



EXPLORING ROHINGYA REFUGEE CRISIS IN SOUTH ASIA AS A SECURITY THREAT

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ABSTRACT

The Rohingya refugee crisis in South Asia presents a significant security challenge due to the systematic persecution and displacement of thousands of Rohingya Muslims across neighboring countries. This crisis not only strains regional resources but also escalates tensions. The study examines the security implications, emphasizing the potential destabilization and identifying root causes. These security concerns extend beyond immediate border areas and could impact the entire region's geopolitical dynamics. Addressing the crisis requires collaborative efforts from regional governments, international organizations, and stakeholders to protect human rights, provide humanitarian aid, and find a lasting solution. A comprehensive strategy should address both the socio-political roots and current security issues.

KEYWORDS : Rohingya refugees , security concerns , statelessness , Muslim minority, Humanitarian issue , radicalization, international cooperation

INTRODUCTION

The South Asian region hosts the largest number of refugees on the globe. It has witnessed substantial intra-regional movement and dislocation of regional groups fleeing ethnic or religious persecution and political instability. The term 'Refugee' is derived from Latin word 'Tugere', which means to flee for safety. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, "refugee is a person who flee from his country of origin due to political or other forms of persecutions and is unable or unwilling to avail the protection of that country and thus loses his nationality." One of the greatest human tragedies of the 21st century has been the refugee crisis, which contributes to over fifty million displaced people and refugees that exist today.

THE ROHINGYA PEOPLE : AN INTRODUCTION TO THEIR IDENTITY AND STRUGGLE

The Rohingya are a stateless Indo-Aryan ethnic minority who have lived for millennia throughout most of Buddhist Myanmar. The Rohingya are primarily Muslims. They practice an aspect of Sunni Islam that has Sufi influences. They are not like Myanmar's overwhelming Buddhist people. The dialect spoken by the Rohingya people in Myanmar is called Ruaingga, or Rohingya. The Rohingya always maintained their own language. They have been denied citizenship in Myanmar since 1982 and are not regarded as one of the 135 recognized ethnic groups in the nation, thereby making them stateless.

The Rohingya community originated in the 15th century when Muslims arrived in the former Arakan Kingdom. The term "Rohingya" was first mentioned in British literature in 1799. The Rohingya were distinct from the majority Rakhine Buddhist population. Buddhist Nationalist groups like MaBaTha and anti-Muslim 696 in Myanmar are facing discrimination and marginalization, as they are not considered citizens by the Myanmar's Government. They have called for boycotts, expulsions, and attacks on Muslim communities. The Rohingyas, despite their historical connection to Myanmar, are not recognized as a Myanmar ethnic group and are often considered stateless due to government reluctance.

CRISIS AMIDST ROHINGYA REFUGEES

The Rohingya refugee crisis erupted in August 2017 when a large scale exodus of refugees resulted from a lethal crackdown by Myanmar's army on Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State. Following attacks on army and police outposts by armed groups purportedly affiliated with the Rohingya community the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) which were followed with systematic counterattacks against the population, leading to a violence broke out. The government of Myanmar has long discriminated against them and refused to grant them Citizenship because they view them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Their freedom of movement and access to fundamental rights and services have also been restricted. When the military's response to the attacks led to widespread violence, including the burning of villages and accusations of human rights abuses, the situation reached a critical point, driving over **742,000 Rohingya** to flee to Bangladesh. For children, the situation has been particularly devastating, with allegations of disease outbreaks, starvation, and limited educational prospects, in addition to concerns associated with abuse, exploitation, and neglect. Rohingya Families, who are stateless, face severe abuse, exploitation, and gender-based violence due to their lack of fundamental rights and protection. A generation of Rohingya children and teenagers has been brought about by the crisis, and they are currently facing the prospect of being a "lost Generation," robbed of possibilities to pursue education or gain employment, and exposed to exploitation.

The most marginalized and persecuted group of people in the world are the Rohingya refugees. The Rohingya, a Muslim minority in Myanmar, were compelled to flee their homes in the predominantly Buddhist country due to discriminatory legislation enacted by the government since the late 1970s. They were forced to escape Myanmar's horrific brutality at various times, taking refuge in Bangladesh and other South Asian Nations. The horrific genocide in Myanmar has made the already dire situation worse. Thousands of families were slaughtered or split up, entire villages were destroyed by fire, and grave human rights breaches were documented. Both Fundamental human rights and civil rights have been stripped away from them.

CURRENT SITUATION

Seven years into one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Rohingya refugee crisis has escalated into a "protracted situation." The UNHCR reports that 569 Rohingya perished at sea in 2023—the highest number in seven years. They continue travelling across the sea in a perilous strategy to obtain safety. According to a UN refugee agency assessment from January 2024, some 7,000 displaced Rohingya Muslim refugees had to flee their camp in southeast Bangladesh due to damage caused by fire. According to locals, Rohingya organizations, and the media, in January 2024, military forces from Myanmar targeted Arakan Army fighters stationed in

Rohingya villages, especially in south Buthidaung township which resulted in civilian casualties and property devastation. The UNHCR also estimates that an additional 1.1 million Rohingya are internally displaced within Myanmar. It is reasonable to conclude that the heinous deeds—which includes raping women, setting entire villages on fire, and dismembering children—have most likely amounted to crimes against humanity. The situation has caused widespread reports of sexual and gender-based violence, the burning of entire villages, the separation and killing of families, and significant trauma among the refugees. The Rohingya Crisis has created a complex web of humanitarian, legal, security, and social difficulties, requiring a coordinated international response to address the needs of the “lost generation” of older kids and teens who are denied education or employment opportunities, increasing their susceptibility to human trafficking and exploitation.

ROHINGYA CRISIS : SOUTH ASIA’S SECURITY CHALLENGE

The Rohingya crisis has strained South Asia’s internal security by causing refugee influxes, radicalization concerns, and diplomatic tensions among neighboring countries, like Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, highlighting regional instability and complex geopolitical dynamics, and significantly impacting the region’s internal security. The displacement and misery may encourage radicalization, allowing extremist organizations to exploit the precarious conditions in refugee camps, potentially endangering the region’s security. The crisis has strained relations, causing disputes over repatriation plans and accusations of Human rights abuses, potentially impacting regional stability and diplomatic ties. I’ll be discussing the major security ramifications of the Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh and India here.

Refugee movement across borders could compromise border security, facilitate illegal activities, and pose challenges for humanitarian organizations. It also influences foreign involvement in South Asian affairs, potentially impacting internal security dynamics. The Rohingya crisis has had a multifaceted impact on South Asia’s internal security, involving humanitarian, diplomatic, and socio-political dimensions, necessitating collaborative efforts for stability.

SECURITY ECHOES : THE ROHINGYA INFLUX IN INDIA

The Rohingya crisis in India is a complex issue with significant implications for the country’s security policies. An estimated **40,000** Rohingya fled Myanmar to seek safety in India due to violence and persecution. They are a part of a larger displacement in which hundreds of thousands have fled to neighboring nations. They are scattered across the country, with many living in makeshift camps under challenging conditions. There have been unexplained fires at some camps, adding to the refugees’ anxieties. Many Rohingya refugees live in precarious conditions, with limited access to basic services and legal protections. They face challenges such as restrictions on movement, lack of education, and xenophobia. Rohingya people in Jammu, Telangana, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Rajasthan live in temporary shelters made of bamboo and tarpaulin, which have been prone to fires. The Rohingya in India continue to live in a state of limbo, with their future in the country uncertain.

The Rohingya have been classified as “illegal immigrants” by India, Recent reports highlight the Rohingya people’s hazardous status in India, where calls for their repatriation back to Myanmar are mounting. This has sparked concerns about how refugees are treated and the principle of non-refoulement, which forbids sending refugees back to dangerous areas. The Indian government has voiced concerns about security and the socioeconomic effects of hosting an extensive refugee population, although the situation continues to be complicated. Numerous international organizations and nations have expressed concern about the situation, urging on India to provide the Rohingya community shelter and maintain an adequate level of protection.

ROHINGYA UNREST : REPERCUSSIONS FOR INDIAN SECURITY

The presence of Rohingya refugees may pose security problems, which the Indian government has expressed concerns about. The government considers these allegations of Rohingya people getting fake Indian identification documents, human trafficking, and other subversive actions as threats to internal and national security. There are concerns that Rohingya refugees, who are often in vulnerable positions, could

be targeted for radicalization by extremist groups. This poses a potential threat to internal security. There may be conflicts between the host communities and the refugees as a result of the large amount of migrants straining local resources and services.

Indian authorities are intensifying monitoring in regions with high concentrations of Rohingya migrants due to perceived security threats, including terrorism, drug trafficking, human smuggling, and maritime piracy, highlighting the complex balancing act between humanitarian obligations and national security. The Rohingya in India are facing increasing fear of deportation due to government restrictions and calls for their deportation, with **240** currently detained and a heightened risk of forced returns. It is imperative to consider the humanitarian needs and rights of refugees in addition to security concerns, despite the fact those concerns are legitimate. The international community continues to expand for a reasonable strategy that addresses security issues while upholding the Rohingya people's safety and dignity.

SECURING STABILITY: INDIA'S STRATEGY ON THE ROHINGYA ISSUE

India's response to the Rohingya Refugees has been mixed. India has permitted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to function and has given the refugees some degree of protection even though there is no official legislation regarding refugees. The Government has increased surveillance in areas where Rohingya refugees are settled, particularly in temporary shelters. Citing concerns for national security, India has launched legal action to control the entry and stay of Rohingya refugees under the Foreigners Act. State and federal Governments have been instructed to form district task forces in order to locate and expel individuals who are unlawfully residing abroad, including Rohingya.

According to the government, deporting illegal Rohingya immigrants is a response to grave security challenges, which will also attempt to strike a balance between national security and humanitarian concerns. India has responded to a court petition by prioritizing its citizens and addressing national security risks from Rohingya refugees. Through "Operation Insaniyat," India has provided humanitarian aid to Bangladesh, aiming to remove migration incentives and resolve the situation with Myanmar. The strategy advocates for diplomatic measures to ensure the dignified, sustainable, and safe return of the Rohingya people to their homeland. Therefore, these measures have been subject to debate and legal scrutiny, as they involve complex issues of human rights, international law, and national security. The situation remains dynamic, with ongoing discussions about the best way to address the security concerns while upholding Humanitarian principles.

THE SECURITY RIPPLE EFFECT OF ROHINGYA INFLUX IN BANGLADESH

The Rohingya crisis pertains to the ongoing humanitarian scenario that has resulted from the forced relocation of the Rohingya population, a Muslim minority group residing in Myanmar. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh since August 2017 in order to escape the violence and persecution they ought to encounter in Myanmar. As of February 2024, the situation is still grave, with a large number of refugees, many of them are children residing in Bangladesh in the world's largest refugee camp.

The Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are primarily settled in the **Cox's Bazar region**. This region is home to several camps for refugees, which when together constitute one of the biggest Refugee settlements in the world. Based on the most recent information, Bangladesh is still housing over **952,309 Rohingya refugees** in 33 camps located in the Cox's Bazar District and Bhasan Char Island. These camps are overcrowded and have restricted access to basic amenities including food, clean water, education, and sanitary facilities.

They face difficulties including illness outbreaks, starvation, and an absence of educational opportunities while living in improvised shelters in densely populated camps. Natural catastrophes like cyclones and a strong monsoon pose a threat to the migrants as well. In these camps, efforts are still being made to give the Rohingya people the essential assistance and better living conditions. UNICEF and other organizations provide basic services to Rohingya children in camps, but concerns about a "lost generation" and security repercussions for Bangladesh have led to international calls for durable solutions.

ROHINGYA PRESENCE : A SECURITY QUANDARY FOR BANGLADESH

The Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh has led to significant security concerns, with recent reports highlighting a range of issues: Human Rights Watch reported an increase in violence against Rohingya refugees, including murders, kidnappings, and torture perpetrated by criminal gangs and armed groups. At least 48 migrants were killed in the first half of 2023, and over 40 refugees were assassinated in 2022. According to the UN's refugee agency, at least 569 Rohingya died or went missing at sea while trying to migrate mainly from Bangladesh. The deaths are a stark reminder of the perilous conditions the Rohingya face, not only in their Homeland of Myanmar but also as refugees in Bangladesh.

In the refugee camps, turf disputes between gangs engaged in drug and people trafficking have occasionally resulted in fatalities and serious injuries. The relocation of refugees to Bhasan Char has encountered resistance due to severe weather and transportation limitations, which has made the situation of the refugees even more vulnerable and worse. Conditions in the refugee camps are getting more severe, and there is an increase in tension. Additionally, refugees are having difficulty accessing police, legal, and medical support.

Rohingya refugee children in exile face challenges like disease outbreaks, malnutrition, and inadequate education, while funding has declined, reducing food assistance for the first time. These instances highlight the intricate security issues raised by the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, which need for a comprehensive strategy that respects human rights in order to guarantee the protection and welfare of the refugees. A dignified and sustainable return to Myanmar is considered the primary solution to the crisis. Many Rohingya refugees express a desire for safe and voluntary return, prompting the international community to reassess efforts to facilitate this process.

SAFE HAVENS : STRENGTHENING ROHINGYAS SECURITY

The Bangladesh government has been taking several measures to address the security threats and challenges posed by the Rohingya crisis. Bangladesh's government is working together with the UN and refugees to develop a security strategy that upholds human rights. There are efforts ongoing towards setting up easily accessible channels through which refugees can report crimes as well as through which the police may investigate into complaints immediately. Bangladesh is being pressured by UN agencies and donor states to eliminate administrative barriers that impede access to local courts and law enforcement, as well as limitations on education and employment opportunities. The Kutupalong "mega camp" in the Cox's Bazar area is one of the refugee camps where the government is trying to improve living conditions.

Bangladesh is focusing on reducing alienation and insecurity by eliminating criminality and easing education bans and improving employment conditions in refugee camps. The government has allocated funds to support refugees and partnered with organizations like the World Food Programme. However, calls are being made for Dhaka to reverse strict security protocols to prevent further local unrest in the camps. Also, There is a need to investigate and eradicate corruption and abuse from specific security force officers as well as to take severe action against armed and violent criminal groups within the camps. The Armed Police Battalions (APB) are urged to refrain from exploiting refugees for mandatory night patrols. Amendments to the living conditions in the camps are being generated, which might contribute to a decline in dangerous and unlawful behavioral patterns.

The Bangladeshi government is implementing multidimensional security measures to improve the safety and justice of Rohingya refugees and host communities. These measures include immediate and long-term initiatives, recognizing the complex and dynamic nature of the situation, and relying on international organizations and donors for assistance.

CONCLUSION

The Rohingya Refugee Crisis has worsened security issues, fueled political rivalry, and increased the risk of radicalization among over one million stateless individuals, posing a significant threat to regional stability and peace, affecting human rights, regional politics, and security, and requiring international response and increased security risks.

The Rohingya crisis underscores the negative impact of statelessness and the need for International cooperation. I believe that a long-term solution involving regional governments and international organizations is crucial to uphold Rohingya rights and address host nation security concerns. This includes promoting communication, granting Rohingya full citizenship rights, supporting humanitarian operations, providing work and education opportunities, and strengthening refugee camps.

In order to resolve the underlying causes of the crisis, human rights must be promoted and the legal position and protection of the Rohingya must be guaranteed. Everyone involved must work together, including international organizations and regional powers to put pressure on Myanmar to provide the Rohingya people citizenship and security guarantees. South Asian countries, along with ASEAN, need to work together to address the crisis, share the burden and prevent the exploitation of the situation by extremist groups. In my view, the international community needs to maintain its support for refugees and the host communities, but it also must adapt to pressing issues and broaden its search for solutions.

The Rohingya crisis requires promoting Human rights and legal protection, requiring collaboration among international organizations and Regional powers to pressure Myanmar to grant citizenship and security. South Asian countries And ASEAN must collaborate to address the crisis, share the burden, and prevent extremist group exploitation. In my view, The international community must adapt to pressing issues maintain its support for refugees and the host communities and broaden its search for solutions. A comprehensive approach combining political advocacy, clear path to citizenship, humanitarian help, and security measures is needed to ensure stability and peace in South Asia, upholding the rights and dignity of the Rohingya people.

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