



#### Article History:

Received: 22-02-2019

Accepted: 28-05-2019

Publication: 19-05-2019

#### Cite this article as:

kader, M. F., & Choudhury, A. H. (2019). Historical Background Of The Rohingya Refugee Crisis And The Implication Of Their Statelessness. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Economic Review*, 1(1), 8–15. doi.org/10.36923/ijsser.v1i1.23

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# Historical Background of The Rohingya Refugee Crisis And The Implication of Their Statelessness

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**Abstract:** Bangladesh is a country consisting of various ethnic groups. Despite 46 years of independence, Bangladesh remains a developing country facing numerous challenges. One such challenge is the plight of the Rohingya. They face mass killings, executions, forced labor, deportation, and denial of the most basic human rights, rendering them stateless. The main purpose of this study is to examine the causes of the Rohingya refugee crisis and the implications of their statelessness. This study is both descriptive and exploratory in nature, utilizing interview schedules and case studies for data collection. The research analyzes the crisis through theoretical frameworks, including migration theory, to understand the Rohingya crisis and its impact on local people. Main Findings: This study attempts to uncover local people's views on the causes of the Rohingya refugee crisis and the implications of their statelessness. The findings indicate that around 93% of local people believe that the Rohingyas are original citizens of Myanmar. They attribute the persecution of Rohingyas in Myanmar primarily to religious and political-economic factors. The Rohingya crisis poses significant challenges for Bangladesh, impacting its socio-economic and political landscape. This study highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive and permanent solution to the crisis. The root causes of the Rohingya persecution—religious and political-economic factors—must be addressed by both regional and international communities. Providing the Rohingyas with full citizenship status and rights in Myanmar and ensuring their safe repatriation are crucial steps toward resolving the crisis. Effective diplomatic efforts, coupled with humanitarian support, are essential to alleviate the plight of the Rohingyas and foster peaceful coexistence in the region. The findings of this study can provide valuable insights for policymakers and humanitarian organizations addressing the Rohingya crisis. Understanding the root causes and implications of statelessness can help in formulating effective strategies to mitigate the crisis and support the affected populations. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the Rohingya refugee crisis by providing a localized perspective. It will be helpful for future research and background studies on the crisis, offering a foundation for more in-depth investigations and policy formulations.

**Keywords** Rohingya, Refugee, Local Peoples, Crisis, Statelessness

## 1. Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the major countries facing the problem of refugees. The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country bears testimony to development and nation-building, which has exposed the people of this country to different forms of migration and displacement (Ahmed, 2010). A large number of Rohingyas also began arriving in Bangladesh in 1990, 1991-92, 2012, 2016, and 2017 after experiencing various forms of persecution in their home country. Still, whenever any kind of insurgency takes place in Myanmar, it impacts Bangladesh with a refugee influx. The effects of the Rohingya refugees on the destination country are significant, with huge negative effects on socio-economic, demographic, and environmental factors.

A series of global and national efforts have been made to resolve the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, these initiatives have not been able to resolve the problem entirely. As of July 31, 2017, Bangladesh hosts 33,542 officially documented Rohingya refugees in the two camps of Kutupalong and Nayapara in its southern Cox's Bazar district (Kader, 2017). It is known that more than 1 million Rohingyas are living outside the official camps and are dispersed around the country. Bangladesh is expected to adhere to various regulations, such as maintaining rules and norms in dealing with refugees as dictated by international organizations. In doing so, Bangladesh finds itself in a paradoxical situation regarding the Rohingya crisis. The authors conducted this study for humanitarian obligations and academic use.

## 2. Statement of The Problem

Refugees are often seen as a threat to the internal security of a receiving country. Whenever a refugee flow enters a country, it competes for the limited resources being used by the local population. Consequently, this contributes to the breakdown of the socio-economic, demographic, political, and environmental systems of the receiving country. This often leads the denied and persecuted Rohingya to engage in illegal and destructive activities. Numerous media reports have shown the involvement of rohin-

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-gyas in various types of criminal and unwanted activities in several areas of Bangladesh.

### 3. Objectives of The Study

This research was conducted with the following objectives:

- To understand the causes of the Rohingya refugee crisis.
- To understand the implications of Rohingya statelessness.

### 4. Methodology

This study was both descriptive and exploratory. Teknaf and Ukhia in the Cox's Bazar district were selected for the present study, which spanned six months. Eighty local people were purposively selected from Teknaf and Ukhia Upazila of Cox's Bazar from the total population. Based on the objectives of the study, an interview schedule and case study were conducted. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The data collected from the survey were compiled, classified, analyzed statistically, and finally presented in tabular form and figures.

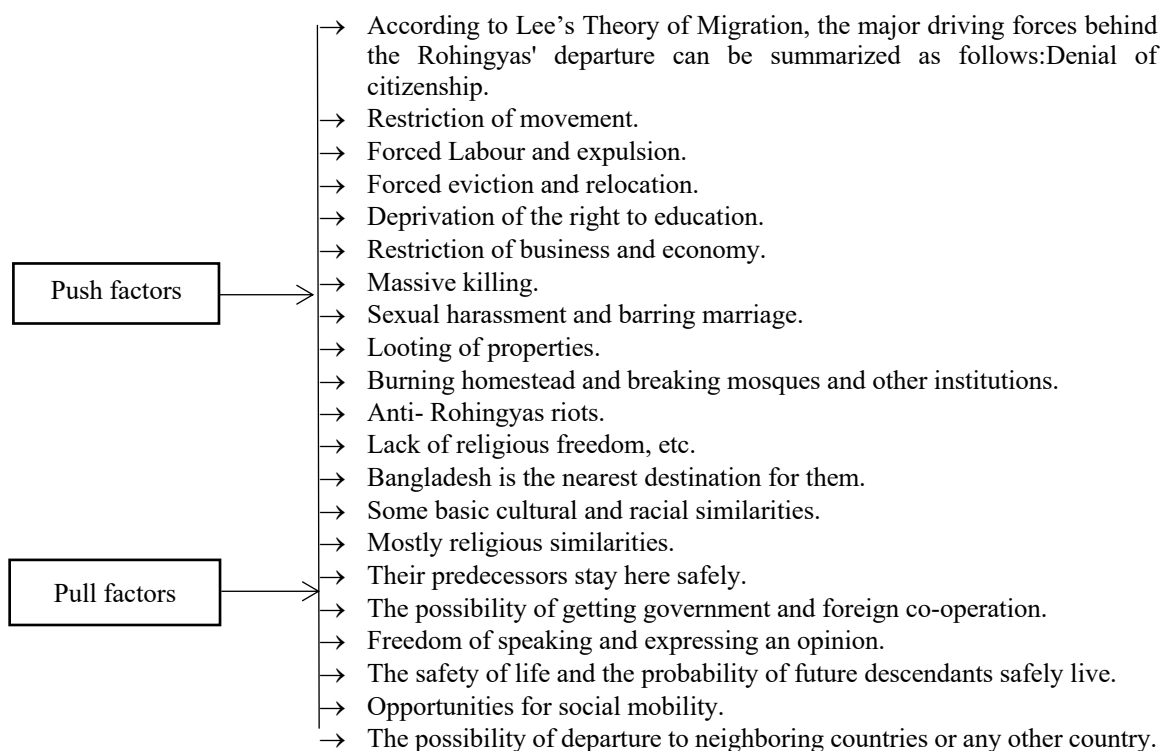
### 5. Conceptual And Theoretical Discussion

**Refugee:** According to Article I A (2) of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, the term 'refugee' applies to any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (Hathaway, 1991).

**Rohingya:** The Rohingyas are an ethnic group, the majority of whom are Muslim, who have lived for centuries in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar. Currently, about 1.1 million Rohingya live in the Southeast Asian country. The Rohingyas speak Rohingya, a dialect distinct from others spoken in Rakhine State and throughout Myanmar. They are not considered one of the country's 135 official ethnic groups and have been denied citizenship in Myanmar since 1982, effectively rendering them stateless. The Rohingyas differ from Myanmar's dominant Buddhist groups ethnically, linguistically, and religiously.

**Border People:** People living in the border areas of two or more countries are called border populations. In this study, the term 'border people' refers to all populations living in the border areas of Bangladesh and Myanmar, specifically in the Cox's Bazar district.

#### 5.1. Lee's Theory Of Migration



### 6. Causes of Rohingya Refugee Crisis and Their Statelessness

The Rohingyas were stripped of their citizenship and right to self-identify by the 1982 citizenship law (European Commission, 2017). The Rohingyas have always been persecuted in Myanmar and subject to many restrictions in their daily lives. The brutal killing of the Rohingyas and violence against them, occurring almost every year

previously by the military government in Myanmar, have forced them to leave their country. Most of the persecuted Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh in 1982, 1991-92, 2012, and 2017.

### 6.1. Who Are the Rohingya?

The Rohingya are often described as "the world's most persecuted minority." They are the original population of Myanmar who were born as citizens of Myanmar or have lived for centuries in the majority Buddhist Myanmar. However, they are not considered one of the country's 135 official ethnic groups and have been denied citizenship in Myanmar since 1982, effectively rendering them stateless. Due to continuous persecution in Rakhine state, many Rohingyas are fleeing to Bangladesh. Currently, about 1.3 million Rohingyas in Bangladesh live in various makeshift camps in the Cox's Bazar district and some throughout the country (Siddiquee, 2012).

### 6.2. Rohingya Issue

The Rohingya refugee issue is very crucial and complicates the relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Bangladesh experienced an unprecedented refugee crisis from 1978-2017, with the forcible exodus of minority Rohingyas into Bangladesh. Despite living in the Arakan state of Myanmar for hundreds of years, the Rohingyas were deprived of their citizenship rights by the military government of Myanmar on the grounds that they were aliens in Myanmar. They were also denied freedom of movement, freedom of marriage, and legal rights to own land or property in their own country (Uddin & Ahamed, 2008).

Initially, the Myanmar military government created the refugee crisis by treating the Rohingyas as illegal immigrants and pushing them into Bangladesh. The Myanmar government viewed the immigration that took place during British rule as illegal, leading many Buddhists to consider the Rohingya to be Bengali, rejecting the term Rohingya as a recent invention created for religious, economic, and political reasons.

**Table 1:** Percentage Distribution of Rohingya Identity

Rohingyas Identity	Yes	6	7.50
	No	74	92.5
	Total	80	100.00

Source: Field level survey, 2017

From the data, we see that almost 92.5% of respondents said that Rohingyas were not Bangladeshi citizens. They also said that Rohingyas are citizens of Myanmar and have been living there for centuries, but the Myanmar government repeatedly persecuted them for religious, economic, and political reasons.

### 6.3. The Major Push of Rohingyas

The entire population of Myanmar is practically color-coded! Following the launch of "Operation Nagamine" in 1977, which continued for over a decade, almost the whole of Myanmar's population was registered and provided with identity cards (Ahmed, 2010). Those residing lawfully in Myanmar were divided into four colors: Pink for full citizens, Blue for associate citizens, Green for naturalized citizens, and White for foreigners. The Rohingyas do not fall under any of these categories, and no such cards were issued to them.

The first major push took place in 1991-92. Another significant push occurred within three decades, mostly in 2012, and finally in 2017. Currently, all the Rohingyas who have been residing in Bangladesh for decades, including the new arrivals fleeing Myanmar, are being registered under the biometric registration system. The Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission Cox's Bazar (RRRC) reports that the total number of Rohingya people in Bangladesh stands at approximately 1.1 million, with hundreds still crossing the border each day. Around 650,000 Rohingyas have entered Bangladesh since November 25, 2017, joining more than 400,000 who fled in the earlier three decades. Now, 715,103 Rohingya refugees, including the long-term ones, have been registered by the Bangladesh government (Kader, 2017).

**Table 2:** A Report of Bangladesh's Push Back Policy (April 1992 -September 2000)

Date	Number of Rohingya enter into Bangladesh	Means of transport used by Rohingyas	Channels used to enter Bangladesh	Pushed back by Bangladesh	Arrested by Bangladesh
April 1992-September-1992	265,000	Boats and trawler	Nayapara ferry, seradip, shahpori island	627	183
1993-1997	...	...	...	Repatriated 2,30,000	....
2000	33,000 Rohingyas recognized as refugees	...	...	...	...

Source: Ahmed, 2010.

**Table 3:** A Report of Bangladesh's Push Back Policy (June 2012- April 2013)

Date	Number of Rohingyas enter into Bangladesh	Means of transport used by Rohingyas	Channels area used to enter Bangladesh	Number of Rohingyas pushed back by Bangladesh	Number of Rohingyas arrested by Bangladesh
June 11-12 2012	1325	Traulers boats engine boats.	Mistiripara Jalia para, Nayapara ferey, Shah pori Island	Around 300	167
June 13, 2012	83	Trawlers	Seradwip at st martin	16	129
Jun 14-16 2012	Around 2,000	15 boats	Majherpara Also stranded in the Naf River	30	16
June 18, 2012	180	7 or 8 small boats	Teknaf	140	....
June 23, 2012	90	Small boats	Teknaf	944	Around 350
	62	Small boats and Trawlers	Teknaf	62	...
September 08, 2012	54	...	Naikhongchhor Cox's Bazar	...	...
April 4-5 2013	356		Cox's Bazar.	...	180

Source: Yesmin, 2012 and Field level survey, 201

**Table 4:** A Report of Bangladesh's Push Back Policy (Oct 2016- Nov 2017)

Date	Number of Rohingyas enter into Bangladesh	Means of transport used by Rohingyas	Channels used to enter Bangladesh	Paused back by Bangladesh	Arrested by Bangladesh
Oct 2016	87,000	Boats, Trawlers, someone on Foot	Jaliapara, Teknaf, Baluhali	700	138
Mar 2017	85,000	7 small Boats Trawlers.	Teknaf Shah pori island	1,085	267
May-June 2017	55,000	Small boats Trawlers on foot	Bayapara ferry, Baukhali, Naikhonchhor, Chipatkhal	257	..
August 23-24 2017	70,000	On foot and small boats Trawlers	Seradip, Nayapara ferry, leda, Balukhali,	...	...
August 25, 2017	1,82,000	On foot Trawlers	Jamtoli,leda Shamlapur, Nayapara, Chipatkhal	305	12
Oct 2017	70,3052	..	Unchiprang shapori, leada Thankali, Naya Para	..	..
Nov, 2017	14,503	...	Cox's Bazar	..	..

Source: Filed level survey, 2017

#### 6.4. Causes of Rohingya Persecution in Myanmar

It is a universal truth that the persecution of Muslim Rohingyas in Myanmar has continued from 1982 to the present day. In 1982, the government introduced regulations that denied citizenship to anyone who could not prove Burmese ancestry from before 1823 (Parnini, 2013). The largest Muslim group in Myanmar is the Rohingya people; they have been the most persecuted group under Myanmar's military regime. Since 1948, successive governments have carried out several military operations against the Rohingya (including in 1975, 1978, 1982-83, 1991-92, 2000, 2012, 2016, and 2017). During these operations, Myanmar security forces have driven the Rohingyas off their land, burned down their mosques, and committed widespread looting, arson of households, and rape of women. Consequently, this continuous persecution has forced them to flee from Myanmar.

**Table 5:** Causes of Rohingya Persecution

Causes	Percentage
Religious	57.5
Economic	7.5
Political	22.5
Others	
(Possibility of Future damaged by Rohingya, Both Political & Religious reason)	12.5
Total	100.00

Source: Filed level survey, 2017

From the above table, we see that almost 57.5% of respondents said that the Myanmar government persecuted Rohingyas for their religious beliefs. If we analyze the data as a whole, it shows that they believe economic and political causes are also responsible for their persecution. Additionally, 12.5% of respondents think that the persecution is due to fear of the Rohingyas grabbing the Arakan region and the potential future threat they might pose.

### 6.5. The Implication of Statelessness

Looking back at history, it is clear that after Burma's war of independence from British colonial rule in 1942-1948, ethnic minorities in Burma have been repressed and harassed. From that time, the relations between the Muslims and Buddhists of Arakan began to deteriorate (Ahmed, 2010).

The Rohingya are not new in Myanmar; they have lived there for centuries. However, when the 1982 citizenship law was passed, they were stripped of any kind of official legal status. The military regime of Myanmar labeled them as resident foreigners and persecuted them, forcing them to flee from Myanmar. Because of the law, their rights to study, work, travel, marry, practice their religion, and access health services have been continuously restricted.

Since the 1970s, a number of crackdowns on the Rohingya in Rakhine state have forced hundreds of thousands to flee to Bangladesh, as well as Malaysia, Thailand, and other Southeast Asian countries. During such crackdowns, refugees have often reported rape, torture, arson, and murder by Myanmar security forces. As a result, the majority of Rohingyas have ended up as stateless Muslims, one of the most persecuted groups in the world.

**Table 6:** Trends of Myanmar Oppression

Year	Rohingyas Oppression in Myanmar
1977-78	A military operation in what is now known as Rakhine state drives out more than 200,000 Rohingya to neighboring Bangladesh. Refugees report widespread rape and murder Bangladesh and Burma, as the country was then known, soon agree on a repatriation plan. Many Rohingya refugees initially resist returns but authorities in Bangladesh cut food rations and camp conditions worsen. More than 10,000 Rohingyas die, according to Medecins sans Frontieres. An estimated 180,000 Rohingya return to Burma by 1979.
1982	Burma enacts the 1982 citizenship law, introducing a three-tier level of citizenship that effectively makes it impossible for Rohingya to become official citizens of the country. Some 200,000-250,000 Rohingya flee Rakhine state bringing allegations of force labour and rape by Myanmar's military. Bangladesh houses the refugee in a series of camps spread out through Cox's Bazar district but insists the Rohingya must return to Myanmar.
1991-1992	Rohingya refugees are repatriated in spurts, but much of the process is mired in controversy. There are early reports of forced repatriation and coercion. The role of the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, is also criticized when the thousands on a weekly basis repatriate Rohingya refugees. An estimated 2, 30,000 refugees are return.
1993-1997	In the early 1990s influx, Kutupalong and Nayapara, which grow to a combined population of 33,000 officially recognized refugees. But more than 200,000 other Rohingya are spread out in makeshift settlements in southern Bangladesh.
September 2000	Myanmar's military junta transfers power to a quasi-civilian government, which soon begins political and economic reforms aimed at engaging with the global community.
2011	
April 2012	Aung san suu kyi, who had spent parts of two decades under house arrest, wins a seat in parliamentary by-elections.
2014	A nationwide census is held with support from the UN populations Fund, or UNFPA, but authorizes refuse to allow people to identify as Rohingya. The census estimates that roughly 1,090,000 people in northern Rakhine state were not counted during the enumeration.
	More than 5,000 people including Rohingya from Myanmar and migrants from Bangladesh are stranded at sea after the ships they were traded at in were abandoned by smugglers. Aid



May 2015	groups believe 370 people died. The survivors come ashore in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia Joining a growing number of Rohingya's in countries around the region and beyond.
November 2015	Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy wins national elections Rohingyas barred from voting, while the NLD does not run a single Muslim candidate.
October 2016	A group of Rohingya fighters calling itself the 3 Arakan salvation army, or ARSA, attacks border posts in northern Rakhine state. The resulting military crackdown pushes more than 87,000 people into Bangladesh. Swelling refugee numbers in the crowded camps. Refugee and rights groups claim widespread abuses, which the military denies.
March 2017	The United Nations started Mission to investigate claims of rights abuses in Myanmar, including the October 2016 violence in Rakhine. Myanmar refugee's entry to the right probe.
Aug 24, 2017	The Kafi Annan-led Advisory commission on Rakhine state, established a year earlier by Aug san Suu Kyi to make recommendations on Peace Building in Rakhine, issues its final report, it includes a recommendation to revisit the controversial 1982 citizenship law. De fact to leader Suu Kyi promises to give the report full consideration.
Aug-25 2107	Within hours, ARSA fighters stage a new round of attacks in Northern Rakhine state, Myanmar's military responds with a sweeping crackdown in Rohingya communities. By the end of the year, more than 6,50,000 new Rohingya refugees enter Bangladesh. Among them 82 thousand women were pregnant and 2 lac children at health risk.
Nov 2017	Bangladesh and Myanmar announce they have reached an agreement to repatriate Rohingya refugees, through details of the plan were unclear.

Source: IRIN, 2017 & filed level survey 2017

### 6.6. Integration Process of Rohingya

1. The process of integrating Rohingyas into the local community has emerged as a solution to the refugee problem. Such integration depends on several factors, including:
2. The willingness of the refugees to settle locally.
3. The receptiveness and commitment of the host country and local population towards the integration of refugee populations.
4. Access to livelihoods and means for socio-economic survival.
5. Opportunities for refugees to acquire citizenship and achieve full integration into the host society (Alam, 2017).

In the process of local integration, the international community plays an important role, which may include financial assistance to the host government, local communities, and the refugees to assist in their integration into the host society. It was found that the large number of Rohingya in Bangladesh is partly due to the social, ethnic, linguistic, and predominantly religious characteristics that they share with the host community.

1. Many Rohingyas have integrated into Bangladeshi society in the following ways:
2. Illegally obtaining Bangladeshi national identity cards with the help of local political leaders.
3. Inter-marriage with local Bangladeshis.
4. Their common adherence to Islam.
5. Their involvement in different informal jobs.

### 6.7. The Future of the Rohingya Crisis

Local people in Cox's Bazar are worried about the future of the Rohingyas, as over 1 million Rohingyas have already crossed the border into the district, fleeing ethnic cleansing in Myanmar and putting immense strain on infrastructure, services, and the low-paid job market. Local people have continued assisting the Rohingyas but are concerned about their future as the massive influx is putting extra pressure on food, shelter, sanitation, market prices, the local job market, natural resources, and transportation costs. Most respondents said, "Our future is bleak, as Rohingyas are causing price hikes, increased transport fees, and the local poor would lose jobs as Rohingya labor would be cheaper." The Cox's Bazar refugee relief and rehabilitation center declared that they would bring all Rohingyas into a mega camp to prevent their mingling with locals. However, the UN has warned about potential conflict between locals and Rohingyas. The RRRC stated that although such concerns exist, no such situation has arisen so far, and they remain on alert for possible conflicts.

The new waves of Rohingya influx have overcrowded Teknaf and Ukhia Upazila's health facilities and put extra pressure on water sources. Rohingyas pose a threat to the outbreak of diseases and are hampering education. Since August 25, when the last round of the Rohingya influx began, market prices have increased significantly, transportation costs have doubled, the number of patients at health facilities has tripled, and Rohingyas have destroyed at least six kilometers of forest, living in a 12-km<sup>2</sup> area of reserved forests. The way Rohingyas have made shelter on hill slopes and cut down forests poses a significant risk of landslides and cyclones causing heavy damage to the area. Additionally, they hamper the tourism business in the beach town of Cox's Bazar. Prices of coarse rice and flour have increased significantly, and vegetable prices have doubled. In the first week of October 2017, prices of all main food commodities, including rice, flour, salt, oil, potato, sugar, and pulses, increased.

Local people also expressed fear of a deterioration of law and order if the Rohingyas could come outside the camps looking for jobs and potentially get involved in criminal activities. Additionally, Rohingyas are working as agricultural laborers, fishing boat workers, and rickshaw-pullers. With physical features very similar to those of Bengalis, Rohingyas can easily blend into the Bangladeshi community and, in this way, may assimilate with the people of Bangladesh in the future.

## 7. Conclusion

The Rohingya crisis has given rise to various problems for Bangladesh. This study was conducted to identify the causes of the Rohingya refugee crisis and their statelessness. The main findings of the study were that the causes of Rohingya persecution in Myanmar were their religious beliefs and the political economy of the Myanmar government. Continuous persecution by the Myanmar military government has rendered them one of the most persecuted and stateless nations in the world. While the government of Bangladesh, regional, and international communities are playing critical roles in providing humanitarian and other support to the Rohingyas, they have not taken effective steps to resolve these problems permanently. Though Rohingya refugees are involved in various destructive activities, they have no clear options for survival here, and they are perceived as an unwanted burden on society. Now, the Rohingya issue needs a permanent solution rather than incremental fixes. Therefore, for a resolution:

1. Provide them full citizenship status and rights in their country (Myanmar).
2. The Myanmar government must take back all the Rohingyas who have fled to different parts of Asia, particularly Bangladesh.
3. The process of further “Burmanisation” of Myanmar must be stopped (Ranjan, 2017).

Repatriation could be a solution to the Rohingya refugee crisis, but this issue completely depends on the governments of both Bangladesh and Myanmar. Additionally, before implementing these policy plans, it is imperative to understand what the Myanmar government can and should do to resolve these problems. According to my observation, providing humanitarian and other assistance to Rohingyas is not the real solution to this crisis. Rather, effective measures should be taken with the help of regional and international bodies to permanently resolve this crisis. We must be less emotional and more rational. Therefore, life in makeshift camps does not solve the crisis but rather prolongs it.

## 8. Limitations and Study Forward

The main limitations of this study are that it was only conducted on local people in Cox’s Bazar who live in the camp area. Local people, especially women, were reluctant to be interviewed. Data collection occurred during the rainy season, causing some unintentional interruptions. Data collectors were not highly educated, resulting in some inconvenience during data analysis. To gain a better understanding of this issue, in-depth interviews would be better. Additionally, we were not able to clarify the findings properly.

To address these limitations, I suggest the following recommendations for future studies:

- All unregistered Rohingya refugees living inside or outside camps should be documented with the help of local NGOs and government organizations. Diplomatic efforts should be made to repatriate them to Myanmar through bilateral agreements.
- Strict retribution should be applied to those who kindle the situation against minorities.
- A special committee should be formed to oversee the circumstances.
- Everyone should respect the religious beliefs of others.
- Specific steps should be constituted to handle any kind of emergency.
- The government should take proper steps to address the price hikes of necessary goods, such as tree plantations, stopping fuelwood collections, and stopping hill cutting activities.
- Bangladesh should take the first diplomatic step in line with its foreign policy, as there is a gap in values and norms between Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- The Bangladesh government must take determined steps to stop illegal trade and arms trafficking.
- The Bangladesh government must continue active diplomacy, particularly with regional partners (Myanmar, India, and China), to solve the problem.
- Myanmar should bring all the Rohingyas back from Bangladesh and provide citizenship to them.
- ASEAN and SAARC can mediate between the two countries.
- UNHCR should take the initiative to solve the problems related to Rohingya refugees.
- As both are members of the UN, the UN can take measures to ease the relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

**Acknowledgement Statement:** The authors would like to thank all participants and the reviewers for providing comments in helping this manuscript to completion.

**Conflicts of interest:** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

**Authors' contribution statements:** Author 1 contributed to the Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, and Writing of the original Draft; Author 2 contributed to Software, Validation, and Data Curation.

**Funding statements:** This research has not received any funding.

**Data availability statement:** Data is available at request. Please contact the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

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