

A Crisis in Deadlock: Analyzing Possible Obstacles toward Rohingya Refugee Repatriation

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Abstract

A large number of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, are trapped for many years without a durable solution. This paper demonstrates the experience of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar camps to illustrate the problems facing contemporary refugees, which is very difficult, and the situation is deteriorating day by day in the camps. A hope of repatriation to their home in the original land in Myanmar remains unsuccessful. This paper uses a qualitative method to address the question of what the obstacles are that remain for the Rohingya in refugee life in Bangladesh. From the responses of key informants, this article examines the role, perspective, and action of key players – the Myanmar and Bangladesh governments, the Rakhine community (including their armed group Arakan Army), and the Bangladeshi host community – toward the Rohingya repatriation. Moreover, the article demonstrates how to analyze the deadlock toward Rohingya repatriation through an integrated theoretical framework: Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS), the Triadic Nexus model, and Securitization Theory.

Keywords: Rohingya Repatriation, Bangladeshi Government, Myanmar Government, Rakhine Community, Host Community.

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Introduction

The number of civil wars has often been quoted as having overtaken the number of interstate conflicts in recent years (Bosetti & Einsiedel, 2015; Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Yet it is the experiences of the minorities which is often overlooked that makes civil wars even more dangerous. This is because, when governments unleash their full force on the minorities, sometimes in the guise of counterterrorism, basic rights and international humanitarian law are not observed. Since the turn of the new millennium, the number of conflicts between minorities and governments has increased, with some of the worst experiences being witnessed during and after the 2011 Arab Springs (Josua & Edel, 2015). Amidst disturbing reports of abuse, suppression, and attacks on minorities, global attention is often swayed by other well-publicized cases, leaving some of the tragic experiences, such as the one witnessed by the Rohingya in Myanmar, on the periphery of the global agenda and discourse.

The Rohingya are the most persecuted Muslim minority in the world, coming from the southwestern coastal part of Myanmar in the Rakhine state (formerly Arakan), which, over recent decades, have slowly and significantly been abused by many human rights violations including: forced labour, depopulation of their communities, removal of citizenship, severe abuse of children, elders and women (including use of rape as a weapon), confiscation and destruction of property (including schools, homes and religious centres), prohibition of freedom of movement, denial of education, religious and ethnic discrimination, systemic persecution and racism, restrictions on marriage, mass rapes, massacres, ethnic cleansings and forced expulsions (Dussich, 2018). Due to the number of violent operations against the Rohingya in Myanmar, they have been forced to flee to Bangladesh multiple times. Some Rohingya refugee who had to flee in 1978 were able to repatriate to Myanmar in 1992, however many refugees had been left behind who are still living in Bangladesh refugee camps along with new influx in 2016-2017 (Farzana, 2017: 68). This article depicts the unsolved and prolonged Rohingya refugee crisis by addressing the question what are the obstacles that remains the Rohingya in refugee life in Bangladesh. The article demonstrates how to analyze the prolonged Rohingya refugee crisis that has no immediate hope of a durable solution through an integrated theoretical framework: Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS), the Triadic Nexus model, and Securitization Theory.

1. Contextual Background

The Rohingya group was one of the officially recognized ethnic groups of Myanmar until the 1962 military coup by General Ne Win. After that, the Rohingya have been removed from

the list of the ethnic groups of Myanmar. Rohingya was one of the ethnic groups officially recognized ethnic groups of Myanmar like Shan, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Rakhine, Mon and Chin, recognized by the Prime Minister U Nu (Parnini, Othman, & Ghazali, 2013; Rahman, Anusara, Chanthamith, Hossain, & Amin, 2018). On 15 October 1982, the Ne Win government removed Rohingya from the list of official ethnic groups according to the Citizenship Act of 1982, and 135 ethnic groups officially recognize in which they are seemed in Myanmar prior to 1823 – shortly before the British conquered certain in lower Myanmar or individuals born to parents who were citizens at the time of their birth (Lintner, *Outrage : Burma's struggle for democracy*, 1990). Rohingya had the same identity as other ethnic groups in Myanmar, which was NRC¹. The NRC was taken away from all people in Myanmar and provided a citizenship card to ethnic people, which is called ‘Pink Card’, and the Rohingya were provided *Yayi Kart*² discriminately (Lee, 2021; Rahman, Anusara, Chanthamith, Hossain, & Amin, 2018). Since then, every right of the Rohingya has been deprived, including basic rights. Rohingyas have restrictions on movement that they cannot go from one town to another. They have restrictions on education that they cannot study professional subjects such as Medicine, Engineering, Technology, and so forth. They have restriction of healthcare that they cannot go to take treatment where the healthcare service is available outside of the township, and even at the hospital in the town, they are not treated well and provided good service discriminately (Mallick, 2020).

Since Rohingyas have lost citizenship rights from their own country, they are being marginalized from every sector politically and socially, and the government made them stateless (Lee, 2019: 61). They cannot be police, cannot be a lawyer, cannot be a military; they cannot be any civil servant or public servant in their own country, Myanmar. It also deeply impacts their daily life and other livelihoods since they do not have the opportunity of employment. So, most of the Rohingyas, in their mind, education is nothing for both livelihood and social aspects because there is no job opportunity for them even after graduation, who have a degree that needs to be earned by facing many difficulties and restrictions (Zawacki, 2013). Very few Rohingya could attend university in Sittwe who had money and were able to afford it, and would have many challenges to get travel authorization from the immigration. In the schools, no Rohingya teachers from the government sector. Of course, some Rohingya teachers in primary schools in rural parts had been hired as private (not government employees) which are not very effective and well systematic. Rohingya

¹ NRC National Registration Card, it was also called “Three folded card”.

² Temporary Card, it is also called “White Card”.

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students are always challenge with different types of discrimination, while Rakhine students are given priority. When there is no Rohingya in the police and military and any administrative and regulatory sector, Rakhine people bully Rohingya always, as their people are in every sector of the government (Szurlej, 2016).

Because of the violence and operations against the Rohingya, there have been a number of Rohingya exoduses from Myanmar to Bangladesh on multiple occasions. Firstly, the inter-communal violence between the Rakhine and the Rohingya emerged in 1942, where thousands of Rohingya were brutally killed by the Rakhine, and thousands of Rohingyas had to escape their lives by refuging in Bangladesh (Ullah, 2016: 287-297). Secondly, another tragedy on the Rohingya happened in 1978, when an operation was deliberately carried out in the name of ‘population check’ that was called ‘*Nagamin* Operation.’ Thousands of Rohingyas were being tortured, had their land and properties confiscated, arbitrarily arrested, and killed hundreds. Thousands of Rohingyas had to escape their lives to Bangladesh and seek refuge there again (Cheesman, 2017: 472). Thirdly, in the inter-communal violence that happened in 2012 between Rakhine and Rohingya, thousands of Rohingya have become IDPs (Internal Displaced Persons) in Kyauktaw, Kyaukpyu, Sittwe, and other places in Rakhine state, as their houses have been burned down by the extremist Rakhine along with Myanmar security forces. Hundreds of Rohingya have been killed by the Rakhine mobs with the help of security forces (police, riot police, and military), and dozens of Rohingya had to escape their lives into Bangladesh (Pedersen, 2018). Fourthly, the exodus was in 2016, when ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) attacked the BGP’s (Border Guard Police) headquarters on 9th October. Another operation was launched by the Myanmar armed forces on the Rohingya, who are mostly civilians in the northern part of Maungdaw, Rakhine state. Thousands of Rohingyas had to flee to the neighboring country, Bangladesh (Kyaw, 2020). The last and biggest one was in 2017, when nearly one million Rohingya were forced to flee from Myanmar to Bangladesh. In the name of so-called “Clearance Operations” after the ARSA’s attack on some security force posts in northern Rakhine state on 25 August 2017, thousands of Rohingya civilians have been brutally killed including infants, children, pregnant women and elderly people. Hundreds of Rohingya women have faced gang rape by the local extremist Rakhine, security forces, and military (Messner, Woods, et al., 2019: 5-11). According to the UN Fact Finding Mission report, more than 350 Rohingya villages have been burned down by the military, police, and local extremist Rakhine people (IIFMM, 2018).

2. Theoretical Framing: The Rohingya Repatriation Deadlock

This article analyses the long struggle of the Rohingya refugees through a combined theoretical lens that connects the framework of Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS) with the analytical power of the Triadic Nexus model and Securitization Theory. The PRS framework depicts a long-lasting refugee crisis that has been ongoing for many years without a potential durable solution, and it is being applied to the situation of the Rohingya dilemma (Loescher, Milner & Newman, 2008: 3-4). The Rohingya in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar illustrate a PRS since there is no pragmatic condition yet, even though there are three possible solutions: voluntary repatriation, local integration, and third-country relocation. Repatriation is the ultimate solution for the Rohingya refugee, but the Myanmar government and AA³ are not willing to accept the Rohingya; local integration is a very complicated and controversial idea, as the Rohingya are not 'Bengali' and Bangladesh is not able to accept a huge population of another country forever; third-country relocation doesn't work since the number of Rohingya refugees are over one million. This PRS is not a passive phenomenon but is actively sustained by the political dynamics between key actors, which can be properly mapped using the Triadic Nexus model (Brubaker, 1996). The interdependent and often conflictual relationships between the country of origin (Myanmar), the host state (Bangladesh), and the refugee population itself (Rohingya) are examined by the Triadic Nexus model, in which there are complicated interconnected obstacles that make the Rohingya in refugee camps a 'deadlock' for a long time without a durable solution (Bari, 2020).

In order to comprehend the unwavering positions within this Triadic Nexus, particularly of Myanmar and Bangladesh, we turn to Securitization Theory. The Copenhagen School has developed this theory. It asserts that state actors can frame an issue as an existential threat, thereby moving it beyond the realm of normal politics and justifying emergency measures (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998). The stance of Myanmar is basically rooted in a decades-long process of securitizing the identity of the Rohingya. By constructing the Rohingya as illegal "Bengali" immigrants and a threat to national sovereignty, Buddhist Rakhine and other ethnic identity, the Myanmar state has systematically legitimized their exclusion, persecution, marginalization, dehumanization, and the denial of their right to return to their original home (Cheesman, 2017; Ibrahim, 2016: 18). This securitized narrative is fuelled by the Rakhine community, whose opposition always becomes a key obstacle to repatriation (Ware & Laoutides, 2024). Conversely, Bangladesh, while initially responding with

³ Arakan Army is an armed group of Rakhine people who controlled most of the territory in Rakhine state from Myanmar military.

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humanitarian compassion, has increasingly securitized the Rohingya presence domestically. The protracted nature of the crisis has led to framing the camps as sources of crime, illegal drug dealing, environmental degradation, and economic strain, justifying a policy of containment and a singular focus on repatriation, though the situation in Myanmar is not conducive yet (Islam, 2024; Rahman & Arefin, 2024). This mutual securitization of both states for different reasons creates a perverse symmetry - frame the Rohingya as a problem to be managed through exclusion rather than as a population with rights.

These integrated frameworks shed light on why the Rohingya refugee crisis remains without a durable solution. The PRS framework comes up with the 'condition' of prolonged refugee life in refugee camps and exile, the Triadic Nexus maps the 'relational dynamics' of key actors that perpetuate it, and Securitization Theory unveils the 'discursive and ideological drivers' that create those dynamics without a durable solution that is Rohingya repatriation with dignity, equal rights, citizenship rights, and right to return to their original land in Myanmar. The policy, perspective, and action of key players are not random but are logical outcomes of these deeper structural and ideological forces. Therefore, this combined theoretical approach helps to provide a robust foundation for analyzing the qualitative data from key respondents for this research.

3. Methodology

This important research on the obstacles of Rohingya repatriation from the temporary sheltering place, Bangladesh, to their original country, Myanmar, has covered different angles. The study used the qualitative research method to demonstrate what are the obstacles that remain for the Rohingya in refugee life in Bangladesh. It was conducted in-depth personal interviews through 'Zoom' online platform with educated and well-knowledgeable Rohingya individuals who are experts and experienced in that particular field. These individuals are active in social media (Facebook) and messengers (particularly at WhatsApp and Telegram). So, they have been reached out to individually and asked their willingness to participate in this research. Once their approval has been obtained, they have been invited to the interview.

There are a total of 12 participants in this research, as this sample size is determined by the principle of data saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), from different places who are over 30 years and under 50 years old. All participants are educated and have at least a Bachelor's degree, and 9 male and 3 female from the Rohingya community. They have been informed of the purpose of the research first, and their answers would have to be impartial and within their knowledge. Informed consent has been obtained from all the participants.

They have been told that their participation in this study totally voluntary as they do not have any force or pressure to participate in this study. They had been asked whether they had any security concerns about participating in the research or not. They have been guaranteed that their participation in this study will remain ‘anonymous’, in which their identity will not be revealed in this study because of their possible security risk. It has also been explained that they can quit the research at any time they want and will not have to answer all the questions, as they have the choice to skip the questions that they may not be comfortable answering. Each individual has been reached out to at least two days prior to get the update on their physical and mental well-being. In order to analyze the data, the thematic analysis is used by utilizing the tool Nvivo. The research also used secondary data from books, journals, news websites, and reports.

4. Finding

4.1. The Situation of Cox’s Bazar Camps

Since the global humanitarian crisis has deteriorated because of multiple conflicts and wars in recent years, it has immensely impacts to the situation of Rohingya refugees in the world's largest refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh.

“The overall situation of Cox’s Bazar camps is a very tough situation because the focus and consideration of the international community for the camps became less important and decreased as many serious issues around the world have appeared. The ration for the Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar camps has been reduced from 12 USD to 8 USD – because of that, the people are struggling for their daily life.” (R7, female, 30)

The refugee life of the Rohingya is different from that of other refugees in other parts of the world. For instance, the Syrian refugees in Türkiye have access to education, proper healthcare, and livelihood, whereas the Rohingya refugees are restricted in Cox’s Bazar camps.

“Due to squeezing houses in a small area, more often the fire breakout in the refugee camp and get burned the shelters in which people become homeless in refugee life, and also there is movement of restriction, lack of livelihood, lack of education access, lack of healthcare and lack of freedom of speech which mean to me the life in refugee camps is worse than prison.” (R11, male, 35)

Monitoring and maintaining proper security measures alone by the government of Bangladesh is very difficult in a dense population within a tiny area. So, the life of Rohingya in those refugee camps means futureless and dire “The situation in camp is becoming very

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difficult as there are multiple gangs doing several sorts of crimes and human trafficking is increasing day by day.” (R4, female, 34)

Rohingya refugees believe their ultimate and durable solution is returning to their homeland, as every refugee in other parts of the world, and in the Rohingya case, given their difficult situation in the refugee camps, they merely have the desire to go back home as early as possible.

“We escaped our life in 2017 from the killing zone to refuge in a peaceful place, but this place is very difficult to live long-term. We want to go back to our country, Myanmar, as soon as possible.” (R10, male, 41)

4.2. Obstacles to Repatriation

When Myanmar regime had full control of entire territory of the Rakhine state, several attempts had been carried out to the threshold of repatriation, and the Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a repatriation deal on November 23, 2017 which was updated on January 15, 2018 whereby Myanmar agreed to accept 1,500 Rohingyas each week and complete the repatriation process by 2020 (Khasru & Nahreen, 2018), but it was not implement yet as both Arakan Army who control most of the territory now and Myanmar regime do not want Rohingya back to their land in Rakhine state.

“In my opinion, the main reason why repatriation is not happening is that the responsible bodies, the Myanmar regime and Arakan Army (AA), do not want and do not have the intention to implement the repatriation of Rohingya. Only, they are showing accusation and pretending to the world.” (R3, male, 39)

Rohingyas have been considered outsiders and not part of the country for decades. Therefore, both the AA and the Myanmar regime are not in favor of accepting the Rohingya back into the country.

“They are delaying the repatriation to implement their policy to have a Rohingya-free land. The Myanmar government and AA, I think, will only do some Rohingya repatriation when international pressure is put on them. They are not sincere in Rohingya repatriation at all.” (R9, male, 32)

Refugees are unwilling to return without guarantees until their security and rights will be protected, accountability ensured, and reparation provided for the destruction of their villages, homes, and property (ICG, 2018).

“The reason why the repatriation is not happening is that we, the Rohingya, are demanding 10 points and the Myanmar government is not ready to provide any of these.” (R4, female, 34)

Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar want a durable solution that means they will not need to take refuge again and again in Bangladesh. The solution is that they are citizen of Myanmar, so they need to have citizenship and equal rights.

“The Myanmar government is still saying the same things which they have been saying from the beginning, such as NVC⁴ thing, do not provide citizenship, do not provide original land, and keep in 15 selected places like a concentration camp.” (R12, female, 48)
The similar concern raised by this respondent below;

“The Myanmar government only focuses on 1982, which means Rohingya are not citizens of Myanmar, and Rohingya in the camp say that we will go back to our country if we are able to go to our original places with full citizenship rights, which are included in the 10-point demand.” (R8, male, 30)

Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar are always concerned about their guarantee to ensure that they will not need to take refuge in Bangladesh again. The Myanmar government does not want to repatriate Rohingya in a realistic way. People here in refugee camps are worrying that if we go back without our rights, which have been taken away from us, then we will have to come back to escape our lives again and again to our neighboring countries, especially in Bangladesh.” (R6, male, 46)

4.3. The Perspective of the Rakhine Community and AA on the Rohingya

Rohingya caught in the battle between AA and the military, and they live in mixed-control areas, must pay taxes to both the regime and the AA – and yet they often cannot get services from either entity. They also face discrimination at the hands of local AA officials.

The Rakhine community’s viewpoint on the Rohingya is always very bad. They are still torturing the Rohingya who are in Rakhine state. Their armed group AA is taking tax from Rohingya, kidnapping Rohingya, and using Rohingya as human shield where many Rohingyas have been killed in the battle. (R4, female, 34)

The Rohingya are not spared from both AA and the military as they have been recruited by both sides since the beginning of the fighting in Rakhine state. Rohingya are also targeted by AA in the commission of serious international crimes.

⁴ National Verification Card

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Participant 9: “AA has used some of my friends, who are educated, and one of them is a village administrator, as a human shield and was killed in the fighting between AA and the Myanmar military. The torturing of AA against the Rohingya is worse than the military once did” (R9, male, 32)

The Rakhine community does not want Rohingya back to Myanmar as most of their land is already being used, and they think Rohingya are not part of Myanmar.

“The policy of Rakhine community on Rohingya is same as Myanmar military government. It is a huge opportunity and helpful for them that the Rohingya were forced to flee, and the lands are empty now for the benefit of the Rakhine people as they build houses on the land and use the land now.” (R3, male, 39)

The tension between the Rohingya and Rakhine in the Rakhine State escalated in the years 2012, 2015, 2016, and 2017. During June and October 2012, members of a Rakhine political party, including Buddhist monks, along with ordinary Rakhine individuals, orchestrated and instigated violence, targeting Rohingya. This violence led to the internal displacement of at least 125,000 Rohingya, with numerous fatalities and victims being buried in mass graves (Ty, 2019).

“The perspective of the Rakhine community on the Rohingya is always negative, which is unacceptable. In this circumstance, as they are approaching their goal to separate the land Arakan⁵, they do not consider embracing the Rohingya in the land.” (R12, female, 34)

4.4. Perspective of the Rakhine Community and AA on Rohingya Repatriation

The Rakhine community and their armed group AA always see the Rohingya people as a threat. Rohingya have been challenging with exclusion for a long time in the hands of the military regime and AA (now).

“The Rakhine community and their leadership do not want the Rohingya to be repatriated, as they reflect in many forms when the repatriation talk is discussed. AA does not even accept the Rohingya who had to flee to Bangladesh due to the recent fighting in northern Rakhine state, while other ethnics could return after the war.” (R1, male, 42)

Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar have concerns about their life guarantee when they go back to Myanmar. Without their safety and security, the violence and other discriminatory oppression against them would be imposed.

⁵ Former name of Rakhine state

“The vulnerable and traumatized people in camps fear returning to the unstable situation as AA is torturing, abducting, and killing Rohingyas inside Rakhine state at the moment.” (R7, female, 30)

The hate speeches toward a particular group of people mean the intent of targeting that group to harm, oppress, and destroy, which is one of the symptoms of the threshold to the commission of serious international crimes.

“Rakhine people still use hate speeches against Rohingya openly by using the words “Kalar⁶” and “Bengali,” which is one of the types of evidence that they do not want us.” (R10, male, 41)

When one ethnic group perceives another as a demographic threat, it may employ the strategy of either biopower or forced population transfer to suppress the population growth of the other group and maintain majority control. The Rakhine community does not want Rohingya to be repatriated in Rakhine state. Their leader, Twan Mrat Naing, once has mentioned that the population of Rakhine must be majority than the total population of all peoples in Rakhine state. In this way, they see in two ways; first, the suppression of Rohingya population as we are majority in especially three townships, and secondly, they already gave advice to their people to take more and more children.” (R5, male, 31)

The intervention of the international community would be a quite important step to implement the repatriation of Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar who have been living for years in the camps.

“The Rakhine community sees the Rohingya as not belonging to Myanmar, and they have come from Bangladesh so that they cannot live in Rakhine state, Myanmar...yes, there is a possibility to implement the repatriation, in my opinion, that if the international community puts pressure, some refugees can be repatriated. Still, there is a doubt on the implementation of the whole Rohingya repatriation.” (R2, male, 33)

The nationalism of the Rakhine people seeks to establish a separate independent state, which is what they call ‘fatherland’ and other ethnic groups of people need to live under their ruling.

“Rakhine community do not want Rohingya repatriation because their ultimate goal is to separate Rakhine state only for themselves. They try to eliminate as much Rohingya as possible from Rakhine state.” (R6, male, 46)

⁶ Kalar is a commonly-used term in Myanmar, often used in a derogatory way to denote people of darker skin colour, often of South Asian descent.

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The AA is seeking recognition from the international community for an independent sovereign state for them which is their goal.

“In case they have to repatriate Rohingya by the international community’s pressure, they want Rohingya under their separate rule the way Myanmar military keep us... AA also say that the repatriation talk should proceed under the rule, and international community need to recognize us that the repatriation can be implemented if they talk with us. They say this only to get support from international community and want to rule over the Rohingya in the whole Rakhine state.” (R8, male, 30)

4.5. Perspective of Bangladesh on Rohingya Repatriation

Since the Rohingya refugee population in Cox’s Bazar is huge, it is quite a burden for the Bangladesh government to host them for a long time. Moreover, they are always in favor of Rohingya’s sustainable solution that it lies within Myanmar.

“When we look at the policy of Bangladeshi government on Rohingya repatriation, they want to repatriate Rohingya as soon as possible and Chief adviser Prof. Muhammad Yunus claim that Rohingya should be able to celebrate Eid in 2026 in Arakan, but they cannot implement it themselves, and they need international community’s support especially ASEAN, China, and US.” (R2, male, 33)

For hosting a huge number of Rohingya refugee in Cox’s Bazar Bangladesh alone would be extremely hard since the fund from different donor countries are getting cut or decreased due to other crises in other part of the globe.

“Bangladesh could develop the region in Cox’s Bazar in terms of road, transportation and infrastructure after arriving Rohingya refugee. The market of Bangladesh has increased and they are benefiting from that. They received a lot of funds to develop the environment because of the refugees. However, the funds and donation from different countries decreased, so that the policy of Bangladesh to repatriate the Rohingya is changed now.” (R7, female, 30)

The host community has significant concerns about their environment and culture while they host a huge number of refugees where entire people are not with the same character as there are some good and bad people, and some bad people commit crimes and do illegal activities. Also, the host community has frustration on labour market where the refugee labours can be found in cheaper market, so they secure job opportunity from the host community in some cases.

“The benefit of Bangladeshi government and host community if Rohingya

repatriation is happened that they have concern about their culture and environment in which it is changing after arriving Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh. The Rohingya refugee is a huge number who are changing the local culture and environment so that they worry about that, and once they return to their country, the local Bangladeshi feel free with their culture and environment.” (R5, male, 31)

Since the area of Cox’s Bazar Rohingya refugee camps had been wild-land before arriving the refugees, the jungle area has now become a living space. So, the local people can use the land when the refugees are repatriated.

“The host community conceives that the shelter can be used by local Bangladeshi people if the Rohingya refugees are repatriated.” (R10, male, 41)

The concern of losing the land always occurs when long lasting burden of a huge number of refugees remain on the shoulder the host community.

“What the benefit of Bangladesh government and host community if Rohingya repatriation is happened is that the fear hope which host community have toward Rohingya as they will live in Bangladesh forever and make it their own country will go away.” (R11, male, 35)

Discussion and Conclusion

The Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar camps, Bangladesh are in very difficult situation. The place is very small for dense population and is not hygienic. So, the problem with the sanitation is always challenging, and people especially young children are facing with different diseases daily basis. It is not worth to live for long time. The life of the refugee is deteriorating day by day, since they do not have proper education for their children, do not have proper medical facility for huge population and do not have security. According to respondents, the killings, abductions, fighting, and other crimes are increasing day by day in camps. Therefore, the life for many refugees became a punishment in camps. So, many refugees do not want to continue living in camps, and some attempt to move to other countries like Malaysia by boat. On their way to Malaysia, many people could not reach their destination, while some boats do not work on the way and sink at sea, and some are arrested in other parts of Myanmar and sentenced under immigration law regardless of children, women, and men, and some could reach Indonesia and Thailand. Furthermore, along with their remaining bad memories from Myanmar in 2017, they are struggling with the burning of their shelters in camps, which is a very terrible experience for their life. They are becoming

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shelter-less in refugee camps in some cases, and the flame is extremely traumatic for them again in the place where they escaped their life by thinking of a safe place.

In Rakhine state, the viewpoint of the Rakhine community and their armed group AA toward the Rohingya is not changing in a good, harmony and peaceful way. AA gained 14 townships out of 17 townships in Rakhine state including Maungdaw and Buthidaung of northern Rakhine state where the home of majority Rohingya – Buthidaung was captured in May 2024, and Maungdaw was captured in August 2024. The current major power holder of Rakhine state AA does not want Rohingya repatriation, as their leader Twan Mrat Naing mentioned in 2022 in an interview with Asia Times media that “...a massive repatriation of refugees in the current situation could unleash a new wave of unrest” (Lintner, 2022). Moreover, Twan Mrat Naing stated in the interview with Irrawaddy News media in September 2025 that the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh is not feasible in this situation as the country is unstable with ongoing civil war (Irrawaddy News, 2025). AA denies the identity of Rohingya by referring to them as Bengali or Muslim (Amnesty International, 2025), and sometimes AA’s leadership, Twan Mrat Naing, calls them with a derogatory term ‘Kalar’⁷ (Rahman S. , 2024). Rohingyas in Rakhine state under AA’s rule are facing forced labor, food and health crises, severe restrictions on movement (Amnesty International, 2025). According to the respondents, both female and male in this study, they do not want Rohingya to be repatriated in a realistic way. When the international community puts pressure on the Myanmar government and AA, even in that situation, they do not want to repatriate all Rohingya refugees from the Bangladesh camps. They try to make the situation in Rakhine state unstable when the repatriation talks are carried out.

The policy of the Myanmar military government remains the same as before, as they only accept refugees who fled after 2016, and they would be scrutinized by the 1982 citizenship law in which they need to hold a National Verification Card (NVC). They will be kept in temporary camps in Maungdaw and then will be transferred to 15 selected places where they will have limited space for every household, which means their policy toward the realistic repatriation is far away. They do not want to provide the rights of the Rohingya back, and they do not want to give the original land of the Rohingya back. If they had the intention to implement the repatriation of Rohingya, they would have followed in a realistic way, and the Rohingya in Bangladesh refugee camps in Bangladesh would not have lived in a difficult

⁷ “Kalar is a commonly-used term in Myanmar, often used in a derogatory way to denote people of darker skin color, often of South Asian descent.” Challenging Entrenched Racism in Myanmar: Don’t call me ‘Kalar’ - Progressive Voice

situation for over eight years. The Rohingya refugees demand dignified and durable return with their rights and safety – according to respondents R4 and R8, about 10-point demand included their rights (including citizenship rights, right to return to their original land, and so forth), guarantee for safety and security (including for safe-zone under the UN).

The ongoing Rohingya repatriation situation remains at an impasse, characterized by Myanmar's failure to create conditions for safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable return. Despite Myanmar's announcement at the 6th BIMSTEC Summit in April 2025 of the eligibility of approximately 180,000 Rohingya refugees for repatriation from Bangladesh, this declaration has not translated into a realistic way due to the persistent absence of legal citizenship guarantees, security assurances, and accountability for atrocities (AlJazeera, Myanmar confirms 180,000 Rohingya eligible to return, Bangladesh says, 2025). China-led pilot repatriation also did not work, where China, Bangladesh, and Myanmar delegations tried to implement the project, while Myanmar was not ready to provide Rohingya citizenship rights and allow them to return to their original land, so that Rohingyas did not agree to return without a guarantee (AlJazeera, 2023). ASEAN has acted primarily through quiet diplomacy and facilitation rather than robust regional coercion, limiting its effectiveness on repatriation and accountability. The organization has favoured non-interference and preventive diplomacy, engaging Myanmar through dialogue channels and supporting UN-led initiatives such as coordination with UNDP/UNHCR, but these measures have not overcome Myanmar's internal resistance or produced durable returns of Rohingya refugees (Nuruzzaman, 2023). Furthermore, the international community has combined humanitarian assistance, investigative and legal measures, and diplomatic pressure, but these actions have not produced safe large-scale repatriation of Rohingya refugee.

Bangladesh is a small country by its size with dense population, challenging poverty, economic and political crises. The huge Rohingya refugee population burden Bangladeshi government and host community to keep them for long time in a small land. Even though Bangladeshi government and host community have some sort of advantage by Rohingya refugee, the disadvantage of Bangladeshi government and host community are higher. The government need to manage security and other administrative stuff for the refugees, which makes a headache to Bangladesh. Also, many host communities do not have job opportunities for low-class work because Rohingya refugees agree to do the work for a lower rate. Of course, the Bangladeshi government and host community could develop their place in which it was not livable. Some members of the host community who are educated got job

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opportunities in camps. Some funds could be added to the market, which is not a big change since Bangladesh already has already big market.

When the overall situation of the Bangladesh side is examined, they do not have a self-interest to keep the refugees for a long time. They are hosting the refugee for the sake of humanity and at the request of the international community. Bangladesh itself cannot implement the repatriation process without the participation of the Myanmar government and international intervention. The international community will need to put effective pressure on the Myanmar government to implement it. Also, China, Russia, India, and ASEAN will need to play a concrete role as they are key players in the field to implement the repatriation.

Rohingya refugees are demanding their rights back and to repatriate to their original land, and the Bangladeshi government wants to repatriate Rohingya with their rights, safety, and dignity. Both the Rohingya and Bangladeshi governments want these because they should have guarantee not to happen Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh will not happen again and again. It is the responsibility of Myanmar government to facilitate a conducive repatriation of its people Rohingya.

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