

Addressing the Rohingya Crisis: Bangladesh Approaches at Home and Abroad

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We share the same sky but not the same land-in the world, where territories determine primary identities for humans and being stateless is considered the worst form of loss of identity. Rohingyas have experienced that in their own country of origin for years as their legit claim to identity was stripped off constitutionally since 1982. Years of persecution against the Rohingyas took their worst form in August 2017, which led to a mass exodus of the Rohingyas to the only other place where they could seek refuge, that is, in Bangladesh.

A country of 50 years, Bangladesh had its fair share of crises, but mostly of natural origin; it is a delta hosting the confluence of three big rivers and the

Bay of Bengal is prone to natural disasters. Bangladesh, however, had seldom experienced artificial crises of the type that the exodus of Rohingyas has unfolded-an additional 1.1 million population in the country of foreign origin, which requires unprecedented management. Rohingyas have been crossing on this side of the border since before the independence of Bangladesh. Independent Bangladesh has seen several phases of influxes of Rohingyas, which previously have been dealt the help of the international community. The influx of 2017 was entirely different than before-both in terms of volume and nature. One can argue that the systemic volatility and the gaps in the international order lead to

rule-breaking tendencies of rogue countries, and Myanmar's military junta was no exception. The repression of Rohingyas happened when great powers were busy securing their national interests. Despite consensus on the rules-based international order, the idea was often selectively applied. While Bangladesh has acquired newfound strategic importance, thanks to its third neighbor, the Bay of Bengal, it seems that how the Rohingya issue should be approached is slowly changing in favor of Bangladesh.

Several developments have taken place in recent times, which need to be evaluated in their proper perspective. Bangladesh has successfully internationalized the Rohingya issue. It has been able to make a sound case internationally about the gravity of the problem, that it is not only Bangladesh's problem, and that the international community must have to shoulder the responsibilities of the cost of this prolonged humanitarian crisis. As the Gambia took the case of Myanmar allegedly violating provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, also known as the Geneva Convention, against the Rohingyas living in the Arakan Province, the issue has received a further impetus. One must not take this lightly by arguing that the ICJ has no implementing authority. It needs to consider the nature of emerging international consensus on this issue irrespective of their national policies on the Rohingya issue—that is, the unanimous acceptance of the identity of the Rohingyas in the ICJ proceedings and the verdict. As the Court consisted of a Myanmar judge as well, this shows that the Rohingyas' primary demand for

the recognition of their identity has been heard and accepted by the international community. This case, with Myanmar referring to the Rohingyas as 'Arakanese Muslims, shows the political maneuvering of Myanmar on multiple levels. First, identifying Rohingyas as Arakanese Muslims is the first international step for Myanmar to accept Rohingyas as Myanmar nationals.



On the other hand, one must not overlook the political and strategic games associated with this particular approach adopted by the country. This was an attempt to cash on global Islamophobia by Myanmar and decline to accept the reality that not all Rohingyas are Muslims. Rohingya Christians and Hindus have also fled to Bangladesh, being persecuted by the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar military junta. However, Bangladesh has not let Myanmar cash on propagating this idea, nor did the persecuted Rohingyas. Rohingyas belonging to other faiths do not shy away from expressing their religious identities and establishing their voice in the process of repatriation to their homeland.

This brings us to the issue of repatriation, Bangladesh has made it clear that it wants sustainable and meaningful repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar. For this, Bangladesh is

seeking multilateral cooperation. Its development partners, such as the United States (US), Japan and China, and the European Union (EU)-all have their respective roles to play. The US has taken a strong stand against the Myanmar military junta by declaring the atrocities committed against the Rohingyas comparable to Holocaust and other genocidal activities and thus, referring to mass atrocities against the Rohingyas as 'genocide', To further the cause, the US has also sanctioned Myanmar business people and a few members of the Myanmar military. This act shows that the US is gradually taking a solid stance on genocidal activities against the Rohingyas by the Myanmar military. Japan and other international actors are also slowly but surely paying attention to the mass violence against the Rohingyas indiscriminately and working to find a durable solution. The United Nations (UN), which has identified violence against Rohingyas as 'textbook examples of genocide,' has taken up the Rohingya issue as one of its priority areas.

Bangladesh's handling of the Rohingyas living in the country has also been laudable, Bangladesh provided shelter, security and voices to the Rohingyas, and it has also created opportunities for Rohingya women and young girls and boys, who were traditionally excluded from earning their livelihood and learning how to make a difference. The approach was taken by the Bangladesh authority in involving women and youth in community-level engagements and programs. This can act as an early-warning system in the case of an outbreak of health-related vulnerabilities or social unrest, which have

transcended the traditional roles in their culture. In the long run, this will help break the gender barrier in a society where the hierarchical relationship between men and women exists, and they are often not allowed to interact with each other in the public domain. That young boys and girls are given opportunities to work together would bring about changes in how gender relations are perceived and how they can think about furthering this to other spheres of interactions. This is more so in the case of Bhashan Char, where one can see how the involvement of local youth with the Bangladesh authority has created a bridge and therefore, understanding each other's requirements and priorities. This also works to identify under the circumstances what the 'real time' needs, short-term and long-term needs. There is little doubt that this connecting process between the Rohingyas and Bangladesh authorities shall be as vital as the repatriation processes begin. For Bangladesh, it has been unhesitatingly communicated to the international community that repatriation is the priority, As Professor Imtiaz Ahmed of Dhaka University has pointed out, there is no doubt that repatriation must take place while we must also realize "time is relative, but it has to be done." One must realize that any international issue-irrespective of its merit or complexity-requires time and patience to resolve. No matter how small it may seem at first sight, any step must be connected with the larger picture to make sense of it.

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