# **Peacebuilding and social cohesion between Rohingya and Host Communities in Cox's Bazaar: Responses from the Host, NGOS and the Government**

Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim minority Indo-Aryan ethnic group in the western region of predominantly Buddhist Myanmar, are described as genocidal violence that follows decades of religious persecution and human rights abuses. They refer to refugees from the Rakhine state, also known as Arakan, or Rohang in the Rohingya language in Burma of Myanmar who fled to Bangladesh during the ethnic cleansing by the Myanmar army. The region of Rakhine was annexed and occupied by Myanmar in the 1700s which was ruled by the military for over 50 years, and during that time period, it adopted a lot of racial policies against many minorities like the Rohingyas, the Chinese people like Kotang people, and the Panthay (Chinese Muslim). As of 2012, eight hundred thousand Rohingya live in Burma. They have faced persecution at the hands of Myanmar's military since the country's independence in the late 1940s. Buddhists in Myanmar believe that Rohingya are Bengali who migrated to Myanmar illegally during the British rule in the subcontinent. A well-known claim in Myanmar is that Buddhism is threatened by the Muslims in Bangladesh whose population desiring to move into Myanmar even though no threat exists toward the Rohingya. Since the government significantly influences citizens, they believe their claims and increase the hatred towards Muslims. There is also an economic aspect to this issue that Rakhine is one of the poorest areas in Myanmar, with a poverty rate of 78% facing inadequate job opportunities, and the Rohingya are considered a burden to their economic status because the Rohingya people are seeking jobs. However, all the jobs are dominated by the Burmese elites, which do not allow this. Recently, a military crackdown held in Myanmar in August 2017 created a new mass exodus of Rohingyas towards Bangladesh and many other countries, and on August 25, 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar have fled to Bangladesh. Most Rohingya have sought refuge in and around Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh, and more than 300,000 Rohingyas live in Bangladesh who fled in earlier violence from the Burmese government over the last three decades. This influx of refugees has transformed Cox's Bazaar district for the host community and creates conflicts between Rohingya and the host community.

The influx of Rohingya is adversely affecting the livelihood of the host community due to deforestation, inflation, and competition over opportunities which create conflicts between Rohingya and the host community. The key sources of conflicts between Rohingya and the host community are

* Discrimination by the government and the non-government organizations,
* Lack of accommodation, food, and healthy environment,
* Impact on working sectors and wages,
* Displacement and crisis in Myanmar,
* A rise in polygamy and unsanctioned relationships,
* Reliance on humanitarian assistance.

The host community perceived that the Rohingya created many security threats, social problems, and environmental imbalances. They added that the government and the non-government organizations are giving too much attention to the Rohingyas, which they do not deserve that kind of support. Rohingyas receive free shelter, firewood, food, and health care, while the host communities do not. The total number of Rohingyas coming to Bangladesh has exceeded one million. However, the capacity of the camps allotted to them is minimal. As a result, many Rohingya families have taken up residence in the nearby hills outside the camp. There are reports that Rohingyas are settling in the hills and jungles, creating the risk of landslides and posing an extreme threat to the region's natural environment. Due to its geographical location, Bangladesh is already facing environmental catastrophe. The current unplanned situation of Rohingya refugees could make it even direr. The Rohingya population is at food risk. Food aid is coming from home and abroad. However, it is very inadequate compared to the needs of the refugees. As a result, the Rohingya population, especially children, may suffer from malnutrition and even premature death. In addition, the pressure on the Rohingya to supply food is creating a new food crisis in Bangladesh, which can be seen as a threat to the country's food security. Health risks are also a cause for concern. Many Rohingyas have contracted tuberculosis, skin diseases, and HIV. In these cases, there is a risk of spreading the disease among Bangladeshis. The healthcare available in the Rohingya camps is very inadequate compared to the enormous population. The marginalized Rohingya population is deprived of fundamental human rights such as education, health making it very easy to engage in various criminal activities. The labor market depends on the interaction of supply and demand of workers. The presence of additional Rohingya workers could disrupt this stability. There is a risk of falling labor costs due to providing too much labor, which will hurt local workers. Bangladesh's allies are taking a new stand on the Rohingya issue. Bangladesh has become diplomatically isolated as Bangladesh, and its allies India, China, and Russia have sided with Myanmar. All three countries are interested in maintaining friendly relations with the Myanmar government, which has made Bangladesh diplomatically incompetent over the Rohingya crisis, a significant threat to our diplomatic security. In Bangladesh, many refugees previously registered birth and marriage through the senior official administrating governance within a camp. Now the registration process of Cox's Bazaar has been frozen by the government of Bangladesh, which inhibits the Rohingya from legitimizing their presence in Bangladesh. However, this registration process is not linked to access to humanitarian assistance. On the other hand, marriage registration practice varies across the camps for newly arrived refugees. For that reason, if they return and the government of Myanmar does not recognize their marriages, that will place severe restrictions on the rights of the children who might arise from the marriage. The Rohingya problem is very complex. The arrival of large numbers of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh has put considerable pressure on the country's limited resources. The problem for Bangladesh is becoming more apparent due to the high population density. Therefore, the causes of conflicts between Rohingya and the host community may lead to widespread disturbance. Refugee and host community relationships are a sensitive matter from multiple perspectives, including survival, economic, moral, and sociopolitical. Inability to appreciate its sensitivity and failure to address this promptly may be detrimental to both communities.

The conflicts or tensions between Rohingya and the host community may turn into civil war or significant conflicts causing many death and property destructions in Cox's Bazaar, just like the conflict between Israeli and Palestinian, the conflict between the Zionist yishuv-Arab population, and the conflict between Arab and Israeli. The key sources of those conflicts are mutual recognition, borders, security, water rights, control of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, Palestinian freedom of movement, and finding a resolution to the refugee question. The conflict has prompted international actions and security and human rights concerns between both sides internationally. In addition, the violence of conflicts has curbed the expansion of tourism in the region, which is full of historical and religious sites that are of interest to many people worldwide. In October 2020, an Israeli court ruled that several Palestinian families living in Sheikh Jarrah would be transferred to Jewish families by May 2021. In late April 2021, Palestinians began protesting on the streets of Jerusalem in protest of the eviction. Violence erupted on the premises of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on May 7, after weeks of daily protests and tensions escalated between protesters, Israeli settlers, and police during the month of Ramadan, with Israeli police using stun grenades, rubber bullets, and more. Water cannons collided with protesters, injuring hundreds of Palestinians. On May 21, Israel and Hamas agreed to a cease-fire. Two hundred and fifty Palestinians were killed and nearly two thousand wounded in the eleven days of fighting, and at least thirteen Israelis were killed. Gaza authorities estimate that millions of dollars have been lost, and the United Nations estimates that the fighting has displaced more than 72,000 Palestinians.

The role of the local government in reducing the conflicts between Rohingya and the host community is enormous. They are working for the rehabilitation of Rohingyas to reduce the lack of accommodation for the conflicts. They selected sample locations from the two most affected Upazillas Ukhiya and Teknaf, two control areas Ramu and Cox’s Bazar Sadar, and three Rohingya camps, namely Bahukhali, Kutu Palong, and Unshiparang. These locations were selected based on population, geographical status, and recommendations from local government officials.

National and international NGOs have supported Bangladesh's government in providing life-saving assistance during the Rohingya crisis. Our national NGOs play a crucial role in dealing with this crisis. For example, The most excellent civil society response to the recently arriving Rohingya refugees has been organized by BRAC. This response provided the urgent needs of vulnerable individuals while also developing skills, tolerance, and knowledge to help them maintain their long-term well-being as the crisis increased later. If we are talking about international NGOs, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has joined other renowned NGOs in encouraging the international community to help Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh live a secure and dignified living in refugee camps.

A total of 8,69,604 Rohingyas from 1,69,913 families live in 34 new and old refugee camps built on about 8,000 acres of forest land in Ukhia and Teknaf in Cox's Bazar. Since last February, the government has started relocating one lakh Rohingyas from Cox's Bazar to Bhasanchar in Noakhali to improve their living standards. The refugee camps in Bhasanchar are run entirely by the Bangladesh government. Other UN agencies, including the UNHCR, have not yet been involved in Rohingya activities. At present, about 12,000 Rohingyas are living in Bhasanchar. At present, the camps are somewhat secure. Even then, the Rohingyas are roaming outside the camp in various ways, evading the members of the law enforcement agencies in charge. Although various crises have been created due to the misconduct of Rohingyas, the government is working to control them. The Rohingyas are causing immense damage to the local population, and the only solution to all the problems is the speedy repatriation of Rohingyas. The government tries to repatriation Rohingyas to Myanmar to reduce the conflicts. The first deadline for Rohingya repatriation was set for November 15, 2016. At that time, no one could be sent to Rakhine as the Rohingyas disagreed. The Myanmar government recently sent a list of 3,540 names from 1,033 families for repatriation. Despite ongoing repatriation efforts, the Rohingya have refused to return and are distributing leaflets demanding five points.

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