

# The Impacts of Rohingya Refugee Influx on Bangladesh


*Los impactos del flujo de refugiados Rohingya en Bangladesh*

**Abstract:** The Rohingya, a Muslim minority ethnic group in Myanmar, were forcibly displaced to Bangladesh in 2017 on the ground of ethnic cleansing by the military government. This study aims to provide a comprehensive review of the socio-economic impacts of the Rohingya refugee influx on the host community. This paper uses push-pull and realism theories to identify the roots causes of this massive influx to Bangladesh. The study applies a qualitative method to analyze the impact of the Rohingya refugees on the economy of Bangladesh, complemented by a qualitative literature review. The results indicate that rising prices, along with falling wages of low-skilled workers are negatively affecting host communities. Environmental degradation, as well as excessive pressure on already strained infrastructure and public services, are major concerns. Further research is needed to identify other factors that could strengthen the effectiveness of the repatriation.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic impacts. Rohingya Refugee. Myanmar.

**Resumen:** Los Rohingya, grupo étnico minoritario musulmán de Myanmar, fueron desplazados a la fuerza en Bangladesh en 2017 por la limpieza étnica del gobierno militar. Sin embargo, desde el punto de vista geopolítico, China, India y Estados Unidos tienen importantes intereses geopolíticos substanciales en la región. La estrategia económica de China y Myanmar desempeñó un papel crucial en el flujo. Sobre la base de los factores mencionados, se recomienda un enfoque holístico esencial entre las diversas organizaciones internacionales, el país anfitrión Bangladesh y Myanmar para una repatriación sostenible de los Rohingya en Myanmar lo antes posible.

**Palabras clave:** Impactos socioeconómicos. Refugiados Rohingya. Myanmar.

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**Received: Nov. 08, 2021**

**Approved: Nov. 30, 2021**

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**ISSN on-line 2316-4891 / ISSN print 2316-4833**

<http://ebrevistas.eb.mil.br/index.php/RMM/index>



## 1 Introduction

Bangladesh, a small South-east Asian country with a large population and few resources, has given a safe haven for more than one million Rohingya people who have been forced to flee Myanmar. Bangladesh has been housing Myanmar refugees since 1978, a period that spans more than four decades. More than 742,000 people fled to Bangladesh since 25 August 2017 as a result of the Myanmar military's campaign of brutality and terror (UNHCR, 2019). The migration of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh has had a significant influence on the local communities of Cox's Bazar and Bandarban (where the Rohingya took shelter) districts. The migration became one of the world's fastest-growing refugee crises at one point. Bangladesh shelters 4.73% of the world's total refugees despite having less than 0.31% of the world's population (UNDP, 2018). For the vast majority of the Rohingya refugees, Cox's Bazar has been their principal destination. According to the 2011 census, the population of Cox's Bazar is only 4, 71,768 people (BANGLADESH BUREAU OF STATISTICS, 2013). As a result, the Rohingya community in this district outnumbers the local community by a factor of 2.43. The national economy, security, and environment are all threatened by housing such a massive load. In the Rohingya community, a new pattern of economic activity is booming. The emergence of a small group of persons who have gained new job scopes as a result of the influx is said to be benefiting from these economic dynamics. According to various studies, the major ways in which migration affects the host community are increased commodity costs and lower wages for low-skilled workers. Environmental degradation, increased pressure on already-weak infrastructure and public services, and rising tensions between refugees and host communities are also major difficulties (UNDP, 2018).

Myanmar is a unique state in which geopolitics and genocide or ethnic cleansing have intermingled. Historically, there has long been a deep mistrust between Islam and Buddhism. On the corollary, USA, China, and India are all fighting for control of their own spheres of influence. The fact that Myanmar refuses to recognize Rohingyas as a separate ethnic group should not be seen in isolation. It has to do with territory and sovereignty (KARIM, 2021).

The repatriation has been in a stalemate for more than four years now. Despite numerous bilateral talks and diplomatic measures, Myanmar has so far been unable to create ideal conditions for the return of Rohingya. As the repatriation will be entirely on 'informed consent,' the Rohingya's wishes are crucial. No Rohingya has expressed an interest in returning to their homeland until the core problems are addressed. Myanmar's Citizenship Act of 1982 formally recognized the Rohingya as stateless. With the current military coup in Myanmar, which overthrew the democratically elected party and sparked widespread violence and protest, the Rohingya repatriation is the military's last priority. With this reality, it's realistic to assume that the Rohingya crisis will drag on for a long period.

### 1.1 Objective of the Study

In light of this, the primary goal of this study is to provide a comprehensive review of the economic impacts of the Rohingya inflow on Bangladesh. On the other hand, there is a direct link between the Rohingya crisis and China, India, and USA, s geopolitical interests in the region. The following are the specific objectives:

- To analyze the economic implications for the host community in the aftermath of the influx.
- To analyze the region's geopolitical implications of China, India, and USA.
- To analyze the main barriers of repatriation.

### 1.2 Research Question

The primary research question is:

- What are the economic impacts of Rohingya influx in Bangladesh?

The secondary research questions are:

- What are the region's geopolitical ramifications?
- What are the underlying reasons of the crisis, and how do they affect the repatriation?

### 1.3 Literature Review

The first wave of Rohingya refugees arrived in Bangladesh in 1978. It has been a safe haven for the Rohingya for more than four decades. The unprecedented influx of Rohingya refugees has wreaked havoc on security, the economy, and the environment. Because of the situation, relations between the two countries are strained. Despite several bilateral and diplomatic measures, no Rohingyas have been repatriated to Myanmar as of yet.

According to a UNDP report titled "Impacts of the Rohingya Refugee Influx on Host Communities," published in November 2018, the Rohingya refugee crisis has had a significant impact on host communities' livelihoods. Price adjustments and a drop in daily wage for laborers have had a particularly negative impact on the host community. Large quantities of in-kind assistance received as relief items are sometimes being sold by refugees in local markets, causing prices to go down. On the contrary, their purchases of other products drive up prices due to strong demand (UNDP, 2018).

The survey's net effect reveals a minor drop in price on food products and an increase in price on other categories. Wages for agricultural and other unskilled employees were also reported to be low. The inflow has placed a tremendous strain on the host community, which is aggravated by the country's comparatively low socioeconomic development. There have also been severe negative effects on government services and the environment (UNDP, 2018).

The many terminologies related to refugees which are covered in a UNHCR paper titled "An Introduction to International Protection". The research outlined the parameters under which some people can be classified as refugees and why others cannot, as per the 1951 Refugee Convention. This paper primarily focuses on the necessity for international refugee protection as well as the international legal framework for refugee protection (UNHCR, 2005).

Nour Mohammad's article "Refugee Protection Under the Constitution of Bangladesh: A Brief Overview" outlined the different international and national obligations that Bangladesh faces when it comes to refugee status. Despite the fact that Bangladesh is not a member to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol, the Rohingya refugees were sheltered by Bangladesh under Customary International Law. Under "Executive order," the Bangladeshi government grants asylum seekers refugee status (Mohammad).

Myanmar is a unique country where geopolitics has collided with genocide or ethnic cleansing, according to a book titled "Ethnicity and Geopolitics of Rohingya Crisis. It's difficult to tell the difference between geopolitics and genocide/ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. There has long been a deep mistrust between Islam and Buddhism. In terms of geopolitics, USA, China, and India are competing for control of their own spheres of influence. By default, Bangladesh is struggling under the weight of imposed geopolitics (KARIM, 2021).

All of these works suggest that the influx has produced two economic groups: the first is the general public, who are severely hampered by price increases and low labor costs, and the second is a small number of people who benefit from the influx by gaining employment opportunities. On the contrary, the geopolitics of the sub-region is directly influenced by powers such as USA, China, and India. Everyone is putting their own agenda on the table and Bangladesh is being sucked into it by default. This dissertation aims to fill a research gap between the main issues of the humanitarian crisis and geopolitics, both of which are contributing factors to the successful return of the Rohingya to Myanmar.

## **2 Methodology**

This research will be exploratory in nature, as primary data could not be collected owing to lack of time and resources. As a result, the research will be based on secondary data, which means that the data was not analyzed by the researcher but by others.

To make this study more substantial and logical, relevant books, journals, published articles, reports, electronic and internet sources and online newspaper are used and fully credited.

## 2.1 Limitations

Several aspects of this study must be taken into consideration. First, the study is not a primary one, and secondary data is interpreted based on main data, thus it could be deceptive.

Second, because the data was not gathered by the author, there is a risk of bias.

Third, because the crisis is far from resolved, the effects of the Rohingya migration on host communities are dynamics. As a result, some of the findings reported here may vary over time.

## 2.2 Rationale of Methodology

To begin, I used secondary sources to compile a list of significant literatures on the Rohingya crisis and its economic impacts on the host country. The information was then logically analyzed. While doing so, it became evident that the history of Myanmar and the Rohingya influx are inextricably linked. Later, it became obvious that there is correlation between ethnicity and the region's leading actors (China, India, and USA) in terms of geopolitics and geoeconomics. The biggest impediments to start the repatriation are ethnicity and the geopolitics of the area. As a result, this research has used this theoretical framework to describe the study's main argument.

## 2.3 Theory

Push-Pull and Realism theory are the theoretical approaches used in this study. "Populations with 'refugee' statuses are most influenced by push forces in a country or region," according to the Push-Pull Theory. In their home countries, refugees are frequently subjected to genocide-like conditions, mainly as a result of authoritarian governments or people hostile to religious or ethnic groups (Rosenberg, 2020). The Rohingya are denied their citizenship and basic human rights, were forced out by the Myanmar military on the grounds of ethnic cleansing. This is the driving force behind the influx of Rohingya into Bangladesh.

On the other hand, a promise of religious or political freedom, the availability of job opportunities or cheap land, and a plentiful supply of food could all be considered pull factors for moving to a new country (ROSENBERG, 2020). The pull factors in the case of the Rohingya influx are that Bangladesh, the receiving state, opened its border on humanitarian grounds, and the Rohingya historically discovered a better place to migrate.

According to the primary definition of Realism which states that human beings are egoistic and crave for power. Realists think that human egoism, desire for control, and reluctance to trust others lead to predictable results (ANTUNES; CAMISÃO, 2018). Accordingly, the brutal behavior and power-seeking mentality of Myanmar's military are consistent with Realism theory. As a result, this idea has been examined using realism and push pull theory, taking into account issues like as self-interest, national interest and national security.

## 2.4 Significance of the Study

It has been more than four years since the last Rohingya influx took place in Bangladesh. Despite various bilateral and diplomatic efforts, the repatriation process has failed miserably twice. So far, the UN has been unable to exert sufficient pressure on Myanmar to begin the repatriation process. It's worth mentioning that Bangladesh has been housing Rohingyas for more than four decades. Repatriations were successful during the last three times, however, the repatriation of the 2017 influx, could not be started till today. Bangladesh, as a small country, is incapable of bearing such a massive weight. On the other hand, China and India have considerable geopolitical and geoeconomics interests in Myanmar. As a result, these two countries don't not play a substantial role in resolving the crisis. The Myanmar persecution of the Rohingya appears to be motivated by more than ethnicity. Considering the intensity and timeliness of the topic, the author was inspired to do the research.

Map 1 - Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh and Rakhine State in Myanma



Source: Asrar (2017).

For decades, the Rohingya have lived in Myanmar, a Buddhist-majority country. Under British colonial administration (from 1824 to 1948), there was extensive migration between today's Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh. Following Burma's independence in 1948, the government enacted the Union Citizenship Act, which listed the ethnic groups considered "indigenous" to Myanmar. The Rohingya were not recognized as one of Myanmar's 135 official ethnic groups.

### 3 History of Rohingya

The Rohingya ethnic community is predominantly Muslim. They make up 1% of the entire population, 4% of the population of Rakhine state, and 45% of Myanmar's Muslim population. During August an estimated 742,000 Rohingya refugees entered Bangladesh through the Cox's Bazar area. Children, women, and elderly men make up the majority of the refugees. This amount was added to the 278,000 Rohingya refugees who had been left over from two previous occurrences in 1978 and 1992. According to the latest Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) report, the overall number of Rohingya refugees has now surpassed 923,000 (ISCG, 2018).

Following the 1962 military takeover, the government provided the Rohingya with fewer official documents. In 1974, all Burmese citizens were required to obtain national identification cards, while the Rohingya were only allowed to obtain international identification cards. By 1982, a new citizenship law had been passed that made it difficult for Rohingya to get full citizenship, leaving them stateless (MOHDIN, 2017).

The Myanmar government referred the Rohingya as Bengalis, outsiders, or worse, terrorists. This view of Rohingyas as foreigners and illegal immigrants justifies the group's systematic marginalization and the government's efforts to drive them out of their homes. It signifies that they have a place in Bangladesh. The distinction between these two terms—Rohingya and Bengali—is critical in understanding the Myanmar problem (MOHDIN, 2017).

#### 3.1 International Legal Framework for Refugees

In the international arena, there are primarily two entities that offer legal basis for refugees. These are:

##### *3.1.1 The 1951 convention*

It is a legal framework that encompasses a wide range of issues concerning refugees for the first time. The cornerstone of international protection is Article 33(1), known as the Principle of Non-Refoulement. The clause forbids refugees from being repatriated to any country where their lives may be endangered or threatened (INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES, 2017).

##### *3.1.2 The Protocol Of 1967*

The 1967 Protocol's goal was to accept the 1951 Convention's application to modern refugee flows. States can accede to this autonomous instrument even if they are not party to the 1951 convention (INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES, 2017).

### 3.2 International and National Obligations on Bangladesh

Bangladesh is neither a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. Bangladesh has signed a number of international human rights accords, some of which support refugee rights indirectly. However, unless particular provisions are incorporated into existing municipal laws or given effect through separate legislations, international human rights are not enforceable in courts of law. Even if a state is not a party to a convention, it must adhere to some universally acknowledged and recognized standard, referred to as Customary International Law. Similarly, while not being a signatory to the 1951 Convention or 1967 Protocol, Bangladesh has housed the Rohingya community in the country and wishes to repatriate them freely under Customary International Law (MOHAMMAD, 2012).

Under the Executive Orders of the Government of Bangladesh, the Rohingya asylum applicants from Myanmar were granted refugee status between 1978 and 1992. They were given refugee status on the surface. In the case of the 2017 migration, however, the Rohingya were not given 'Refugee' status in Bangladesh. They are referred to as "Forcefully Displaced Myanmar Nationals" in the government's official declaration (MOHAMMAD, 2012).

## 4 Socio-Economic Impacts on Host Communities

### 4.1 Rohingya Economy

Due to the presence of more than 1 million Rohingya in Cox Bazar district of Bangladesh, in post influx scenario of August 2017, a new economic activity has evolved centering this community. A massive humanitarian activity is presently working to help the community. This community has got enormous inflow of foreign aids, in terms of cash and products like- daily necessities, foods and grains etc. Some of these products are sold by the Rohingya to the local market with cheaper rate; again, the cost of other products which they need to buy from the local market are increased due to higher demands. So, the market equilibrium is shifting centering these economic activities. On the other hand, such huge manpower is putting pressure on the local workforce by reducing their wage. So, all these factors are central to the economic activities which can be defined as 'Rohingya Economy'.

### 4.2 Socio-economic Impacts on Host Communities

Socio-economic impacts on host communities are multi-dimensional, and encompass the micro, meso and macro-economic.



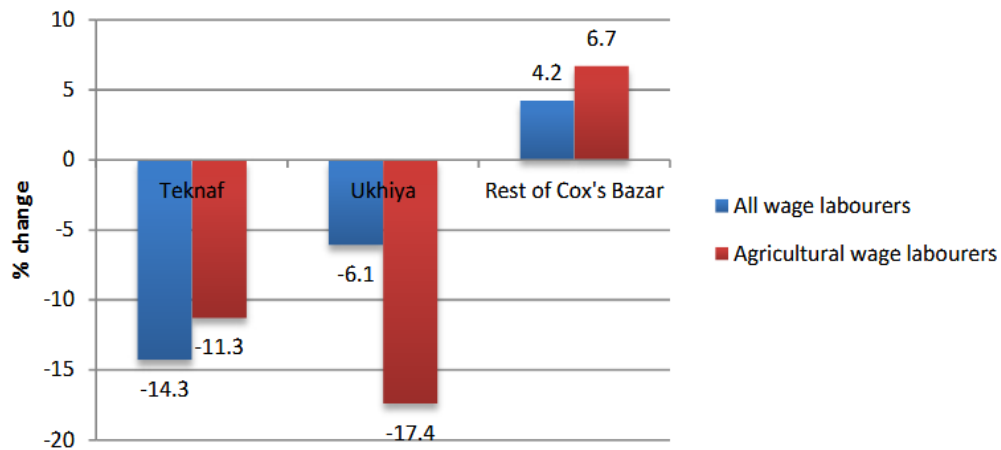
### 4.3 Microeconomic Impacts

According to a survey conducted by UNDP in November 2018, impact of Rohingya population among the Bangladeshis, at least 404 households were taken as a sample and the data collected from the sample through questionnaire was processed. This chapter uses the data as secondary source and tries to evaluate the impact of the influx on the host community and tries to find out relevant findings for this research.

#### 4.3.1 Impacts on Wage

Both in Teknaf and Ukhiya (sub districts) of Cox's Bazar, wages for agricultural and other unskilled jobs are reducing. This is due to the Rohingya's lower salary as day laborers compared to the host community's workers. According to the survey data, the mean salaries of all laborers, as reported by households, fell from Tk. 417 pre-influx to Tk. 357 post-influx, implying that wages fell by more than 14% in Teknaf (Graphic 1) and nearly 6% in Ukhiya after the influx. Agricultural wage in Ukhiya, on the other hand, have dropped at a significantly faster rate. In the post-influx period, the average agricultural wage rate in Teknaf fell by 11%, while in Ukhiya it fell by 17%. The inflow is thought to have lowered earnings by 20% on average in Teknaf and Ukhiya. More than 70% of respondents in Teknaf and 50% in Ukhiya said the primary way the inflow has affected them was lower pay (UNDP, 2018).

Graphic 1 - Wage impacts in June 2018(% change over pre-crisis period).



Source: UNDP household survey 2018 apud UNDP (2018, p. 73).

### 4.3.2 Impact on prices

Large amounts of in-kind help received as humanitarian items are being sold by refugees. Local retailers stated that products spilling out of the camps were being sold at reduced prices. On the other hand, refugee purchases of other goods raise prices.

Table 1 compares the information to prices reported in a September 2017 survey conducted by Action Contre la Faim. The prices indicated in the latter study confirm the refugee influx's initial inflationary effect, especially on rice, lentils, edible oils, and potatoes. They discovered that most commodities have experienced a 10% price hike (UNDP, 2018).

Table 1 - Pre- and post-influx prices of essential commodities (Tk)

Food item	PRI findings		Action Contre la Faim findings	
	Pre-influx	Post-influx	Pre-influx	Post-influx
Rice	32	38	35	38
Flour	28	35	23	26
Lentils	100	93	102	109
Edible oil	100	90	85	96
Potato	22	30	22	30
Sugar (gur)	60	62	59	60
Salt	22	25	26	32
Meat (beef)	440	500	n/a	n/a
Fish (fresh water)	130	150	n/a	n/a
Other vegetables (leafy and non-leafy)	25	30	n/a	n/a

Source: Action Contre la Faim Market Assessment 2017; UNDP household survey 2018 apud UNDP (2018, p. 71).

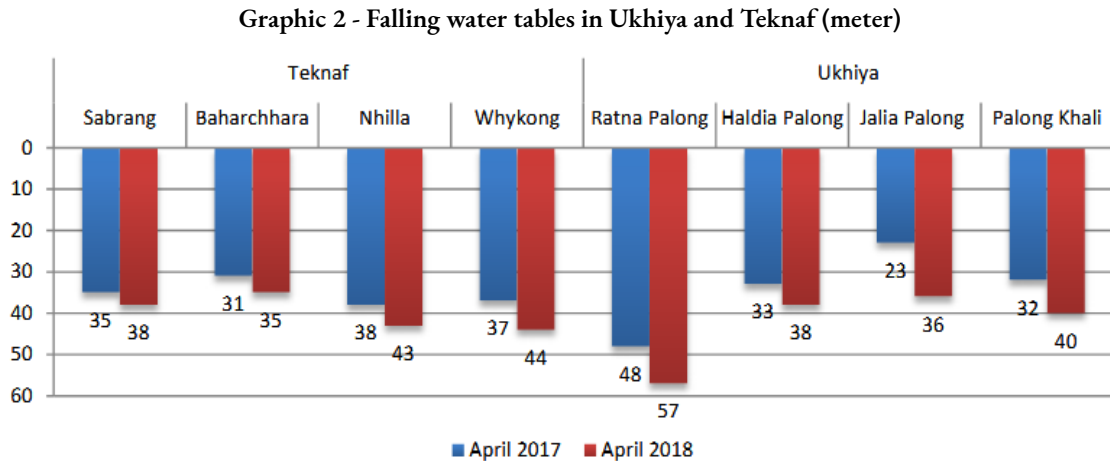
## 4.4 Meso-economic Impacts

### 4.4.1 Impacts on land and agricultural production

Between August 2017 and March 2018, refugee activity damaged at least 100 ha of crop land in Teknaf and Ukhiya, in addition to 76 ha of arable land occupied by refugee settlements and humanitarian agencies. Around 5,000 acres of land have been rendered useless as a result of sandy soil streaming down from the mountain slopes, which is currently being used for refugee accommodation (UNDP, 2018).

Between August and December 2017, an estimated 5,731 tube wells were built to provide water to the refugees (ISCG, 2018). The area's water levels are being lowered as a result of this

excessive reliance on groundwater (Graphic 2) The water levels around the camp areas are said to have lowered by 5 to 9 meters. Freshwater resources are scarce in the afflicted areas, particularly in Teknaf (Cox's Bazar). Irrigation wells are slowly drying up as the water table drops due to the degradation of watersheds and a major reduction in groundwater recharge (UNDP, 2018).



Source: UNDP (2018, p. 105).

#### *4.4.2 Impacts on fishing and related activities*

Fishing employs roughly one-third of the people of Teknaf (BANGLADESH BUREAU OF STATISTICS, 2018). For security reasons, fishing in the Naf River has been prohibited since August 2017, putting a tremendous strain on an estimated 30,000–35,000 fishermen and their families. Many fishermen have been forced to work as wage laborers, but the influx of refugees has resulted in fewer employment openings and lower daily salaries. According to government officials and a UNDP analysis, the fishing communities along the Naf River are likely to be among those hardest hits by the refugee crisis (UNDP, 2018).

#### *4.4.2 Impacts on the environment*

One of the most serious consequences of the immigration is environmental degradation. The inflow has ruined around 4,818 acres of forest reserves worth US\$55 million, according to the Cox's Bazar Forest Department. Those who rely on forest resources for a living have been robbed of their livelihood in many instances. Meanwhile, 750,000 kg of wood, plants, and roots are harvested as cooking fuel every day. A variety of wildlife species are also at jeopardy (UNDP, 2018).

#### 4.5 Macroeconomic Impacts of the Refugee Influx

International aid, remittances, and wage incomes are the main sources of revenue for the Rohingya economy. A portion of the help finds its way into the local economy, benefiting local consumers by lowering the prices of items bought elsewhere. Other things purchased by the refugees from their immediate host community show the reverse pattern.

As a result of the UNDP 2018 survey, when only assistance inflows are considered, a dollar of help has a total economic impact of \$2.70. When the factor in the expenses of losing forest and water resources, the total comes to US\$2.3 billion (UNDP, 2018).

It appears that negative consequences are more localized than the aid effect. The immediate host community is the loser, even if Cox's Bazar and the rest of Bangladesh are generating static gains in the short term.

#### 4.6 Impacts on Public Service and Public Goods Delivery

Teknaf and Ukhiya's public service delivery systems, which were built to serve a quarter-million people, now have to accommodate an additional million people. All services are overburdened, resulting in conflicts between the refugee and host communities, the majority of whom are poor and vulnerable.

##### 4.6.1 *Impacts on governance*

The effectiveness of governance institutions is becoming increasingly more constrained in the face of this tremendous problem. Some local government and sector officials devote 50% or more of their time to Rohingya issues, causing public service delivery to be delayed, if not completely halted. They also work without pay on weekly holidays (UNDP, 2018).

##### 4.6.2 *Impacts on solid waste management and water, sanitation and hygiene*

The public health engineering services, including solid waste disposal, are under significant demand. With an additional 10,000 tons of solid trash produced each month, waste management has become a top priority. Human waste has contaminated many water resources, including 86% of drinking water wells. Rainwater washes faecal particles downhill, spreading waterborne infections to both refugees and host communities. Washing clothes, cooking, and bathing are all done with water from ponds, canals, and wells (UNDP, 2018).

#### *4.6.3 Impacts on roads*

Increased traffic is wreaking havoc on already-degraded roads. Roads, dams, and bridges have all been severely damaged. The transit camps has left a massive path of infrastructure destruction and environmental deterioration. Damaged schools and schoolyards, as well as landslide-prone hills, are among these locations.

Around 45 % of residents in Teknaf and 62 % in Ukhiya said traffic congestion had grown in their neighborhood, while more than two-thirds said road conditions had deteriorated. According to the UNDP survey, 66.7% of respondent households in Teknaf and 70.41% of respondent households in Ukhiya blamed the Rohingya influx for road damage (UNDP, 2018).

#### *4.6.4 Impacts on health services*

Increasingly, health complexes and district hospitals are designed toward meeting the emergency requirements of refugees. Local health-care services are severely overburdened, and as a result, local residents do not receive the same level of care as migrants. According to a UNDP study, the Civil Surgeon of Cox's Bazar said that health centers were overwhelmed during the disaster period. Approximately half of the time, as well as that of doctors in health complexes, is now devoted to migrants. Members of the host community now had to wait longer for services. The situation has become more difficult as refugees are provided with free medication while locals must pay for it (UNDP, 2018).

#### *4.6.5 Impacts on education services*

Since the inflow, students from the surrounding community have dropped out or skipped lessons in order to assist their families with income-generating activities such as selling things at refugee camps. Parents are preventing their daughters from attending school because they are concerned about their safety. According to the UNDP survey, several participants expressed security worries as a result of the refugee surge, particularly regarding the mobility of women and girls (UNDP, 2018).

### **5 Broader Geopolitical Perspectives**

Geographically, Myanmar is surrounded by India, China, Bangladesh, Thailand and Laos. Therefore, it has vital importance for all of these countries as a buffer zone. The Rakhine state (where the Rohingyas live) is believed to be full of natural resources and minerals. Geopolitically, USA, China, and India are competing to create their sphere of influence in the sub-region. It simply indicates that the ethnicity is not the only problem with the Rohingyas as there are some other underlying issues which need to be identified and analyzed (ZHENDONG, 2021).

### 5.1 China's Geo-politics

The "string of pearls" policy is used to assess China's Indian Ocean direction. Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka are viewed as "pearls" in the Chinese strategy under this policy. China is highly concerned about sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean (SAMARANAYAKE, 2012).

China is primarily interested in building pipelines and deep-sea ports in Myanmar. The first goal is to import natural gas from Myanmar. The second goal is to shorten the route for oil tankers and cargo ships sailing from the Middle East and beyond. Instead of passing via the congested and strategically important Malacca Strait and taking a long detour through Southeast Asia, these tankers can drop off the cargo in Myanmar. This will save 2000 miles, or about two weeks of travel time (KANTHAN, 2017).

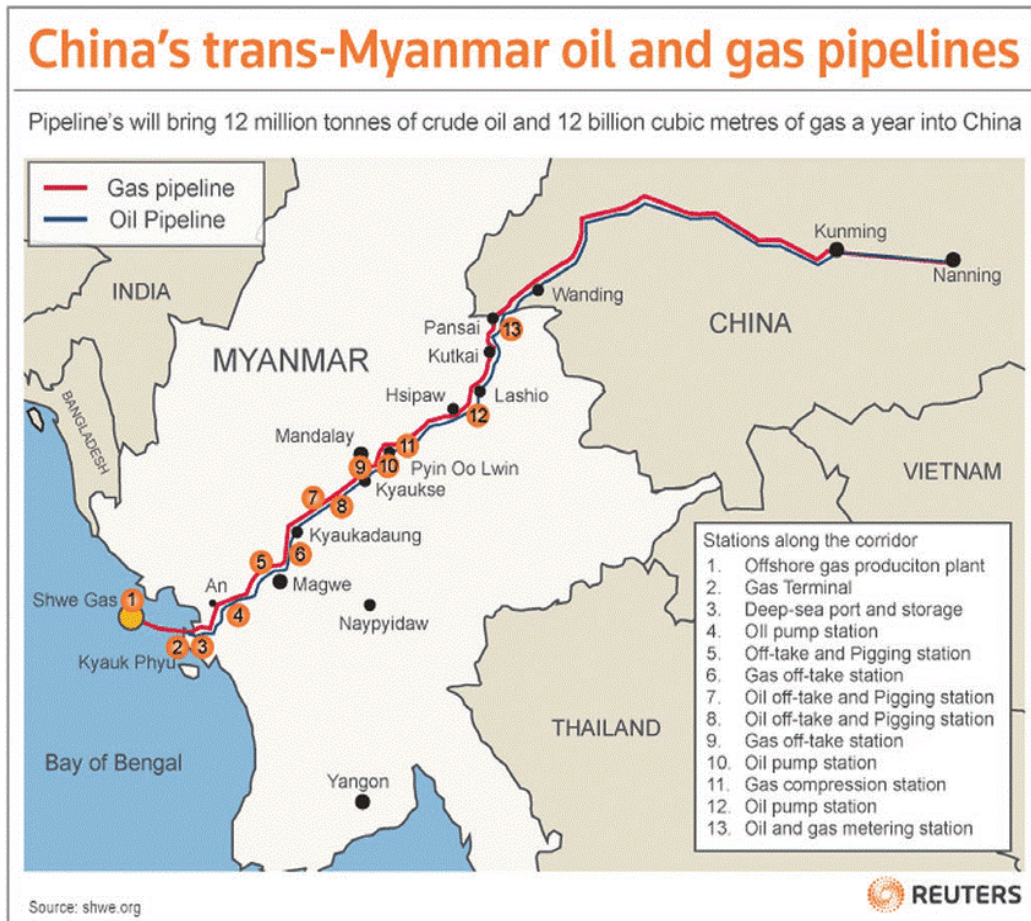
In January 2017, China invested USD 18.53 billion in Myanmar (AHMED, 2018). A transnational pipeline developed by China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) that connects Sittwe, Rakhine's capital, to Kunming began operation in September 2013 as part of development initiatives. It is obvious that efforts are being made to transport Myanmar oil and gas from the Shwe gas field to Guangzhou, China (WEBB, 2017).

A parallel pipeline is expected to convey Middle Eastern oil from Kyaukphyu port to China. The gas pipeline was completed in 2014 and transports more than 12 billion cubic meters of natural gas to China each year. The oil pipeline, on the other hand, makes it easier for China to acquire oil from the Middle East and Africa, and it cuts the time it takes to transport such oil by up to 30%. The Shwe oil pipeline, in particular, is crucial to Chinese geopolitical objectives. 80% of China's imported oil goes through the congested Malacca Strait and the disputed South China Sea, which the US Navy might blockade if war breaks out between the two countries (WEBB, 2017).

These pipelines cause local conflict due to land grabs, inadequate compensation for damages, environmental deterioration, and an influx of foreign employees, rather than enhanced local employment prospects. Myanmar has an economic incentive to clear land for more development projects. It gives a boost to the country's already growing economy. All of this maneuvering takes place in the context of geopolitics (FORINO; MEDING; JOHNSON, 2017). This tendency is thought to have prompted the Myanmar military to pursue the Rohingyas, despite the fact that it tends to justify periodic attacks by local insurgent groups for their atrocities (WEBB, 2017).

China has been strengthening its naval cooperation with Myanmar over the years. It has supplied Myanmar with weapons and military equipment including missiles, fighter planes, radar, and warships, as well as training for its air and naval forces (CHEYANG, 2010). Using a barter system, China has donated military weaponry worth USD 2 billion. Myanmar's naval bases in Hanggyi, the Coco Islands, Akyab, and Margui have also benefited from Chinese assistance (KARIM, 2021).

Map 2 – China Myanmar Oil and Natural Gas Pipeline Project



Source: Adapted from Shwe Gas Movement apud Meyer (2015).

## 5.2 India's Geo-politics

India's Act East Policy aims to improve connectivity and market access in Southeast Asia, and collaboration with Myanmar is crucial. As a result, Myanmar's prominence as a geopolitical and geoeconomics partner has grown (KANWAL, 2010). Indian policy in South Asian regional is aggressive in order to establish a geopolitical space and create a barrier to Chinese advances. Many observers believe that India will pursue its "Hindu-Buddhist Peace Zone" in South Asia to balance out the Pakistan-China axis. Prime Minister Modi visited Myanmar shortly after the killing in September 2017 to counter Chinese influence in the country. India was influenced by geopolitics to refrain from condemning Myanmar's atrocities (AHMED, 2018).

The BJP government has sparked an ultra-nationalistic—Hindu-fundamentalist—feror to make India completely Hindu-centric. The fate of the Rohingya Muslims will be affected by this trend. It demonstrated this by threatening to expel 40,000 Rohingya refugees when it sought asylum in India. These Rohingyas have been labeled as “illegal immigrants” and a “threat to national security” by the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs. Human Rights Watch’s South Asian Director, Meenakshi Ganguli, observes that India sees the Rohingyas “through a singular lens—that they are Muslims” (KAMDAR, 2018, n.p.).

India has significant investments in the coastal regions adjacent Sittwe in order to gain a stronger footing in India’s northeastern states. By that India will have more control over the southern Bay of Bengal (HASAN, 2019). The Andaman Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, which controls the activities in the western passage into the Malacca Strait, are then joined up with India’s only combined forces garrison.

India and Myanmar are working to construct a 1640-kilometer highway that will link India to Myanmar and Thailand. India refers to it as its Southeast Asian gateway and a response to China’s One-Belt-One-Road Initiative (BRI) (KARIM, 2021). As of mid-2017, India had provided Myanmar with around USD 1.75 billion in grants and credits. In the Rakhine state, it constructed the Sittwe power station. The 109-kilometer road project, which is part of the USD 484 million Kaladan Multimodal project, connects Palewa river-terminal to Zorinpui on Myanmar’s Mizoram border (AHMED, 2018).

The right to build, operate, and utilize an offshore hub for Myanmar gas usage has been granted to India. The link will be built between Mizoram, India, and Sittwe, Myanmar. It allows the states of northeast India to have direct access to foreign trade. This will also help to increase bilateral trade (KUPPUSWAMY, 2008).

The counterinsurgency operations cooperation with Myanmar is crucial in areas of strategic relevance. The militants fighting in northeastern Indian states have ethnic ties to the Myanmar on the other side of the border. For a long period, joint counterinsurgency operations have been carried out. In 2008, the countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Intelligence Cooperation, allowing them to share real-time “actionable” intelligence in order to better fight militants in the border region (KARIM, 2021).

### 5.3 US Grand Strategy

The US grand strategy appears to be aimed at distorting or delaying China-led infrastructure and maritime projects in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean region. The Rohingya crisis had the potential to undermine the oil pipeline, which runs from Myanmar to China. Preventing the construction of this pipeline would be extremely beneficial to the US (KARIM, 2021).



The US is anxious that its efforts to restore human rights will undermine Aung San Suu Kyi, who is essentially a Western product. The NLD and its leader "cannot live in Myanmar without the aid of the United States and international community," according to a document published by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in 2003 titled "Burma: Time for Change." Between 2012 and 2014, the US gave Myanmar USD 375 million to create "democratic institutions" and drive "economic development" in order to pave the way for a new style of administration (WEBB, 2017).

Relating to the Rohingya problem, the US is playing both sides of the coin. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia, a close partner, is sponsoring and funding rebellion. The US, on the other side, is pursuing closer military collaboration with Myanmar in order to defeat the rebellion it helped to create. As part of America's regional "China containment policy," it is vital. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated this plan in 2013: "We are going to encircle China with missile defense." As part of Obama's 2011 "Pivot to Asia" policy, this plan has resulted in a large rise in US military sales to China's neighbor like Myanmar. The construction of the Shwe oil pipeline to China should make America anxious because it will permanently remove the US ability to place a ban on 80% of China's oil supply (WEBB, 2017).

Both India and the USA have been conducting regular joint bilateral Malabar exercises in the Bay of Bengal. The US military has also cooperated with Myanmar's armed forces, with Myanmar taking part in the annual Thai-US military exercise. This, however, creates concerns that the military encounters between the two militaries may become more intense. The focus shifts to Myanmar's strengthening relations with the West, particularly with the United States, as well as the ramifications for China and India (STEINBERG, 2013).

## **6 Difficulties of repatriation**

### **6.1 Core Analysis of the Difficulties of Repatriation**

It has been more than four years of the Rohingya influx to Bangladesh. Despite various bilateral and diplomatic efforts, not a single Rohingya has returned to Myanmar till date. To understand the root causes as to why the repatriation could not be possible, we need to understand the history and culture of Myanmar. In my study, unless the root causes are addressed the Rohingya repatriation is far from the reality. To understand the core issues, below are the main causes for the failure of Rohingya repatriation:

### *6.1.1 Rohingya Statelessness*

In 1982, Myanmar's Citizenship Act formally denied the Rohingya citizenship rights. To become a citizen, a person's ancestors had to be members of a national race or group that existed in Myanmar before the British occupation in 1823. The Rohingya were still considered unlawful immigrants who were brought in by British colonists. The Rohingya are now the world's largest "Stateless" people. Because they are not entitled to any legal protection from the government due to their "Statelessness" or lack of citizenship, they are more vulnerable. They are denied essential rights like as access to health care, education, and employment. The Rohingya situation will not be resolved unless the Myanmar government amends the Citizenship Acts, which is highly improbable (ABDELKADER, 2017).

### *6.1.2 The misunderstood roots of rohingya crisis*

Though various humanitarian organizations and Western countries see the Rohingya as the world's most oppressed minority, Myanmar's government and the vast majority of its citizens see a foreign group with a separatist ambition fueled by Islam and funded from overseas.

The Rohingya crisis will be incredibly difficult to resolve due to this disparity in perspective. The term 'Rohingya' is extremely thorny for Myanmar's authorities. This is because, if the government recognizes Rakhine's Muslims as part of the Rohingya ethnic group, the Muslims would be granted autonomy inside the country under the 1982 citizenship law—ironically, the same statute that deprived the Rohingya of their citizenship. And there lies the crux of the problem. The Burmese are concerned that a Rohingya autonomous area along the Bangladesh border may encroach on Rakhine territory. The Burmese military, which has repressed Rohingya civilians, regards this as a threat. That may seem preposterous in a country where Muslims account for only 4% of the population, but many Burmese argue as a result of Arakan Revolutionary Salvation Army's expanding presence in Rakhine and surrounding areas (CALAMUR, 2017).

### *6.1.3 Geo-Politics of China, India and Usa*

In that region, China has essentially two objectives. The first is to import Myanmar natural gas. The second is to shorten the route for oil tankers and cargo ships sailing from the Middle East and beyond. Instead of passing via the congested and strategically important Malacca Strait and taking a long detour through Southeast Asia, these tankers can drop off the cargo in Myanmar. Myanmar received an investment of USD 18.53 billion from China in January 2017 (AHMED, 2018).

India has also made significant investments in the coastal regions surrounding Sittwe in order to gain a stronger footing in India's northeastern states. With a stronger footing in Sittwe, India will have more control over the southern Bay of Bengal (Hasan 2019). India refers to it as its Southeast Asian gateway and a reaction to China's One-Belt-One-Road Initiative (BRI) (AHMED, 2018).

The US grand strategy appears to be aimed at distorting or delaying China-led infrastructure and maritime projects in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean region, as part of the BRI (WEBB, 2017). China's and India's current corporate interventions, as well as USA geopolitical relevance in the region, have all play crucial roles in resolving the Rohingya situation. Ethnicity is not the only reason for the influx.

#### *6.1.4 Informed consent of Rohingya for safe return to Myanmar*

Both the governments agreed to repatriate several thousand refugees in late 2019, however, none of the refugees in the selected groups wanted to return to Myanmar. Rohingya leaders have stated that they will not return until their citizenship rights are assured. Meanwhile, the UN has criticized the repatriation plans, claiming that the Rohingya are still in danger in Myanmar. "As grim as the situation is for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, their prospects back in Myanmar are even worse," argues CFR's Joshua Kurlantzick (apud ALBERT; MAIZLAND, 2020, n.p.).

#### *6.1.5 The Role of ASEAN*

The ten ASEAN members have not coordinated a response to the escalating situation. The UN Refugee Convention and its Protocol have yet to be ratified by all ASEAN countries. Because of its members' commitment to the principle of noninterference in each other's domestic affairs, ASEAN has been fairly silent on the plight of the Rohingya and the growing numbers of asylum seekers in member nations. "They aren't going to take collective action on Myanmar, with Myanmar as one of its members," says Kurlantzick (apud ALBERT; MAIZLAND, 2020, n.p.).

#### *6.1.6 Russia, China and India role to resolve the crisis*

Myanmar and key military leaders should face an arms embargo and other sanctions, according to the UN fact-finding team. However, certain members of the Security Council, such as Russia and China have resisted increased pressure on Myanmar's government, claiming that it is attempting to restore stability (ALBERT; MAIZLAND, 2020).

### *6.1.7 Post military coup in Myanmar*

Myanmar's military has seized power after detaining de-facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi in a military coup on February 1, 2021. The government has announced a one-year state of emergency. The coup comes after the ruling National League for Democracy won a huge election victory in November 2020. Khin Maung, the leader of the Rohingya Youth Association, told Anadolu Agency, "The repatriation was already uncertain, now it has been destroyed" It will have a significant impact on our safe return to our homeland." "The UN must act against the Myanmar military," said Mayyu Khan, another Rohingya at the Ukhiya camp in Cox's Bazaar (KAMRUZZAMAN, 2021, n.p.).

### *6.1.8 Foreign aid is a barrier of repatriation*

NGO workers and local elites, who profit economically, do not want a successful repatriation; their living standards are higher than in Myanmar, and foreign aid is indirectly to blame for the repatriation (MUHIUDDIN, 2019).

## **7 Conclusion**

It has been more than four years since a campaign of state-led violence drove hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar into Bangladesh, resulting in a massive humanitarian crisis. Those fleeing persecution largely crossed into Cox's Bazar, a coastal tourism zone of Bangladesh. The Rohingya refugee crisis has had a significant impact on the livelihoods of host communities, particularly in Cox's Bazar. The inflow has placed a tremendous strain on the host society, which is worsened by the fact that these areas of Bangladesh were already dealing with significant issues due to relatively underdeveloped infrastructure. Price changes and a drop in daily wage for laborers have had a particularly negative impact on the host community. There have also been severe negative consequences for public services and the environment.

In the two most impacted sub-districts (Teknaf and Ukhiya), the socio-economic condition is changing. Price adjustments and salary increases, in particular, and their impact, are key issues. The environment bears the significant effects of refugee arrivals. In some situations, these effects may pose substantial threat to individual health. It is impossible to stress the importance of ensuring good public service delivery and increased social protection measures, especially in the worst-affected areas of Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts.

Myanmar is one of the world's most diverse countries, with the government officially recognizing 135 ethnic groups except the Rohingya. The 1982 Citizenship Act denied Rohingya Muslims citizenship. Deprivation and human rights violations have long been a part of the Rohingya experience, which prompted the first exodus of Rohingyas to Bangladesh in 1977. In 1991–1992, 2012, and the influx resumed. The worst atrocities against the Rohingyas, which resulted in one million of them fleeing the nation, occurred in August 2017.

China, India, and the USA all have significant geopolitical stakes in this region. China is interested in Myanmar's gas and oil, therefore, pipelines linking from a deep-seaport have already been completed. China is keen to connect the Bay of Bengal in order to avoid the strategically crucial Malacca Strait, through which majority of the country's energy resources now transit. The "string of pearls" policy is used to analyze China's Indian Ocean orientation (two-ocean strategy). Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka are viewed as "pearls" in the Chinese strategy under this paradigm. India is progressively advancing with its counter-strategy against the "String of Pearls." in the Indian Ocean. India has a grand strategic goal of putting in place its more muscular "Act East Policy". The USA is playing both sides in the Rohingya crisis. On the other side, the USA is pursuing closer military ties with Myanmar in order to defeat the insurgency that it helped to create. This is an amazing puzzle and geopolitical game.

For more than four decades, Bangladesh has served as a safe haven for Rohingya Muslims. Despite the Bangladesh government's bilateral and diplomatic efforts, no Rohingyas have been repatriated to Myanmar. There are numerous obstacles for long-term repatriation. International and regional groups must be willing to work together to develop a practical plan that addresses the core problems. The UN and other international organizations must be more assertive in pressuring Myanmar to begin the repatriation process at the earliest.

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