visible yet, has created a severe security threat for Bangladesh. Though UNHCR is supporting the refugees with humanitarian assistance, such temporary measures are not sufficient enough, rather the international community should come forward with a concrete framework for the repatriation of these refugees, ensuring inclusive and systematic representation of Rohingyas in the decision-making process, of their homeland. The existing refugee crisis can be resolved with sound leadership, strategic planning, creative diplomacy advocacy, and political will (Brian, 2020). A strategically designed plan for the safe repatriation of refugees to their home country, coupled with guarantees for a prosperous future, would assist Bangladesh in alleviating current security threats, thereby contributing to the establishment of enduring peace and stability in the region.

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