



*Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article*

**BANGLADESH'S ROHINGYA REPATRIATION ENDEAVORS AND CHALLENGES;  
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract**

This research investigates the challenges to Bangladesh's endeavors for Rohingya repatriation from Bangladesh to Myanmar since 2017 to 2022. Myanmar's security forces forced more than one million Rohingya to migrate to Bangladesh since 1978 till the last arrival in 2017. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights marked the persecution on Rohingya as a 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing.' Rohingya, one of the globe's most oppressed ethnic minorities, has been targeted by Myanmar's harsh ethnic policies for decade after decade. Bangladesh's long efforts for Rohingya repatriation were not materialized because of Myanmar's non-cooperation with Bangladesh and geostrategic-economic interests, as well as the application of vetoes mainly by Russia and China. This study, firstly, explains the years long persecution of the Rohingya, that ultimately drove many of them to Bangladesh; secondly, it discusses the power and function of the United Nations Security Council and Bangladesh's diplomatic efforts for Rohingya repatriation; and finally, it explained how Chinese and Russian 'vetoes' inhibited measures for safe Rohingya repatriation from Bangladesh to their homeland.

**Key Words:** Myanmar, Rohingya, persecution, repatriation, endeavours, Bangladesh, veto.

**BANGLADEŞ'İN ROHINGYALILARI GERİ GÖNDERMESİNE YÖNELİK  
ÇALIŞMALARI VE KARŞILAŞILAN ZORLUKLARI; ELEŞTİREL BİR ANALİZ**

**Öz**

Bu araştırma, Bangladeş'in 2017'den 2022'ye kadar Bangladeş'ten Myanmar'a Rohingyaları geri gönderme çabalarının önündeki zorlukları araştırıyor. Myanmar güvenlik güçleri, 1978'den 2017'ye son varışlarına kadar bir milyondan fazla Rohingyalıyı Bangladeş'e göç etmeye zorladı. Birleşmiş Milletler Yüksek Komiserliği İnsan Hakları, Rohingya'ya yönelik zulmü 'etnik temizliğin bir ders kitabı örneği' olarak belirledi. Dünyanın en çok ezilen etnik azınlıklarından biri olan Rohingyalılar, on yıldan beri Myanmar'ın sert etnik politikalarının hedefi oluyor. Bangladeş'in Rohingyaların geri göndermesine yönelik uzun çabaları, Myanmar'ın Bangladeş ile işbirliği yapmaması ve jeostratejik-ekonomik çıkarlarının yanı sıra ağırlıklı olarak Rusya ve Çin'in veto uygulamaları nedeniyle gerçekleşmedi. Bu çalışma, ilk olarak, Rohingyaların birçoğunu Bangladeş'e sürükleyen yıllarca süren zulmü açıklamaktadır; ikinci olarak, Birleşmiş Milletler Güvenlik Konseyi'nin gücü ve işlevi ile Bangladeş'in Rohingyaların ülkelerine geri dönüşüne yönelik diplomatik çabalarını tartışmaktadır; ve son olarak, Çin ve Rus 'vetolarının' Bangladeş'ten anavatanlarına güvenli bir şekilde geri dönüşüne yönelik önlemleri nasıl engellediğini açıklamaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeleri:** Myanmar, Rohingya, zulüm, geri dönüş, çabalar, Bangladeş, veto.

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## Introduction

The Rohingyas are Sunni Muslim minority who have historically lived in the 'northern' part of Myanmar's Arakan State-whose previous name was Arakan and is located on the country's western shore (Akins, 2018). The Naaf River and the Yoma Mountains isolate Arakan from Bangladesh and the remainder of Myanmar (Al-Mahmood, 2012). Until it was finally conquered by the nearby 'Burmese' monarchy in 1785, this region was geographically segregated, which have crucial effects in its development as the autonomous 'Kingdom' of Arakan for hundreds of years (Akins, 2018). The Rakhine, a 'Tibeto-Burman' people, have historically been and still are the region's largest ethnic group. Being an indicative of the 'historical and cultural' ties between the two peoples, Rakhine are 'Theravada Buddhists' and communicate in an old variety of Burmese language (Akins, 2018). Moreover, Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung are northerly cities close the Bangladesh border where the Rohingya population were congregated (Myint, 2018). The name 'Rohingya' comes from where the Rohingya people originally lived. There is some uncertainty as to where the term 'Rohingya' originated due to conflicting historical sources and ongoing political arguments. However, there is no doubt that Rohingya people have lived in Arakan (now Rakhine) state since the late 18th century (Akins, 2018). Rohingya's 'appearance' persuaded the Myanmar authority to stain the Rohingya as follows:

The Rohingya people are not native to Myanmar and have never lived there permanently. They are illegal 'Bengali migrants' who moved to the state of Arakan, which used to be called Arakan, when it was ruled by the British. The British brought a lot of Bengalis from what was then called 'Bengal' to what was then called 'British Burma' to work in farming, fishing, and as 'day laborers.' The Rohingyas have never been 'Burmese' in Burmese history. Their 'culture, 'religion', 'language, and the way they look are all different from those of the Burmese. Instead, they are a lot like the folks of South Asia (Radio Free Asia, 2017, cited in Uddin, 2019).

## Literature Review

Saha (2000) discussed about the UN's and the international community's role in formulating requirements for the return of the Rohingya from Bangladesh to their homeland—Myanmar. He emphasizes how crucial the global community is to set criteria and encourage repatriation, especially in situations where the national governments (Myanmar and Bangladesh) have not ratified the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees. Moreover, Faulkner (2019) contends that 'statelessness' contributes to the recurrent failure of repatriation. He studied repatriation of Rohingya refugees from 1992 to 1997. His research demonstrates that, 'statelessness' can weaken the protections offered to refugees and reduce the motivations for their return to home country.

Taking into consideration both theory and practice, Khan (2018) analysed the repatriation of Rohingya in Myanmar from the viewpoint of Bangladesh. He argues that Bangladesh has every right to say that the repatriation agreement signed in 2017 is a legal document that allows the Rohingya to go back to Myanmar. However, Taniparti (2019) discusses challenges of Rohingya repatriation. She has doubt about "voluntary repatriation" of the Rohingya refugees. Because they are oppressed and deprived of their rights in Myanmar.

Anik (2022) in his article titled "Rohingya repatriation: A helpless wait for Bangladesh" mentions the efforts of Bangladesh to send back Rohingya refugees to their home country Myanmar and identified non-cooperation from Myanmar as an obstacle in the path of the repatriation process. He also criticizes global actors for not applying adequate pressure on Myanmar to return its nationals. Moreover, Mallick (2020) too criticises Myanmar and international actors for not doing enough to solve Rohingya refugee crisis. Besides, he argues that two regional players India and China, who have significant economic and political stakes in Myanmar, could put pressure on the

Myanmar administration to return the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh. However, neither one of them is eager to comply with that. In addition, Siddiqi (2022) sheds light on longing of Rohingyas for their motherland. He discusses developments regarding Rohingya repatriation. According to him, Covid-19 related restrictions and circumstances after the military coup created more uncertainty for Rohingyas to go back Myanmar.

Unlike the other studies, this study focuses on Bangladesh's efforts for Rohingya repatriation particularly since 2017 till date and challenges that Bangladesh faces from the aspect of Myanmar's non-cooperation with Bangladesh backed by Chinese and Russian 'veto' in the UNSC, and the USA's inaction over the issue till 2021.

### **1. Rohingya: From Ruler in Arakan to Refugee in Bangladesh**

Rohingya, one of the most oppressed ethnic groups in the world, was in the rule of Arakan for certain times. However, various conspiracies by Myanmar state authorities backed by regional and global powers forced biggest number of them to take shelter in neighboring Bangladesh. U Nu, Myanmar's earliest prime minister, used 'Buddhist nationalism' to stabilize Myanmar (Akins, 2018). His rule was viewed as a throwback to Burma's 'pre-colonial' era, when it was a 'Buddhist empire' and its political actors served as the protectors of the faith. The 'State Religion Act (SRA)', which strengthened the government's position as a supporter of religion, was passed in 1961 under U Nu's supervision. The SRA established Buddhism as the 'official state religion of Burma', established the Buddhist lunar calendar as the official calendar, and started building 60,000 new shrines ("Independence and Modern", n.d). Moreover, the new government dismissed Rohingya from the portfolios of public servants, cops, and village leader and replaced with 'Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL)', a commanding political ally, bureaucrats with Buddhist origin (Akins, 2018). Imposing restrictions on the Rohingya's 'movement' in the northern Arakan prevented them from joining the military as well (Berlie, 2008, cited in Akins, 2018). The Arakan authority, at the time, confiscated Rohingya's properties to give refuge to the Buddhist refugees whose houses were devastated in the battle (Akins, 2018).

Furthermore, Rohingya Mujahid revolt happened in 1947, directed by a well-known musician Jafar Husayn Kawal. He led this revolt until he was killed in October 1950. However, rebellion continued even after his death. This uprising first started with the intention of incorporating the former 'Mayu Division', which is located in the northern part of Arakan, into East Pakistan. Rohingya Mujahid proposed five point demands in September 1948: formally recognizing the Akyab region as a separate Muslim state within Burma.; acknowledging Urdu's status as a national language; building private Urdu-speaking schools; releasing prisoners; and offering official recognition to the Mujahid rebellion. However, the administration paid no attention to the appeals (Akins, 2018). The resultant crackdown by security forces, killed many of Rohingya and forced over fifty-thousands of them evading their homeland (Yunus, 1994).

However, in 1951, Mujahids in Arakan dissenting about Jihad reduced their footholds, allowing local authorities to use a ploy to isolate them from the Rohingya. The Rohingya masses were persuaded to support the government and abandon the Mujahid (Yunus, 1994).

In the middle of 1954, the Myanmar military launched a 'Muslim counter offensive' named 'Operation Monsoon' to clamp down the Mujahid and seize their fastness (Akins, 2018). In 1961, the government formed the 'Mayu Frontier Administration in northern Arakan', with army commanders rather than Arakan authorities in charge. This was done in part to appease the Mujahids and in part for electoral considerations (International Crisis Group, 2016). In July 1961, the remainder of the Mujahid insurgents, figuring around 300 people, gave in to the Myanmar authority (Yegar, cited in Akins, 2018).

In addition, the military 'coup d'etat' in 1962 and executing the policy of 'Burmese way of socialism' nationalized the economy of the country (Farzana, 2017), while the 1974 Constitution also denied the Rohingya's indigenous status and listed 135 'recognized' national ethnic groups. Rohingya were not permitted to cast vote in the election. Before this, local officials just denied them citizenship cards to vote (Akins, 2018). The Revolutionary Council assumed supreme control and invested General Ne Win with all legislative, administrative, and judicial power. The General governed the country by 'decree' from 1962 to 1974. All external companies and assets were nationalized. Everything was regulated by the State. All economic and industrial operations were handed over to the military (Khan & Commission internationale de juristes, 1991). Every social, political, and cultural organizations run by students and others were prohibited (Yunus, 1994). Though the Burmese way of socialism upset people in general, petty entrepreneurs were permitted to run their businesses in many cases. However, Rohingya got no exemption from leaving entrepreneurship in most of the big businesses. Furthermore, from 1962 to 1965, Rohingya were marked as '*kalas*' that drove them away from civilian and other high-ranked offices except for some small portfolios (Yunus, 1994). This seems to be the beginning of state patronage to sow the seeds of antagonism against Rohingya.

In the late 1970s, the Myanmar authority, supported by the junta, initiated campaigns of 'ethnic cleansing', that were carried out with the intention of ridding the country of any 'foreign' or 'colonial' effects. Because of false accusation that they were 'illegal Bengali immigrants' who had penetrated Myanmar during British occupation, the Rohingyas were the prime goal of the campaigns (Akins, 2018). 'Operation Naga Min', also known as 'Operation Dragon King', was initiated by the Myanmar junta in May 1977 with the intention of singling out 'illegal immigrants' from nationals of the country and taking measures accordingly. The campaign approached Rohingya inhabited areas in February 1978. The military's main methods for driving Rohingya out were unjustified apprehension, mosque sacrilege, village demolition, and land seizure, that followed by nearly 250,000 Rohingya's escape to Bangladesh in three months after this attack (Akins, 2018).

Most strikingly, the 1982 'citizenship law' of the country stripped 'citizenship' of the Rohingya because of their disability to conform with the requirements for granting citizenship: Burmans, members of 'indigenous ethnic' or 'linguistic groups', and anybody who could provide evidence that they were descended from individuals who had lived in the area that constituted Burma in 1823 were eligible for citizenship (Steinberg, 2013).

In later days, students began protesting the junta-controlled regime on August 8, 1988, in Mandalay, Yangon, and other cities. They launched the 'Four-Eights Nationwide Democratic Movement' (Hliang, 2007). Since nearly all folks were severely displeased with the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) regime's handling of the country, they showed their favour to the protest. But majority of the observers hesitated about a fruitful end of the protest. The socialist government's foothold was weakened during the last seven days of August 1988, causing nationwide chaos. President Maung Maung pledged a general election after it was evident that the socialist administration had no hope for retaking power. The committed election was held on May 27, 1990, which Myanmar nationals and foreigners viewed as free and fair. The National League for Democracy (NLD) won the election, but the junta denied handing over power (Hliang, 2007).

Moreover, carrying out the 'Operation Clean and Beautiful Nation' in 1991 enforced four plans of actions: refusal of providing 'land', 'shelter', 'food', and 'security' for ethnic minorities (Pittaway, 2008, mentioned in Akins, 2018). As a result, again, about 250,000 Rohingya entered Bangladesh crossing the Naaf River (Akins, 2018).

At the beginning of October 2016, a military campaign began in Maungdaw of Arakan, that destroyed more than 1,200 homes in Rohingya populated areas. A BBC reporter talked to

Rohingya ‘families’, who fled their homeland, said that what was carrying on in northern Arakan was like "hell on earth" ("Rohingya villages destroyed", 21 November 2016). The suspicion of Rohingya’s connection to killing nine police officers by ‘insurgent’ attack on Myanmar border guard post ("Myanmar Says Nine Police", 2016), seems to have legitimized the campaign. However, not more than 13,000 Rohingya could enter Bangladesh this time due to Bangladesh's decision not to accept them en mass and tight vigilance along the border (Tan, 2017).

The UN human rights official Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein condemned what he called a "brutal security operation" that took place against Rohingya people in Arakan state at the end of August 2017. He also stated that the way Myanmar treated with Muslim Rohingya minority appears to be a ‘textbook example’ of ‘ethnic cleansing’ (Safi, 2017). Prior to August 25, 2017, roughly 307,500 Rohingya refugees were already living in Cox's Bazar of Bangladesh, the number that has since increased to 954,500 thanks to the arrival of another 655,000 Rohingya (UNHCR Operational Update on Bangladesh, 2018).

## **2. Bangladesh’s Endeavour for Rohingya Repatriation**

The UN Charter gave the Security Council certain powers and functions: to uphold "international peace and security" in accordance with the UN's tenets and objectives; to investigate any disagreement or resolution that may cause global strife; to make recommendations on how to resolve such disagreements or ways of resolution; to come up with plans for a weapons control system; and to identify any "act of aggression" or "act of war."....(UN Charter). However, the United Nations Security Council failed to uphold the rights of Rohingya who were forcibly migrated to Bangladesh. Bangladesh gave shelter to the Rohingya from its humanitarian stance. But, for Rohingya camps’ being over crowdedness, security concern because of frequent incidents of killing in Rohingya camps and growing anti-Rohingya sentiments among locals trigger Bangladesh to take attempts for Rohingya’s repatriation to their homeland (“Bangladesh tells UN”, August 17, 2022).

### **2.1. Advocacy in the UN**

While addressing at the 72th ‘session’ of the UN General Assembly, in September 2017, the Premier of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina made five recommendations on the Rohingya issue: immediately and permanently end the violence and 'ethnic cleansing' unconditionally in Myanmar, the immediate dispatch of the UN Secretary-General's own investigative team to Myanmar, provision of security for all ordinary citizens without considering any of race and ‘religion’ and to set up ‘safe zones’ under the direction of the United Nations inside Myanmar, assuring of the take back of all Rohingya coercively evicted from Arakan to their homes in Myanmar, and execution of all suggestions by the Kofi Annan Commission Report (“5-point Proposal”, 2017).

Moreover, Sheikh Hasina made three more recommendations at the UN meeting on 24 September 2018 on the “High-level Event on the Global Compact on Refugees: A Model for Greater Solidarity and Cooperation”. The recommendations were: Myanmar should remove unequal ‘laws, policies and practices’ with regard to minorities; Myanmar should foster reliance and provide Rohingyas with safety, legal protections, and residency. It should establish a ‘safe zone’ within the state to safeguard people if necessary; and to prevent anarchy against the Rohingya in Myanmar, the perpetrators must be held accountable, prosecuted, especially after the directions of the UNHRC’s ‘fact-finding mission’ (“Ending Rohingya Crisis”, 2018). Furthermore, Sheikh Hasina, on 24 September 2021, cautioned that if the crisis continued, it could hamper safety and durability in the area and above, and she urged the United Nations and world leaders to adopt comprehensive policies for durable repatriation of the Rohingyas ("PM Places Six Proposals", 25 September 2022).

Besides, On September 22, 2022, during the 77th 'General Assembly of the United Nations', Sheikh Hasina underscored the obligation for the global society to pursue measures: promoting the Rohingyas economically and administratively; getting involved in cases before International Criminal and national courts, and the 'International Court of Justice', together with assisting the Gambia in the ICJ to implement 'international law' and combat infringements of human rights in Myanmar; putting the squeeze on Myanmar to end its persecution of 'religious' and 'ethnic' minorities, pleading with Myanmar to remain committed to its obligations according to the 'ASEAN Five-Point' Resolution, and working to secure Myanmar's agreement ensure unrestricted delivery of humanitarian (Dhruba, 22 September 2022).

At the same session, Sheikh Hasina urged the United Nations (UN) and world leaders to take effective measures for the sustainable repatriation of the Rohingya, warning that,

The region's and the world's security could be compromised if the issue persists. The return of Rohingya refugees has been complicated by the ongoing political turmoil and armed fighting in Myanmar. In this regard, I have high hopes for the United Nations. Hasina repeated her claim that no Rohingya has been taken back to their motherland despite consultations with 'bilateral', 'trilateral', and other partners, including the 'United Nations', to establish the required environment for the safe and dignified repatriation of Rohingya to Myanmar. Myanmar's recurring political upheaval and armed warfare have complicated efforts to return fleeing Rohingyas to their homeland. ("PM for Effective Role", 2022).

## **2.2. Bilateral Agreements and Other Diplomatic Efforts by Bangladesh**

Myanmar, for decades, could violate its promises for Rohingya repatriation, alleging that Rohingyas were from Bengali ethnicity (Kipgen, 2019). The first Rohingya repatriation agreement was reached in November 2017 between Bangladesh and Myanmar. In January of 2018, another deal was agreed to ensure that all Rohingyas would be repatriated within two years (Zaman, 2021). In November 2018, 4000 Rohingyas refugees were scheduled to repatriate (Petersen and Rahman, 2018). About one year later in August 2019, more than 3000 Rohingyas refugees were scheduled to send back Myanmar (Petersen and Rahman, 2019). In both cases, Rohingyas refused to go back Myanmar and expressed their concerns about security and safety in Myanmar (Anik, 2022).

In September 2019 foreign ministers of Bangladesh, China and Myanmar met on the sidelines of the 74th UN General Assembly in New York. In the meeting they decided to set up a "tripartite joint working mechanism" to assess the ground reality for the Rohingya repatriation ("Bangladesh, China, Myanmar", 2019). In 2021, at a China facilitated tripartite meeting, Myanmar agreed to take back Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh. After the meeting Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary said, "We pushed to initiate the repatriation in the first quarter, but Myanmar sought more time for logistical arrangements and some physical arrangements. So we asked to start repatriation in the second quarter, and they agreed on it" (Kamruzzaman, 2021, para, 3).

Moreover, on 14 June 2022, the fifth meeting of the Bangladesh-Myanmar 'Joint Working Group (JWG)' on the Rohingya repatriation was held via videoconference. In the meeting, Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary–Masud Bin Momen and Myanmar's Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs–U Chan Aye led the respective sides. Bangladesh asked Myanmar to speed up the verification of the Rohingyas so that they could be sent back quickly ("Bangladesh for Expediting", 2022).

In the first week of August 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Bangladesh. During his visit Bangladesh sought cooperation from China to send Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar ("Bangladesh Asks China", 2022).

On October 6, 2022, Bangladesh's Premier Sheikh Hasina criticised the junta of Myanmar for not cooperating with Bangladesh's efforts to return Rohingya refugees. She said,

Bangladesh has taken many bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral initiatives to repatriate the Rohingya with safety and dignity to their home country. But the sustainable repatriation of Rohingya could not be started till date due to the lack of political wills of Myanmar government. (Kamruzzaman, 2022, para, 3)

**Table 01:** *Key Events Related to Rohingya Repatriation*

<b>Time</b>	<b>Key events</b>
November 2017	Rohingya repatriation agreement was signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar.
January 2018	Another deal was agreed to repatriate all Rohingya within two years.
November 2018	4000 Rohingyas refugees were scheduled to repatriate. But, Rohingya repatriation did not happen.
August 2019	Another Rohingya repatriation failed. This time more than 3000 Rohingyas refugees were scheduled to return.
September 2019	Foreign ministers of Bangladesh, decided to set up a "tripartite joint working mechanism".
January 2021	At a tripartite meeting, Myanmar agreed to take back Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh. The meeting was facilitated by China.
June 2022	The Fifth Meeting of the Bangladesh-Myanmar Joint Working Group (JWG) on the repatriation of Rohingyas was held via videoconference.
August 2022	China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Bangladesh and Bangladesh sought cooperation from China to send Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar.
October 2022	Bangladesh's Premier Sheikh Hasina criticized the junta of Myanmar for not cooperating with Bangladesh's efforts to take Rohingya refugees back.

**Source:** Author's compilation

### **3. Challenges: Chinese and Russian Vetoes**

The permanent members of the UNSC enjoy veto power. Because of their Veto, many incidents of gross human rights violation or crimes against humanity go untreated in the world. Rohingya persecution by Myanmar security forces is such an example, that suffers by Russian and Chinese veto whenever submitting any draft protesting persecution of Rohingya along with other ethnic minorities in Myanmar. The study shed lights on the implications of Chinese and Russian vetoes particularly regarding Rohingya repatriation since 2017 from Bangladesh to Myanmar.

The UN General Assembly passed a resolution, proposed by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation by a 'vote of 122 to 10', with 24 members voting against it. The resolution that was passed in December 2017 urged the Myanmar government to enable relief staff entry, facilitate

the safe repatriation of all Rohingyas, and provide them complete citizenship. China and Russia, however, were staunchly against the UN resolution (“China and Russia”, 2017).

Then, China and Russia denied discussing a British-drafted UN Security Council resolution to encourage Myanmar to work with the UN on the Rohingya refugee crisis in December 2018. The proposed resolution addressed responsibility and set a timeline for Myanmar to begin repatriating over 700,000 Rohingya Muslim refugees from Bangladesh (Nichols, December 18, 2018).

In addition, at the UN's 75th ‘General Assembly’, on 31 December 2020, China and Russia adopted the side of Myanmar on a draft on the Rohingya issue and other humanitarian conditions in Myanmar, while India remained neutral (“Rohingya Issue”, 2021). On November 17, 2021, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly accepted a resolution proposed by the OIC and the European Union pertaining to the safeguarding of the Rohingya. Since the crisis began in 2017, it was the first time that a draft about the Rohingya was approved by a majority consent at the United Nations (Zaman, 23 November 2021). Bangladesh assessed this as a remarkable diplomatic victory of it.

Nevertheless, Russia and China again used their veto power at the UNSC on May 29, 2022, blocking the issuance of a resolution conveying UNSC worry about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Myanmar (Strangio, May 30, 2022). The following table shows briefly the Chinese and Russian vetoes on the Rohingya issue in the UNSC.

**Table 02:** *Russian and Chinese Vetoes in the UNSC on Rohingya Issue*

<b>Name and Purpose of the Draft</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Chinese/Russian Veto</b>
British drafted resolution determining a timeline for implementing 700,000 Rohingya repatriations (Reuters, December 18, 2018)	December 2018	China and Russia boycotted talks on the resolution
The UK proposed UNSC statement expressing concern about the violent situation in the Arakan state of Myanmar (Reuters, March 18, 2017)	March 17, 2017	China, backed by Russia, vetoed
The Security Council urged Myanmar to stop using disproportionate conventional forces in Arakan, reinstate 'civilian' authority, adopt the 'rule of law', and act swiftly to uphold human rights (Nichols, 2017)	November 6, 2017	China vetoed

**Source:** Author's compilation

#### **4.1. Reasons for Chinese and Russian Vetoes**

Chinese and Russian Geo-economic interests trigger them to follow each other's actions in the UNSC, which also strengthens their political bond. Both China and Russia hold permanent seats in the UN Security Council and wield significant power within the organization. According to Kudo (2008: 87), China is close to Myanmar in terms of 'history', 'culture', 'economy', and 'geography.' The 2227 kilometres far border between the two countries runs across the middle of Myanmar's 'eastern Shan and Kachin states' and China's 'southwestern Yunnan Province'. A 'sibling' analogy best describes their bond.

In fact, China's US\$ 10 billion business with Myanmar in 2017 worthing 30% of Myanmar's gross external trade, funding for the advancement of 'infrastructure', for 'state-owned economic enterprises (SEEs)' and the 'energy sector' made the former as a leading trade partner. Chinese loan to Myanmar also covers 44% of the entire loan of the latter (Ganesan, 2018: 12). In 2021, China exported \$10.53 billion to Myanmar (Trading Economics, March 2023).

Myanmar being the door for China to enter the Indian Ocean, bears mounting value for the latter as it is easy for China to watchdog India from the lofty 'coastline' of Myanmar (Ganesan, 2018:7). Moreover, the Chinese venture under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for structuring a 'sea and land route tying up itself with Central Asia and Europe, yearly 22 million tons of oil shipping through 'a 771 kilometre-long oil pipeline' connecting China's Kunming and Myanmar's Kyaukpyu ("Myanmar Pipeline Gives", 2017), and transporting of 'natural gas' from the Arakan state to China's Yunnan and Guangxi province through the Chinese made '2520 km gas pipeline across Myanmar' (Min, 2013), building six dams in Salween and Irrawaddy Rivers to generate and 'export' 10000 megawatts electricity to China (Ganesan, 2018:15), etc. signifies Myanmar for China.

Apart from that, Russia's growing trade volume from 2005 to 2014 further expresses that Russia stepped up its economic relationship with Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia (Gorenburg and Schwartz, 2019). In 2021, Russia exported to Myanmar for US\$284.33 million (Trading Economics, March 2023).

Moreover, Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu's visit to Myanmar in January 2018 to strengthen the 'bilateral military relationship' followed signing a pact for selling military arms to Myanmar and receiving Myanmar's military personnel to give training in Russian schools (Parameswaran, January 23, 2018), and a US\$38.3 million investment in gas and oil sector in 2017 in Myanmar (Wishnick, 2018) testifies Myanmar's significance to Russia.

Russia's obvious interests are served when it takes China's side against Myanmar, as this boosts mutual confidence and opens new markets for Russian weaponry exports. In 2016, it made a US\$1.45 billion profit from weaponry sales to Myanmar (Wishnick, 2018).

At the same time, it is also argued that the Russian effort to curb the US-led alliance's influence in the East Asia region triggers the former to engage with matters regarding Myanmar (Wishnick, 2018). Russia vetoes any proposal submitted in the UNSC against Myanmar in accordance with its parallel policy with China.

Another reason for Russia's support of Myanmar in the UNSC is its interest to pursuing a "parallel policy effort" alongside China because Russia desires for an excellent military and economic and military nexus with China (Wishnick, 2018). It seems not to be exaggeration to say that Russia and China easily could continue applying their veto due to the USA's inaction over the Rohingya issue.

The US Trump administration started investigation into Rohingya deaths and their forced migration to Bangladesh by the Myanmar security forces. However, it was only in March 2022 when the USA's Biden administration acknowledged what happened on Rohingya as genocide. One important reason behind this was USA's unwillingness to lose Myanmar against China. However, military coup in February 2021 and after junta's oppression against different ethnic groups altered the US policy makers' ways of thinking of Myanmar (McLaughlin, 2022). The United States sanctioned four Myanmar 'military and police' leaders and two army units following the last Rohingya migration, castigating them of 'ethnic cleansing' of Rohingya and other severe 'human rights' violations (Rahman & Akon, 2019).

## 5. Conclusion

This study argues that Bangladesh has been endeavouring bilaterally and multilaterally for long, particularly since 2017, for Rohingya's repatriation to their homeland. However, the Myanmar government's reluctance to receive the Rohingya, backed by Russia and China's veto in the UNSC, impeded the repatriation process. The USA did not take substantiated steps against Myanmar's dealings with the Rohingya and took an indirect stand with Aung San Suu Kyi who always overlooked the Rohingya oppression. The USA moved for solid measures against Myanmar's treatment through acknowledging oppression on Rohingya as genocide only in recent times. For decades, Myanmar has denied Rohingya rights and did everything for cleansing them. As a result, thousands of them sought shelter in neighbouring Bangladesh different times during 1978-2017. Though Bangladesh did not accept Rohingya as formal 'refugee,' they have been being provided with reliefs and other basic needs by Bangladesh authority, several international aid groups, along with certain UN agencies. Limited affordability and social concern stir up Bangladesh for endeavoring Rohingya's repatriation to their homeland. However, the actions of Russia, China, and the USA, backed by their geo-economic and geo-strategic interests, obstructed the repatriation process. Therefore, it is very significant to reform the UN Security Council instead of leaving the fate of the world in the hands of veto-wielding states, either by expanding veto powers to other powerful states or find an alternative way so that no veto can promote gross human rights violation that occurred against the Rohingya ethnic group.

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