

# CA PEACE REPORT

*an initiative of BPO*

Centre for  
**ALTERNATIVES**  
Since 2003

Volume 7, Issue 3, 2024



**Crime and Violence Update  
in Bangladesh:  
An Analysis from BPO**

**Rohingya Crisis: Violence,  
Rohingya Armed Groups and  
Changing Territorial Control in  
Rakhine**

**The Stranded Million:  
Rohingyas in Bangladesh and  
their Repatriation**

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**BPO- Bangladesh Peace Observatory**



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## ***From the Editor's Desk***

The Rohingya crisis has now entered its 7th year. Over 900,000 stateless Rohingya people now reside in Bangladesh, a number more significant than the population of Bhutan. Bhutan's population is less than 800,000, and it probably took 60,000 years to become Bhutan. However, the bulk of the stateless Rohingyas, now numbering 929,606, entered and settled in Bangladesh in less than three months after facing what the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, commissioned by the Human Rights Council of the UN, termed "genocidal intent" at the hands of the Myanmar military in the Arakan region in August 2017. The demographic composition is also noteworthy, with 48 percent male and 52 percent female, and the number of children born in the camps annually is 30,000. This recent exodus starkly contrasts with previous ones in 1978 and 1991-1992, when many Rohingyas were also pushed into Bangladesh, but save some 30,000 who continued to reside in refugee camps, mostly repatriated under the UNHCR's supervision.

Moreover, in the 1970s and 1990s, no allegations were brought against the Myanmar military for committing genocide. This time, there is enough evidence and a near global consensus that a section of the Myanmar military committed genocide against the Rohingyas. Unlike those earlier periods, the 2017 crisis has brought forth substantial allegations and evidence of genocide against the Myanmar military. Although this characterization is widely supported, it remains legally contested. Secretary of State Antony Blinken also announced in March 2022 that the United States had determined that the atrocities the Myanmar military committed against the Rohingya in August 2017 constituted genocide.<sup>1</sup> This raised expectations around the world that policies and actions would follow. One expectation from the observers was that the United States would join the International Court of Justice (ICJ) proceedings, along with Canada and the Netherlands, supporting the Gambia's case against Myanmar at the ICJ. Another expectation was that the United States would impose further and more effective sanctions on Myanmar so that the latter would start taking measures to recognize the Rohingya identity and work on their repatriation from Bangladesh, which has provided temporary shelter to nearly one million Rohingya refugees. Although the expectations have fallen short since the announcement, there seems to have been an attempt by the United States administration to incorporate detailed clauses related to the Rohingya issue when the Burma Act was being drafted. However, the idea was dropped. The Burma Act, when announced in April 2022, only had five clauses about the Rohingya. However, the treatment of the latter was mostly put together with the problems of other minority communities who

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.state.gov/burma-genocide/>. Accessed on 12 June 2024.

were suffering from similar coercion at the hands of the Myanmar military. The Burma Act 2022, announced in April, includes clauses relevant to the Rohingya. Section 102, clause 11 emphasizes the U.S. policy to ensure the protection and non-refoulement of refugees fleeing Burma and to promote conditions for their voluntary return when safe.<sup>2</sup> Clause 14 calls for accountability through credible investigations for potential genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed against ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya.<sup>3</sup> This aligns with Bangladesh's official position and its agreement with the UNHCR.

Amongst the five clauses of the Burma Act, section 102: clause 11 had direct relevance to the Rohingya refugees residing in Bangladesh. The clause refers to the United States policy of ensuring “the protection and non-refoulement of refugees fleeing Burma to neighbouring countries...and promoting the creation of conditions for the dignified, safe, sustainable, and voluntary return of refugees in Bangladesh...when conditions allow.” Clause 14 in the same section also calls for “accountability through independent, credible investigations and prosecutions for any potential genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity...perpetrated against ethnic or religious minorities, including Rohingya, by members of the [Myanmar] military...” This gives the impression that the United States is making clear to Myanmar and Bangladesh that no involuntary return would be accepted, which is also Bangladesh's official position. Bangladesh already has an agreement with the UNHCR to that effect.

However, the more problematic aspect of the Burma Act has been the discretionary authority given to the President of the United States to make significant changes as it allows the President to interpret the Act more liberally,<sup>4</sup> mainly when providing military aid to ethnic armed organizations.<sup>5</sup> Some critics believe that this has compelled China to put pressure on Myanmar for an early resolution of the Rohingya crisis, including initiating a process for their repatriation to the Arakan, lest the region gets ripe for conflicts with the United States getting involved near the Chinese border. The situation remains complex, with ongoing conflicts near the Chinese border and significant Chinese investments in Rakhine State. Since nothing has come about with the Burma Act, with no sign of the Myanmar military returning to civilian politics or China-backed repatriation of the Rohingya having some success, and despite the United States having the option of using the Act for military purposes, should the President of the United States choose to do so, the latter probably now wants to heighten the issue of the Rohingya by introducing yet another resolution, more direct

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5497/text> Accessed 28 July 2024.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-burma-act-does-and-doesnt-mean-us-policy-myanmar> Accessed 29 July 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Haack, “U.S. ‘nonlethal’ aid for Myanmar’s ethnic armies likely to backfire,” *Nikkei Asia*, 29 April 2024.

one this time, in the name of the Rohingya Act. The Burma Act has not led to substantial changes, and U.S. funding for Myanmar decreased post-enactment. The enduring geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and China over Myanmar, dating back to the Cold War, continue to influence the crisis. The recent introduction of a more focused legislative bill, such as the Rohingya Genocide, Accountability, and Protection Act or Rohingya GAP Act,<sup>6</sup> in the U.S. Congress in July 2024, could heighten international attention and potentially drive more direct actions regarding the Rohingya crisis. The world, including Bangladesh, with a new regime in power, and in the backdrop of the Arakan Army gaining ground in the Arakan, will undoubtedly watch the outcome of such Acts, mainly whether they would be able to contribute to the repatriation of the Rohingya with their dignity and citizenship ensured.

**Professor Imtiaz Ahmed**  
Executive Director,  
Centre for Alternatives

3 September 2024

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<sup>6</sup> See, <https://actionnetwork.org/letters/tell-congress-pass-the-rohingya-gap-act/>. Accessed on 22 August 2024.

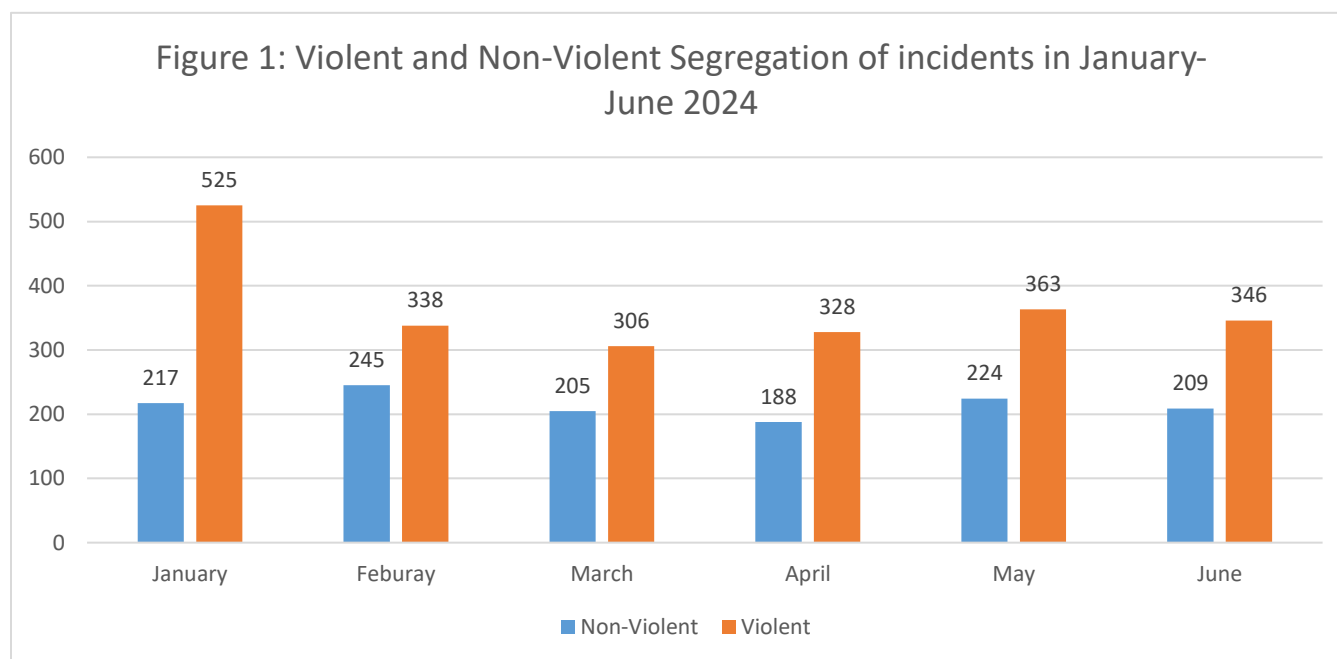
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## Crime and Violence Update in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO

### April-June 2024

The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) brings together different streams of publicly available data on violence using news reports from prominent national and regional dailies. From April to June 2024, BPO recorded 1022 violent<sup>7</sup> and 636 non-violent<sup>8</sup> incidents. Figure 1 shows the monthly segregation of the violent and non-violent incidents that occurred this quarter

alongside the monthly segregation of the previous quarter (January- March 2024). Drawing a comparison between these two quarters, it is noticeable that non-violent incidents maintained a similar up-and-down trend in the two quarters. On the other hand, the violent incidents gradually increased in April and May and decreased nominally in June.



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<sup>7</sup> Violent Incident: According to the BPO Codebook, the reported incident involved the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group in a manner that could have resulted in death, injury, or any other form of bodily harm to persons or property.

<sup>8</sup> Non-violent Incident: According to the BPO Codebook, the reported incident did not involve the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury, or any other form of physical harm to persons or property, e.g., Arrest, Peaceful Protest, Rescue and Recovery.

**Table 1: Major violence types from April to June 2024**

<b>Major Violence Types</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>
Assault	220	242	247
Clash	49	58	48
Sexual assault	21	21	26
Fight	10	10	12
Abduction/hostage	10	10	4
Violence against civilians	1	3	1
Mob violence (large group assault)	5	5	6
Destruction of property	4	11	0
Gunfight	4	3	7
Other	1	4	3
Violent demonstration	0	4	1
Sabotage	2	0	0

Table 1 summarises the updates on major violence types that constitute the most violent incidents. The Annex provides a brief description of each category. It shows that most of the violent incidents fall under the Assault, Clash, Destruction of Property, Sexual Assault, and Abduction categories.

This quarter has shown an upward trend in assault reports but a noticeable decrease in the total number of incidents in this category compared to the previous quarter (12.60%). The reporting of gunfight incidents rose sharply to 14 this quarter from 5 in the

last quarter. Destruction of property went down drastically, and sexual assault increased nominally. The Violent demonstration reports decreased by half, and the other categories showed nominal variance.

Table 2 depicts the comparison of consequences, the total number of killed, injured, sexually assaulted, abducted, and arrested in each month of the quarter in discussion. The table shows that the total number in nearly every consequence category decreased except for total deaths. The highest decrease is seen in the total arrested category.

**Table 2: Comparison of consequences between two quarters (January-March 2024 & April-March 2024)**

<b>Months</b>	<b>Total Injured</b>	<b>Total Killed</b>	<b>Total Sexually Assaulted</b>	<b>Total Abducted</b>	<b>Total Arrested</b>
<b>April</b>	930	217	21	7	986
<b>May</b>	829	217	25	22	1014
<b>June</b>	950	222	16	8	878
<b>Total Number in this quarter</b>	<b>2709</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>2878</b>
<b>Total Number in previous quarter</b>	<b>3235</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3980</b>
<b>increase/decrease</b>	-16.26%	4.29%	-7.25%	-7.50%	-27.69%

### **Understanding the High Number of Assaults**

BPO enlists the inter-personal attacks carried out by different parties against one person/persons by another person/persons for various motives under the assault category. BPO recorded a total of 709 cases of assault in April-June 2024. The motives include domestic violence, dowry, land and other enmities related to economic factors, social-personal rivalry, attacks with criminal intent, suicide attempts, etc. In this quarter, political and election-related attacks also took place. Under the assault category, 133 cases of suicide and attempted suicide were reported, and in those cases, 137 people were killed, including 75 women. Besides, the recovery of

unidentified dead bodies is also enlisted under this category.

### **Political Motives of Clash**

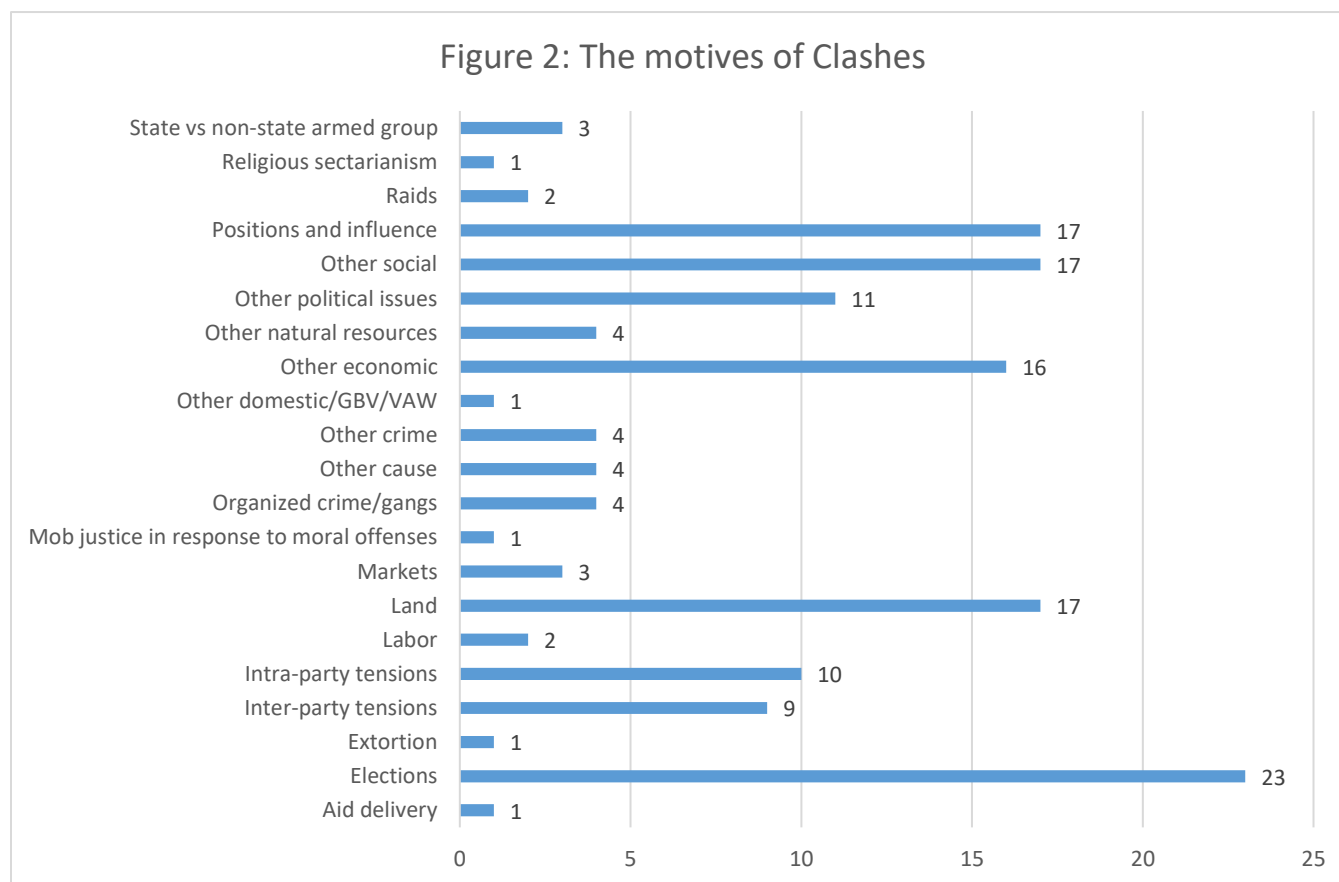
Figure 2 depicts the motives of clashes reported in April-June 2024. From Figure 2, it is noticeable that the prominent motives are elections, positions, and influence (both political and social), tensions between political parties and the internal or factional conflict of political parties, and other political issues, which mainly covered the attacks on political persons by miscreants or enemies, economic and social problems. The dominance of political motives was also seen in the previous quarter's January due to the 12th National Election. Still, in April-June 2024, the Upazila Elections contributed to the conflicts.

## Sexual Assaults: Victims and Perpetrators

Reported incidents of sexual assault have nominally increased (68) in this quarter than the previous one (65). Out of 68 reported cases of sexual assaults in April-June 2024, there were 17 gang rapes. The perpetrators of these offenses were men of different ages, including eve-teasers, local miscreants and robbers, teachers, family members, relatives, neighbours, local political leaders, etc. However, the majority of the victims are girls.

## A Sharp Increase in Gunfight Incidents

The gunfight incidents rose to 14 from 5 in three months. Five incidents were connected to the Kuki-Chin National Front, five were linked to drug and cattle smuggling, two incidents were connected to the Rohingya Issue, and two were connected to robbery. A total of 18 people were killed, and 17 people were reportedly injured in those incidents.



## Violence-Population Nexus

Figure 3 provides a spatial glimpse into the divisional distribution of the recorded violent and non-violent incidents. The Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi divisions have the highest incident numbers. The number of violent incidents is higher than the number of non-violent incidents in all the divisions, a trend similar to the last quarter.

Figure 4 illustrates that Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi are the first, second, and third in terms of death. The Sylhet Division has the third-highest injury count. The Khulna division experienced high incident, death, and injury rates in the previous quarter, but in this quarter, the situation seemed to have calmed down in Khulna.

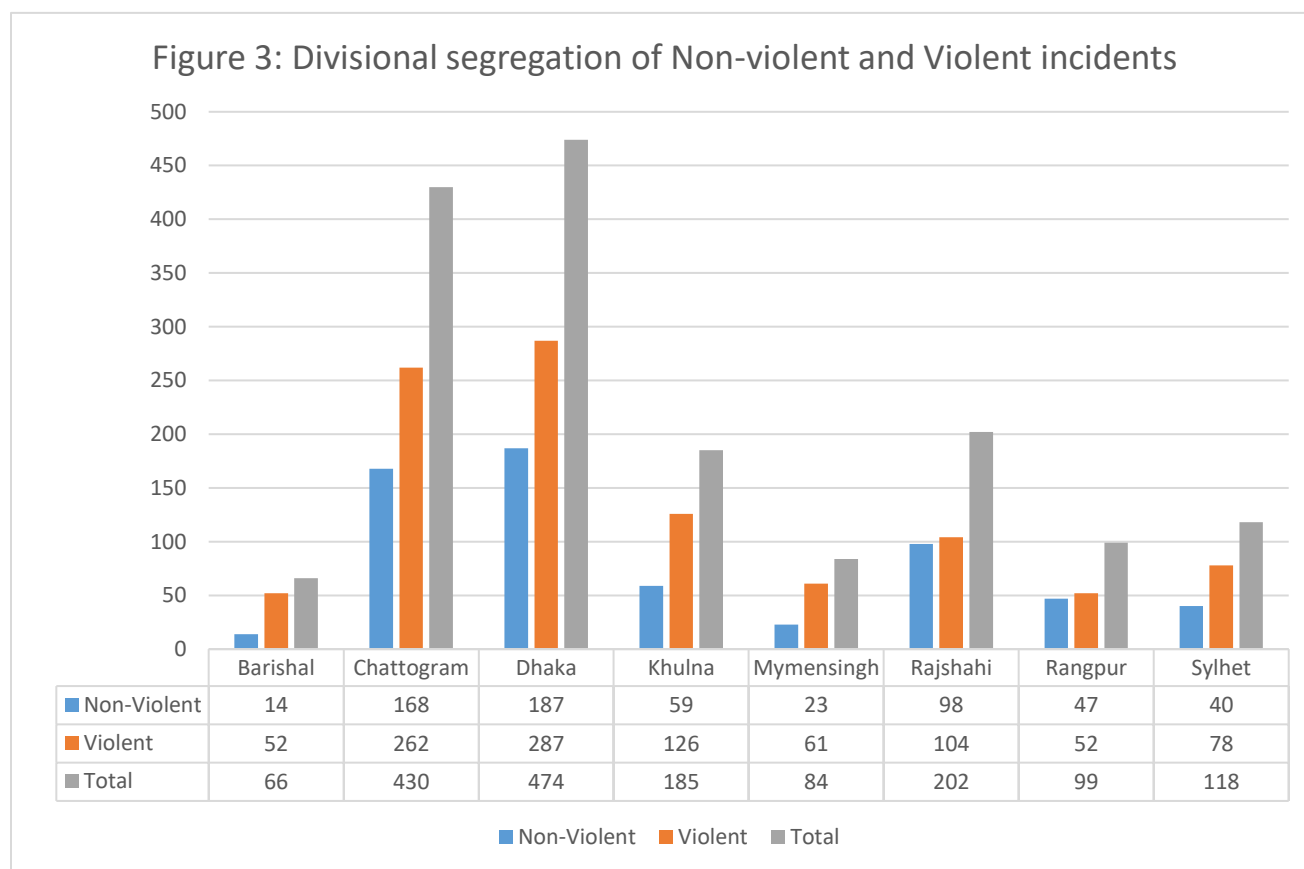
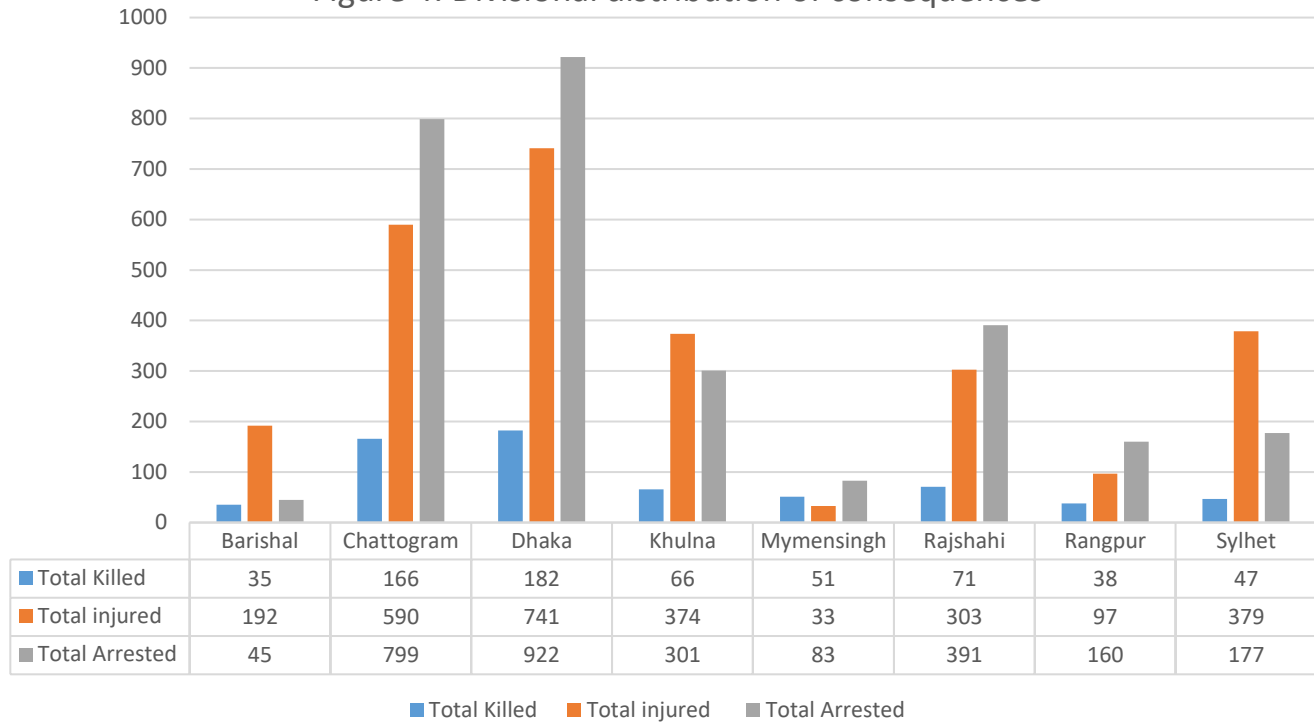


Figure 4: Divisional distribution of consequences



However, a different picture emerges if the population ratio<sup>9</sup> is applied to understand the incidence prevalence and consequences. According to the projected yearly incident rate per 100,000 population, the Dhaka division is second in the chart, and the Chattogram division is the first. The Dhaka division has the third highest death rate despite having the highest number of deaths in April - June 2024. A significant change was noticeable for the Mymensingh

division, which has the second-highest death rate this quarter. This division had the lowest rates in most of the categories in the previous quarters. Barishal, the most minor division in terms of population, has the highest female death rate. Unlike the earlier quarters, the Sylhet division has the second-highest rates in total incidents and deaths and the third-highest in injury rates.

<sup>9</sup> The population data is based on the Preliminary report on the Population & Housing Census 2022, Bangladesh, by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Cited

in: [https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe\\_cfef\\_4811\\_af97\\_594b6c64d7c3/PHC\\_Preliminary\\_Report\\_\(English\)\\_August\\_2022.pdf](https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_(English)_August_2022.pdf)

**Table 3: Comparison of projected Yearly rate of incidents and consequences in the Divisions**

<b>Divisions</b>	<b>Incident number in 3 months</b>	<b>Yearly rate by per 100,000</b>	<b>Total Death in 3 months</b>	<b>Yearly rate by per 100,000</b>	<b>Female death in 3 months</b>	<b>Yearly rate by per 100,000</b>	<b>Total Injury in 3 months</b>	<b>Yearly rate by per 100,000</b>	<b>Sexual Assault in 3 months</b>	<b>Yearly rate by per 100,000</b>
<b>Barishal</b>	66	2.9	35	1.5	13	0.6 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	192	8.4 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	2	0.09
<b>Chattogram</b>	430 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	5.2 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	166 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	2.0 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	40 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	0.5 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	590 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	7.1	21 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	0.25 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
<b>Dhaka</b>	474 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	4.3 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	182 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	1.6 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	61 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	0.6 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	741 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	6.7	17 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	0.15 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
<b>Khulna</b>	185	4.2 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	66	1.5	15	0.3	374	8.6 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	4	0.09
<b>Mymensingh</b>	84	2.7	51	1.7 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	11	0.4	33	1.1	3	0.10
<b>Rajshahi</b>	202 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	4.0	71 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	1.4	22 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	0.4	303	6.0	7 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	0.14
<b>Rangpur</b>	99	2.2	38	0.9	14	0.3	97	2.2	2	0.05
<b>Sylhet</b>	118	4.3 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	47	1.7 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	10	0.4	379 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	13.7 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	6	0.22 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )

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# Rohingya Crisis: Violence, Rohingya Armed Groups and Changing Territorial Control in Rakhine

Khandakar Tahmid Rejwan<sup>10</sup>

## Background and Context

Bangladesh has historically housed displaced Rohingya communities during the colonial period after the country gained independence in 1971. The first of such incursions during the post-independence period occurred in 1978 when Myanmar's Junta launched *Operation Nagamin* and forcibly evicted the Rohingyas from their land.<sup>11</sup> The Tatmadaw committed brutal crimes against humanity in the Community, which included numerous murders and rapes.<sup>12</sup> This forced the Rohingyas to first move into Bangladesh over widespread persecution by the regime in Yangon (then the Burmese capital) at that time.<sup>13</sup> After these, there were several large waves of Rohingyas fleeing into Bangladesh, notably in 1991-92, 2012-13, and most recently in 2016-17.<sup>14</sup> The latest addition to such displacement has gained significant attention due to the number of people crossing the borders into

Bangladesh and the types of atrocities committed by the Tatmadaw.<sup>15</sup> About a million Rohingya people, who are officially defined by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) as Forcefully Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN), initially crossed the borders during the 2016-2017 violence in Rakhine.<sup>16</sup> They were let in under the direction of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's direct humanitarian considerations and are currently placed in 33 FDMN camps spread across various places of Cox's Bazar but mostly in Ukhia Upazilla.<sup>17</sup>

The negligence of Myanmar's Government to FDMNs back or facilitate repatriation, along with the current geopolitical tensions and civil war in Myanmar, has now resulted in a stalemate in the solution to the crisis. Given such circumstances, various security concerns and economic uncertainties arise due to gridlock. One of the primary security threats that has been identified is the proliferation of various Rohingya

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<sup>10</sup> Research Data Analyst, Centre for Alternatives.

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch- "Burmese Refugees In Bangladesh - Historical Background," May 2000. Cited in <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/burma/burm005-01.htm>. Accessed on 10 July 2024.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "Six Years of Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh: From Here to Where?" 27 June 2024. Cited in [https://www.spf.org/apbi/news\\_en/b\\_240627.html](https://www.spf.org/apbi/news_en/b_240627.html). Accessed on 10 July 2024.

<sup>15</sup> "New evidence shows how Myanmar's military planned its brutal purge of the Rohingya." 4 August 2022. Cited in <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/myanmar-rohingya-warcrimes-investigation/>. Accessed on 10 July 2024.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained". 23 August 2023. Cited in <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/#Monsoonseason>. Accessed on 10 July 2024.

Armed Groups (RAGs) and their reckless activities in the camps. Notable such groups are the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), which are arch rivals to each other. Still, also armed criminal and Islamist outfits such as Nobi Hossain Group, Munna Group, and Islami Mahas have become infamous for their activities.<sup>18</sup> These groups are desperate to achieve influence around the camps and are involved in violent and criminal activities such as murders, hijacking, and extortion.<sup>19</sup> They are increasing, showing the use of

lethal force and weapons not only against innocent FDMNs but also security and intelligence personnel. Recent developments in the territorial control of the Rakhine State of Myanmar due to the ongoing civil war have also complicated such a situation whereby Tatmadaw has been effectively defeated in most of the townships by the anti-Junta rebels.<sup>20</sup> Given this, GoB must proactively investigate this issue to stop further escalation and effectively prevent any spillover of criminal and violent activities within or outside these FDMN camps.

### Time based linechart

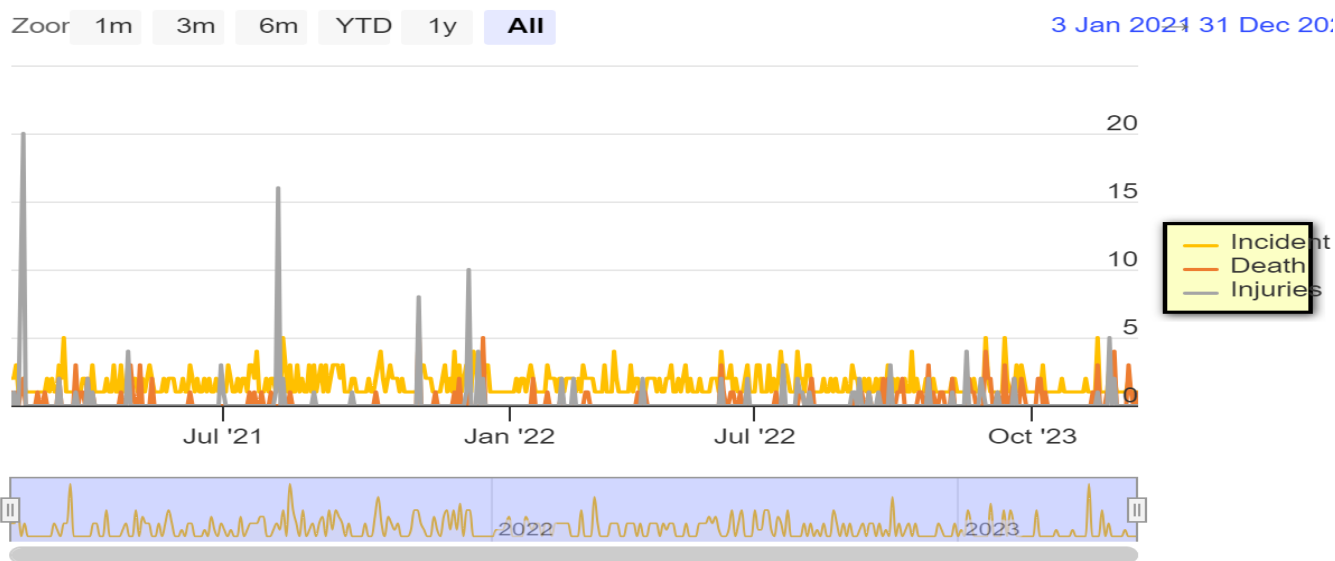


Figure I: Rohingya-Related Violent Incident From 2021 to 2023 (Source: BPO)

<sup>18</sup> “Competing armed groups pose a new threat to Rohingya in Bangladesh.” 11 December 2023. Cited in <https://myanmar.iiss.org/analysis/rohingya>. Accessed on 10 July 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> “War in Western Myanmar: Avoiding a Rakhine-Rohingya Conflict.” 10 May 2024. Cited in <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/war-western-myanmar-avoiding-rakhine-rohingya-conflict>. Accessed on 10 July 2024.

Figure 1 depicts the Rohingya-related violence from 2021 to 2023. We can see that in these three years, incidents related to FDMNs have become increasingly prevalent. This implies the persistence of violence in the camps for a significant period.

### The Situation in FDMN Camps

More than 742,000 FDMNs crossed the borders in 2017; half were children. In 2023, these numbers stood at around 960,000 FDMNs. Several large camps house them, namely the Kutupalong and Nayapara camps.<sup>21</sup> In 2021, about 30,000 FDMNs were relocated to the Bashan Char of Noakhali as a part of the GoB project to relocate the FDMNs.<sup>22</sup>

The FDMNs are barred from moving outside of the camps. They are also forbidden from being employed by local employers or engaging in economic activities. They are mainly prohibited from adopting any 'Bangladeshi Way of Living' to avoid integration into the local community and society. Despite these, there are reports about breaches in the camps and

FDMNs fleeing or working in various parts of the country.<sup>23</sup> There are also reports of the FDMNs acquiring illegal national IDs and passports with the help of corrupted local authorities.<sup>24</sup> These are incredibly frustrating developments regarding security and safety for the local communities.

An administrative body named the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) was set up in 1992 to administer these camps under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, which deals with the FDMN issues to this day.<sup>25</sup> It is responsible for overall coordination and concerns related to the camps with internal and external actors. To supplant the security of the camps, a particular unit of Bangladesh Police known as the Armed Police Battalion (APBN) has been set up.<sup>26</sup> Reportedly, this unit consists of two battalions with an additional battalion numbering around only 2000 personnel, sometimes assisted by the local police to maintain law and order. Such a small workforce to keep order in the camps of millions of people is concerning and needs to be revised. Lack of workforce in terms of law

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<sup>21</sup> "Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained". 23 August 2023. Cited in <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/#Monsoonseason>. Accessed on 10 July 2024.

<sup>22</sup> "Country - Bangladesh - UNHCR Data Portal". n.d. Cited in <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/bgd#:~:text=Rohingya%20refugees%20are%20hosted%20in,Bangladesh%20to%20decongest%20the%20camps>. Accessed on 11 July 2024.

<sup>23</sup> "A Sustainable Policy for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh". 27 December 2019. Cited in <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/bangladesh/303-sustainable-policy-rohingya-refugees-bangladesh#:~:text=Among%20other%20things%2C%20the%20government,and%20threatened%20to%20ban%20more>. Accessed on 11 July 2024.

<sup>24</sup> "Rohingyas given NIDs, passports on forged docs." 27 February 2024. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/rohingyas-given-nids-passports-forged-docs-3553266>. Accessed on 11 July 2024.

<sup>25</sup> "New RRRRC assumes office in Cox's Bazar." 5 October 2020. Cited in [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office\\_of\\_the\\_Refugee\\_Relief\\_and\\_Repatriation\\_Commissioner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_of_the_Refugee_Relief_and_Repatriation_Commissioner). Accessed on 11 July 2024.

<sup>26</sup> "Armed police battalions take charge of Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar." 2 July 2020. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/news/armed-police-battalions-take-charge-rohingya-camps-coxs-bazar-1923689>. Accessed on 11 July 2024.

enforcement and restrictions to any free movement outside camps can be a significant reason for the proliferation of armed groups where people finding no

work can be involved in hateful rhetoric and find loopholes in security measures to facilitate criminal activities.

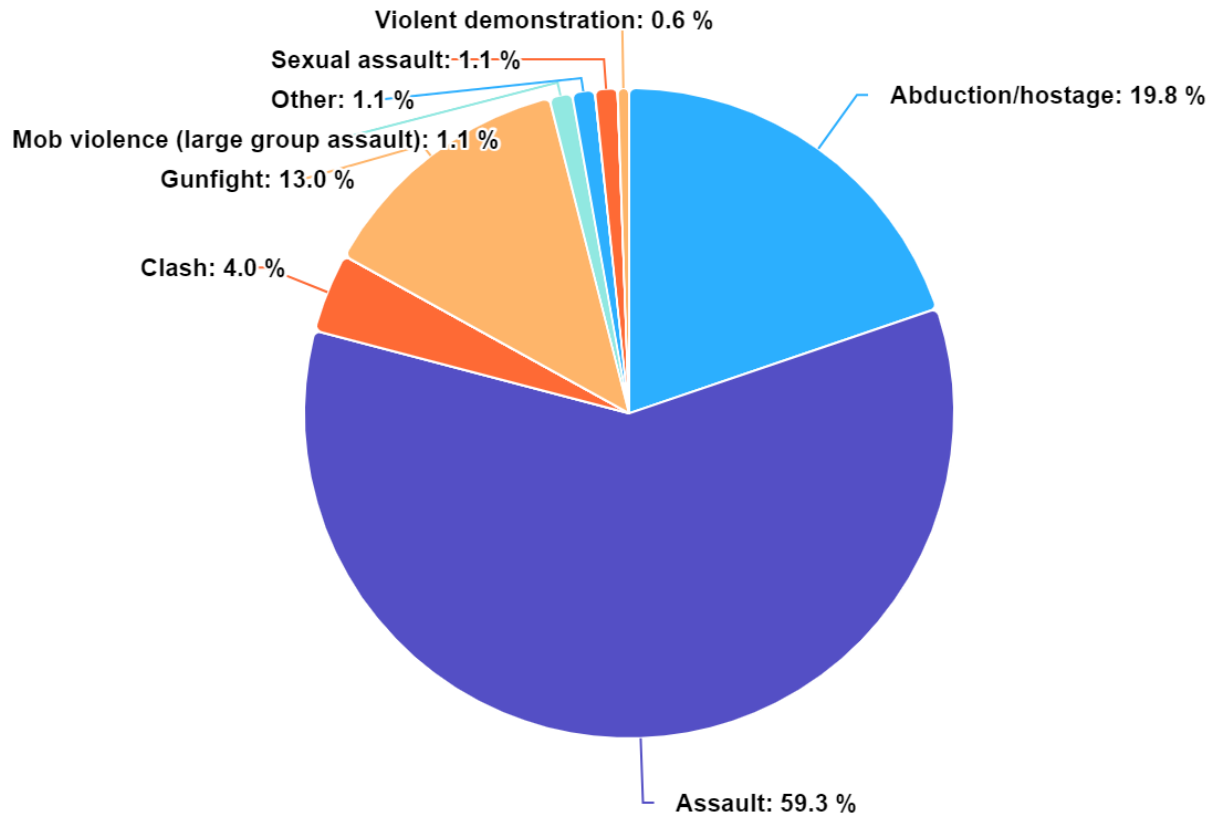


Figure 2: Types of Rohingya-based Violence from 2021-2023 (Source: BPO)

Figure 2 reflects the types of violence in the FDMN camps from 2021 to 2023. More than half of the violence was assault-based, indicating targeted

murders primarily based on inter-party rivalry and influence inside the camps. Besides this, abduction also remains a significant concern inside the camps. Various

violent actors conduct abduction for ransom mainly to improve their economic situation, and it also acts as a source of funding. Besides, rival groups also engage in gunfights within themselves mostly or with law enforcement, which ranks as the third most prolific act of violence.

### **Proliferation of Armed Groups**

The start of the 2016-17 Rohingya Crisis was initiated when a shady and infamous militant outfit named ARSA raided and ambushed several police stations and killed about a dozen Tatmadaw police officers in Rakhine.<sup>27</sup> This event eventually spiralled into the securitization against the Rohingyas, which was used to justify the atrocities against them. After seven years of the crisis, several new groups like RSO, Nobi Hossain Group, Munna Group, and Islami Mahas sprang up alongside ARSA and vowed to establish dominance inside camps. According to Ministry of Defense (MOD) records of 2023, at least 11 active RAGs are in the camps.<sup>28</sup>

These groups have diverse motivations. Groups like ARSA and RSO vow to establish influence and supremacy in the camps.<sup>29</sup> ARSA is especially dangerous given its role in killing several Majhi (Block Leaders of the Camp) and Sub-Majhi (Assistant Block Leader of the Camp) to instill fear in the hearts and minds of common FDMNs.<sup>30</sup> There are also reports of 'Night Governance' in the camps whereby authorities effectively lose control of the camps during the night. ARSA and RSO run parallel governance in their respective areas of influence and power.<sup>31</sup> Some RAGs like Nobi Hossain and Munna Group are mainly armed criminal gangs. Sometimes, they established a nexus between them and ARSA or RSO with divide-and-rule principles. Their focus is primarily based on drug smuggling, robbery, abduction, human trafficking, and arms smuggling to other RAGs.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, another RAG named Islami Mahas is different from the group above. Unlike other RAGs, it's based on religious fundamentalism and promotes Islamic Militancy. This creates a potential for the camps to be a breeding ground for deadly terrorists and extremists.

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<sup>27</sup> "Arsa: The Rohingya militants who tipped Rakhine into crisis." 13 September 2017. Cited in

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/arsa-the-rohingya-militants-who-tipped-rakhine-into-crisis>. Accessed on 28 July 2024.

<sup>28</sup> "Defence ministry report 11 active armed groups in Rohingya camps". 27 February 2024. Cited in

<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/crime-and-law/sbyhp2noh4>. Accessed on 11 July 2024.

<sup>29</sup> "Competing armed groups pose new threat to Rohingya in Bangladesh". 11 December 2023. Cited in

<https://myanmar.iiss.org/analysis/rohingya>. Accessed on 10 July 2024.

<sup>30</sup> "ARSA behind killings in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh: intel." 4 November 2022. Cited in

<https://www.newagebd.net/article/185541/arsa-behind-killings-in-rohingya-camps-intel>. Accessed on 30 July 2024.

<sup>31</sup> "Competing armed groups pose new threat to Rohingya in Bangladesh." 11 December 2023. Cited in

<https://myanmar.iiss.org/analysis/rohingya>. Accessed on 10 July 2024.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

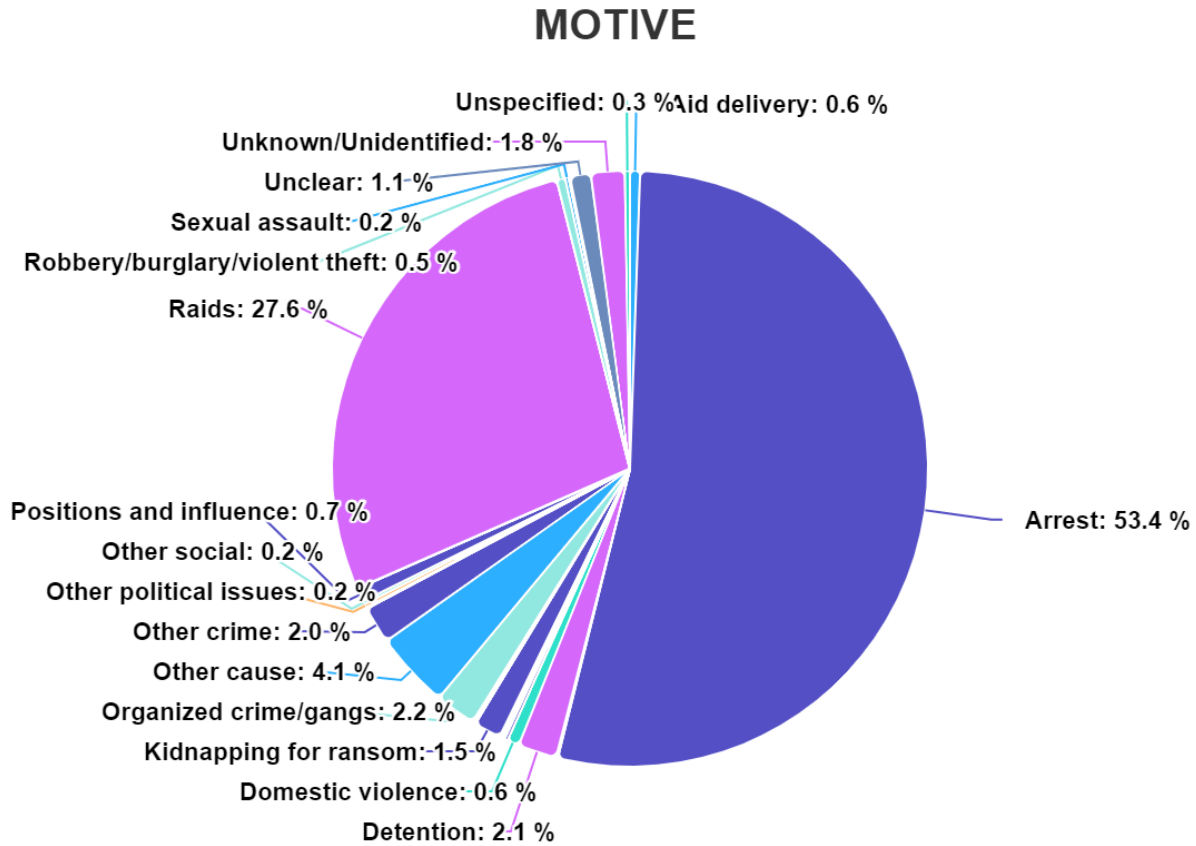


Figure 3: Motivations of Rohingya-Related Violent Incidents from 2021-2023 (Source: BPO)

Figure 3 shows the significant motivations of incidents related to the FDMNs. Most of the motivations are related to arrests and raids. Therefore, security forces are often involved in these incidents to conduct law enforcement activities inside the camps.

### Shifting Territorial Controls in Rakhine

The territorial control of Rakhine has been shifting dramatically since three of the significant Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) initiated a combined offensive against the Junta-led State Administration Council

(SAC) in late October last year.<sup>33</sup> In Rakhine, anti-SAC offensives are primarily led by the Arakan Army or, at present, rebranded as the Arakan Army (AA), which is the armed wing of the political party named United League of Arakan (ULA).<sup>34</sup> AA/ULA now controls more than half of the townships in Rakhine and has strengthened its efforts to take control of the border area with Bangladesh.<sup>35</sup> This is concerning because the relationship between AA/ULA and Rohingyas is quite contentious. There have been reports that AA/ULA and SAC both have been persecuting the Rohingyas in the ongoing clashes between them.<sup>36</sup> This risks the possibility of newly pushing Rohingya people from Rakhine into Bangladesh, these two warring factions. Furthermore, as SAC forces lose control of the border areas, it creates safe passage for the Rohingya armed groups to operate across the borderlands with impunity. It eases the smuggling of illegal weapons and drugs, with human trafficking taking place. Interestingly, SAC has asked Rohingya people to join its ranks due to workforce shortages and desertion.<sup>37</sup> Such a move to enlist the Rohingyas can prompt the FDMN to flee the camps to fight against the AA for incentives rather than stay idle in the FDMN camps. All these can worsen the already existing situation in

Cox's Bazar as a primary hub for drug smuggling and human trafficking.

### **Securitization of FDMNs**

The geopolitical realities and inefficiency in resolving the Rohingya crisis have taken shape, which may lead to a stranded FDMN situation. This may result in heightened anti-FDMN sentiment already prevailing in Bangladesh. The prospect of insecurity and instability because of the increasing number of Rohingya armed groups is real, but FDMNs are securitized as a threat to society collectively.<sup>38</sup> Given this scenario, GoB and other international partners and organizations must focus on resolving the crisis as soon as possible. Violence against innocent men and women is unacceptable regardless of nationality, but securitization of the refugees in a stranded situation is also not uncommon in contemporary times. There must be a balance between distinguishing the criminals from the innocent FDMNs. Innocent FDMNs shouldn't be judged through the lens as they mostly carry the effects of the violence perpetrated by the Rohingya armed groups. Policymakers, bureaucrats, security officials, media, and NGOs working in the camps must

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<sup>33</sup> "Operation 1027: Changing the tides of the Myanmar civil war?". 16 January 2024. Cited in <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/operation-1027-changing-the-tides-of-the-myanmar-civil-war/>. Accessed on 11 July 2024.

<sup>34</sup> "Understanding the Arakan Army". 21 April 2023. Cited in <https://www.stimson.org/2023/understanding-the-arakan-army/>. Accessed on 12 July 2024.

<sup>35</sup> "Arakan Army Launches Battle For Control of Myanmar's Border With Bangladesh." 22 May 2024. Cited in <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/arakan->

[army-launches-battle-for-control-of-myanmars-border-with-bangladesh.html](https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/arakan-army-launches-battle-for-control-of-myanmars-border-with-bangladesh.html). Accessed on 12 July 2024.

<sup>36</sup> "Myanmar: Rohingya at Risk in Rakhine Fighting." 9 February 2024. Cited in <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/09/myanmar-rohingya-risk-rakhine-fighting>. Accessed on 12 July 2024.

<sup>37</sup> "Myanmar's army massacred Rohingyas. Now it wants their help." 8 April 2024. Cited in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-68730994>. Accessed on 12 July 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Md Sohel Rana and Ali Riaz. "Securitization of the Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh". *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. 2023.

spread the discourse of peace and stability, focusing on curbing the crimes committed by the RAG.

### **Conclusion**

The Rohingya Crisis has been a central issue of Bangladesh's foreign policy since 2017. The current scenario is dominated by the emergence of non-state RAG and crimes committed by them. The relevant

stakeholders must have vital policy planning and action to prevent the proliferation of RAG and to cease the presence of existing RAG in the FDMN camps. Eventually, a permanent solution with voluntary repatriation is the only way to achieve peace in the affected zone, which now seems challenging due to geopolitical realities and complexities arising from the varied interests of the actors involved.

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## The Stranded Million: Rohingyas in Bangladesh and their Repatriation

Mohammad Atique Rahman<sup>39</sup>

Kawsar Uddin Mahmud<sup>40</sup>

### I. Introduction

This article intends to assess the current state of the nearly 1.2 million Rohingya displaced community who have been living in Bangladesh as a protracted refugee situation since 2017. This was not the first time Bangladesh hosted a Rohingya displaced community who left their country to save their lives. But in terms of the magnitude of the number so far, Bangladesh has been struggling with providing shelter, protection, and livelihoods to over 1.2 million stranded Rohingya communities and also taking various diplomatic measures for their safe return to their home country. This article also explores and provides recommendations for a sustainable solution to their return and the role of international and regional organizations in supporting this measure.

Rohingyas were recognized as the citizens of Burma, as stipulated in the first Constitution of the Union of Burma<sup>41</sup>. However, Myanmar has scrapped the Rohingya Muslim minority's citizenship rights.<sup>42</sup> The Rohingyas predominantly live in the Arakan State of Myanmar; through concerted political measures and

military operations, which are tantamount to genocide and genocidal activities, the Myanmar state forced the Rohingyas to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh<sup>43</sup>. We argue that refugeehood is not a choice. What makes refugees or the push factors behind someone becoming a refugee varies from one context to another. Discriminatory citizenship policy, oppressive laws, and large-scale violence committed by the state security forces and majority community often create minorities, displaced persons, refugees, and stateless persons.

The issue of displaced persons and refugees got international attention after the Second World War, which uprooted and dislocated an unprecedented number of people, which was roughly 55 million in Europe alone. The leaders of the allied forces (USA, UK, and Soviet Union) realized the problem of dealing with these displaced persons who were unable to return to their homeland due to insecurity and life threats. American President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor D. Roosevelt, predicted that the war caused mass-scale problems

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<sup>41</sup> The official English name was changed by the country's government from the "Union of Burma" to the "Union of Myanmar" in 1989, and still later to the "Republic of the Union of Myanmar".

<sup>42</sup> It may be noted that there are Hindus and Christians also among the Rohingyas in the camps of Cox's Bazar.

<sup>43</sup> Amena Mohsin and Mohammad Atique Rahman (2022), *Living with Violence and Trauma: The Case of Rohingya Women in Myanmar and Bangladesh*, Centre for Genocide Studies, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

with human refugees, and a new kind of refugees emerged after the end of WWII who did not wish to return to their home country to avoid death and persecution by their governments. Identifying this critical nature of the refugee problem, Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognizes the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries<sup>44</sup>. Owing to this principle, the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted in 1951, defines 'refugee' (Art. 1, 1951)<sup>45</sup> as someone unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

Therefore, this convention underlies the responsibility of the international community and the host country towards these persons who fled their home country and cannot return to the same. That includes non-discrimination in providing essential services to the refugees, non-penalization for illegal entry into the host country, and a principle of non-refoulement. The principle of non-refoulement stipulates that they are not expelled or returned to a territory against their will, where they fear threats to life or freedom<sup>46</sup>. Despite the world community duly recognizing the importance of refugee protection and adopting various measures to deal with this matter, at

present, more people are living in refugee conditions than in the post-World War II time. According to estimates by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 114 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced (as of September 2023).<sup>47</sup> That stretches across Ukraine, the Sahel region, Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria, and Myanmar, which doubled the refugee population since 2013.<sup>48</sup>

Although Bangladesh was not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention in 2017, Bangladesh had to open its border and provide shelter to the most significant influx of Rohingya people who had to flee from their country- Myanmar. The August 2017 violence committed against the Rohingya was the culmination of decades of systemic political, legal, and social persecution as well as humiliation inflicted by the Myanmar state. Looking at the nature of violence, one may suggest that it was Myanmar's final solution for its Rohingya people. The United Nations (UN) has termed them as one of the most persecuted people in the world. The August 2017 violence against the Rohingyas in Myanmar made more than 700,000 Rohingyas cross over to Bangladesh<sup>49</sup>. They took shelter in Bangladesh, officially known as the forcibly displaced persons from Myanmar; they live in 34 refugee camps in Teknaf and Ukhiya Upazilla of Cox's Bazar. At present, Bangladesh has been hosting approximately 1.2 million Rohingya since August

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<sup>44</sup> UNHCR (2011), Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees. URL:

<https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees>

<sup>45</sup> [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.23\\_convention%20refugees.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.23_convention%20refugees.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Reliefweb (2024), The refugee and migration situation. URL: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/refugee-and-migration-situation#:~:text=According%20to%20estimates%20by%20the,refugees%20has%20more%20than%20doubled.>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/rohingya-refugees-bangladesh-facts>

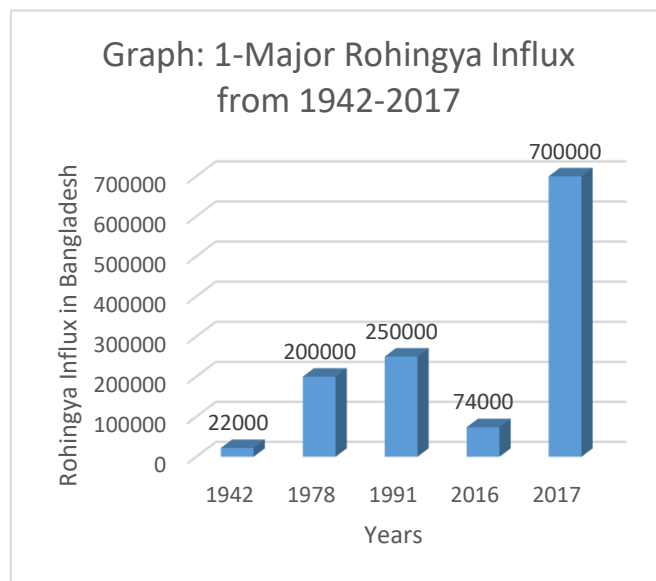
2017.<sup>50</sup> According to UNICEF, more than 52 percent are children, which is approximately 683,000 living in the congested and squalid camps in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh<sup>51</sup>. Also, each year since 2017, nearly 35,000 new births have been registered in the Rohingya camps every year. This would mean that since 2017, an additional 150,000 new members have been added to the Rohingya community in 2022.<sup>52</sup> The local people (or host community) of Cox’s Bazar had set an example of humanity and solidarity towards the Rohingya displaced people by hosting more than one million of them. The long-term Rohingya presence has put tremendous demographic and socio-economic pressures on the host community.

Moreover, since there is no progress on the Rohingya repatriation issue, it further aggravates the situation. In this context, several factors like environmental degradation, economic instability, unequal access to relief and humanitarian assistance, and uncertainty about the recovery of their lands, which are now being used as campsites for the Rohingyas, are some of the factors that may lead to social tension between the host community and Rohingya refugees. In this context, the return of the Rohingyas to their homeland stands at the centre point of the strategic action plan.

<sup>50</sup>Talukder, et.al, (2022), Assessment of Economic Opportunities for Young Rohingyas in Bangladesh. URL: [https://rohingyaresponse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/LSDS-Study-Report\\_Assessment-of-economic-opportunities-for-young-Rohingyas\\_November-2022.pdf](https://rohingyaresponse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/LSDS-Study-Report_Assessment-of-economic-opportunities-for-young-Rohingyas_November-2022.pdf)

## II. Historical Review - Rohingya influx in Bangladesh since 1942

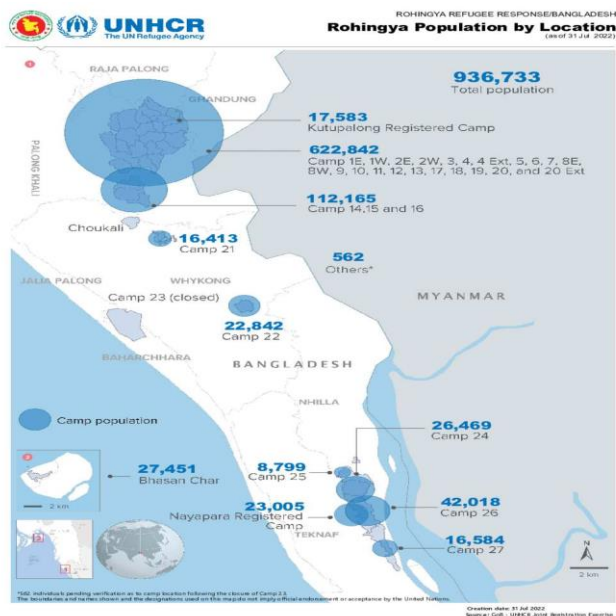
The Rohingya influx posed last century's refugee problem for Bangladesh. The first influx took place in 1942. The outbreak of communal violence between the Rakhine and Rohingya communities in Rakhine state resulted in around 22,000 Rohingyas crossing the border of British India and taking shelter in Bengal<sup>53</sup>. In 1977, the government of Myanmar began Operation Naga Min (Dragon King), which aimed to screen the population. 200,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh, they alleged of being abused at the hands of the Myanmar government and army. In 1978, a massive military



<sup>51</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/rohingya-beyond-survival-alert>

<sup>52</sup> Rahman, M. (2022). The government is worried as the Rohingya population grows fast in Bangladesh camps. *The New Age*, 11 April 2022.

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/burma/burm005-01.htm>



operation forced another 20,000 Rohingyas to seek refuge in Bangladesh. The operation included forced relocation, loot, rape, and vandalization of mosques<sup>54</sup>. They were settled in 13 camps under the UN supervision in Cox’s Bazar and Bandarban districts. The government of Bangladesh and Myanmar Junta government started the repatriation program in July 1978<sup>55</sup>. Given this effort, 180,000 Rohingyas returned to their home country between 1978-79<sup>56</sup>. The third wave of influx took place in 1991-92 when around 250,000 Rohingyas entered Bangladesh from Myanmar to avoid persecution and torture by Myanmar’s

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/historical-review-rohingya-influx-1978>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.msf.org:7979/sites/default/files/old-cms/source/downloads/2002/rohingya.doc>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-country-operations-plan-2003-bangladesh>

military in Rakhine state. In 1993, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the two governments and the third party called UNCHR (UN High Commission for Refugees). In the next four years (1993-97), over 230,000 Rohingyas returned to Myanmar<sup>57</sup>. From 2012-2015, sectarian violence between the Rohingyas and the Rakhine Buddhist community displaced around 140,000 Rohingyas. In October 2016, followed by the killing of nine police officers, the Myanmar Army launched a clearance operation against the Rohingyas, displacing more than 100,000. Around 74,000 fled to Bangladesh<sup>58</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, Bangladesh is neither a signatory of the 1951 refugee convention nor the 1967 protocol or any regional instruments relating to refugees. However, up until 1992, the Rohingya population in Bangladesh was officially registered as refugees by the UNHCR and GoB. These registered refugees live in two official camps, Kutupalong and Nayapara, in Cox’s Bazar district<sup>59</sup>. Since 1992, the Government of Bangladesh stopped registering Rohingyas as refugees in Bangladesh and identified them as “undocumented Myanmar nationals.” It is to be noted that before the recent influx since August 25, 2017, 33,000 registered refugees in Bangladesh resided in UNCHR-managed camps. After 2017, the Bangladesh government and the international refugee and relief agencies set up thirty-three camps in Ukhiya

<sup>58</sup> Amena Mohsin and Mohammad Atique Rahman (2022), *Living with Violence and Trauma: The Case of Rohingya Women in Myanmar and Bangladesh*, Centre for Genocide Studies, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<sup>59</sup> Milton et al. (2017), Trapped in Statelessness: Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 14(8): 942.

and Teknaf Upazilla (see Map-1).<sup>60</sup> Bangladesh Government recognized them as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) from Myanmar.

### III. Rohingya Repatriation Process

Although Bangladesh is not a signatory to the 1951 convention, the country has adopted all possible measures to ensure the protection, livelihood, and safety of these displaced people from Myanmar. Refugeehood and displacement of a large-scale population is not a one-country problem. The cross-border movement of refugees and displaced people in many countries requires effective collaboration between countries of origin, host countries, and international and regional communities. For example, the Rohingya community in Myanmar, facing decades-long persecution, torture, deaths, and dishonours, embarked on crossing the border to save their lives and dignity.

According to UNCHR, one million Rohingyas were displaced by the internal conflicts in Myanmar to take shelter in neighbouring countries. They are mainly in Bangladesh (860,000), Malaysia (101,000), and India (18,000), as well as smaller numbers in Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand, and other countries<sup>61</sup>. The primary objectives of this collaboration are to provide protection and safety for the refugees with dignity and

honour. The secondary aim is to initiate and implement one of the three durable solutions. These are voluntary returns in safety and dignity, local integration, and resettlement to another location or country. Bangladesh, since 1993, has been implementing the first durable solution, i.e., voluntary returns in safety and dignity for the Rohingya displaced people. After the August 2017 influx, the Bangladesh Government initiated the repatriation process. In this context, Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an initial deal for the possible repatriation of the Rohingya to Myanmar on November 23, 2017.<sup>62</sup> According to the *Guardian*, the deal was based on a 1992/93 repatriation pact between the two countries in which Bangladesh stressed completing the repatriation process within the shortest period<sup>63</sup>. Myanmar, in this deal, demanded that they would accept Rohingya people with identity documents issued by governments in the past<sup>64</sup>. They also need to fill in forms with the names of the family members, previous addresses in Myanmar, birth dates, and a statement of voluntary return. Identifying the Rohingyas based on two principles, i.e., identity documents and their former residence address as a prerequisite for the repatriation, complicates this process.

First of all, the majority of the Rohingyas are deprived of nationality of Myanmar by its 1982

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<sup>60</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/95379>

<sup>61</sup> UNHCR (2021), *The Displacement and Statelessness of Myanmar in the Asia Pacific Region*. URL: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/The%20Displaced%20and%20Stateless%20of%20Myanmar%20in%20the%20Asia-Pacific%20Region%20-%20January%202021.pdf>

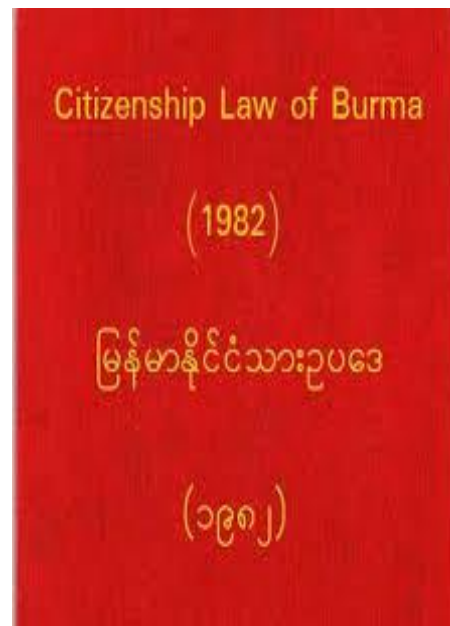
<sup>62</sup> S M Ali Reza (2024), *Six Years of Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh: From Here to Where? Asia Peace Building Initiative*. URL: [https://www.spf.org/apbi/news\\_en/b\\_240627.html](https://www.spf.org/apbi/news_en/b_240627.html)

<sup>63</sup> *The Guardian* (2017), *Myanmar signs pact with Bangladesh over Rohingya repatriation*. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/23/myanmar-signs-pact-with-bangladesh-over-rohingya-repatriation>

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

Citizenship Law. According to this law, there are three categories of citizens, i.e., full citizens, associate citizens, and naturalized citizens. People from the officially recognized national races settled in Burma before 1823. Rohingyas, despite their long history of presence in Myanmar, were not recognized among the eight national races in the 1982 Citizenship Law. They are not even included in 135 other officially-recognized ethnic groups in Myanmar. This Citizenship Act, however, accepts the citizenship of the children if their parents were citizens of Myanmar before the 1982 Act. In this case, Rohingya children born after 1982 may be able to register themselves as citizens of Myanmar based on their citizenship accrued by the 1948 Citizenship Act.

But in reality, the Myanmar authorities, after 1982, refused and restricted registering Rohingya children and also denied their parents Citizenship by issuing colour cards. Over the years,



Rohingyas have failed to obtain new identity cards under the 1982 Law known as Citizenship Scrutiny Cards (CSC). Those who have surrendered their National Registration Cards (NRCs)



**Images 1 & 2: Identification Cards of Union of Myanmar<sup>65</sup>**

with their applications to obtain CSC did not have them returned from Myanmar's officials<sup>66</sup>. In 1995, the Myanmar government started issuing Temporary

<sup>65</sup> The photo of the identification card was taken by the Author in Refugee Camp no. 13, Balukhali Refugee, Kutupalong, Ukhiya Upazilla, Cox's Bazar, on 24 December 2019.

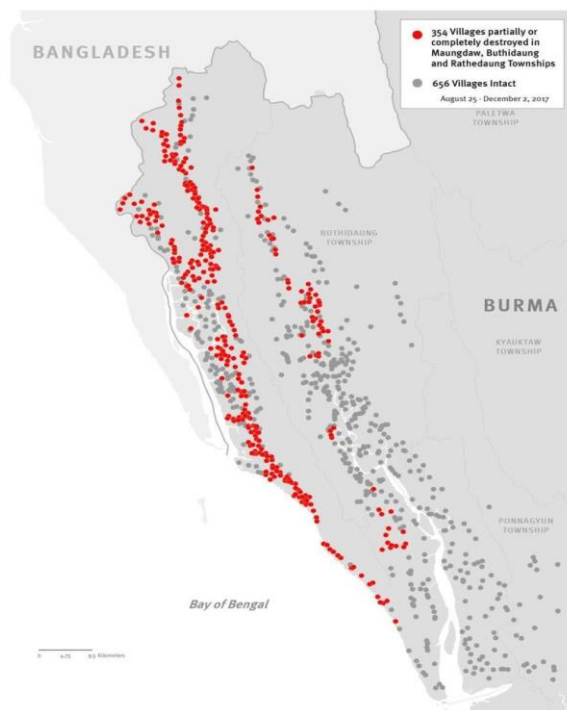
<sup>66</sup> Amnesty International (2017), Caged with a Roof: Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State. URL: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/myanmar-apartheid-in-rakhine-state/>.

Registration Cards (TRCs) or “white cards” (see Images 1 and 2). This card is not proof of citizenship. Instead, it says that the person bearing this card is still in the process of determining their citizenship by the authority. In 2015, the President of Myanmar, Thein Sein, revoked this card and issued a Temporal Approval Card. In this way, the Myanmar government denied the possibility of acquiring full citizenship for the Rohingya people. They are not allowed to own property and stand for election. Therefore, legally, it isn't easy to purchase land in Myanmar. Many of the Rohingyas have no permanent domicile in Myanmar.

Secondly, due to the military crackdown in Rakhine state from 1978 till 2017, thousands of Rohingyas have been displaced either internally or externally. The Myanmar military systematically destroyed hundreds of Rohingya villages to erase the residence addresses of these uprooted people. According to the Human Rights Watch, around 354 villages have been partially or entirely destroyed since August 25, 2017. (See Image.3<sup>67</sup>). It was that time when around 700,000 Rohingyas took shelter in Bangladesh. Therefore, it is tough for the Rohingyas to identify and locate their villages as places/addresses of residence, which is a prerequisite for the repatriation process.

Moreover, before 2017, in 2012, the Myanmar government set up detention camps for more than 140,000 Rohingyas who were internally displaced in Rakhine state due to the ethnic cleansing operations.

Since 2012, they have been confined to open-air prisons (camps) in Sittwe, Rakhine State. According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, these displaced Rohingyas are confined in 24 camps and camps-like settings, where the Myanmar authority restricted their freedom of movement and access to education, primary health care, and humanitarian aid<sup>68</sup>. In this context, the requirements for identification documents have been a contentious issue for the stateless Rohingyas as the Myanmar government has been depriving them of acquiring vital identity and



<sup>67</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/18/burma-40-rohingya-villages-burned-october>

<sup>68</sup> Human Rights Watch (2020), Myanmar: Mass Detention of Rohingya in Squalid Camps. URL:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/08/myanmar-mass-detention-rohingya-squalid-camps>.

residency documents, which includes blocking newborn babies from the household lists.<sup>69</sup> However, voluntary and safe return is the heart of the repatriation process; in reality, the security conditions of Rakhine State are not so conducive due to the ongoing ethnic clash and civil strife between the local people and the army. Tiny numbers of Rohingyas (approximately 1200) have been repatriated so far. Still, these people in Myanmar are living under strict restrictions with no freedom of mobility and are closely watched by the military.<sup>70</sup>

#### **IV. Bangladesh Bears the Burden of Rohingyas:**

The Rohingya crisis, now in its seventh year, remains one of the major humanitarian crises of the contemporary world. Nearly 1.2 million Rohingya refugees reside in Bangladesh, primarily in Cox's Bazar and on the island of Bhasan Char, making it the largest refugee camp in the world. This crisis has led to the

development of several significant issues for the refugees, the host communities, and the regional actors, including the countries and international organizations, which are not likely to be resolved shortly and are associated with the future of Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the ASEAN region.<sup>71</sup> The current status of the Rohingya crisis is characterized by a stalemate where the refugees are between the horns of safe and feasible repatriation to Myanmar and the unsustainable and fast deteriorating situation in Bangladesh<sup>72</sup>. The 2023 Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya crisis has been proposed at \$876 million as it targets delivering aid to 1.47 million displaced Rohingyas and host communities in Cox's Bazar<sup>73</sup>. Similarly, the 2024 JRP requests funding of \$852.4 million to assist 1.35 million individuals residing in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char, as well as the Bangladeshi host populations in Ukhiya and Teknaf<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Amnesty International (2017), Caged with a Roof: Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State. URL: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/myanmar-apartheid-in-rakhine-state/>.

<sup>70</sup> Saha, K. K. 2023. *Rohingya Repatriation: Caught Between State Failure and Armed Resistance*. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. [https://www.ipcs.org/comm\\_select.php?articleNo=5852](https://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=5852).

<sup>71</sup> Milton et al. (2017), Trapped in Statelessness: Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. Link: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14080942>; BDNews24 (2024), Rohingya Crisis May Get Deeper for Bangladesh, India in Coming Days: Donald Lu. Link: <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/j608t62hfr>; Shahnam Karin et al (2020), Status of Rohingya in Refugee Camps of Bangladesh: A Review Study, *Open Access Library*. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1106575>.

<sup>72</sup> Brian Gorlick (2019), The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Rethinking Solutions and Accountability. *Refugee Studies Centre. Working Paper Series*, no. 131. Link:

[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3506638](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3506638); Shamsul Bari (2020), The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: A Time Bomb Waiting to Explode. *Social Change* 50, no. 2 Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049085719901038>; Anas Ansar (2020), The Unfolding of Belonging, Exclusion and Exile: A Reflection on the History of Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 40, no. 3. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2020.1819126>; Shahinur Bashar (2021), The Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh: Environmental Impacts, Policies, and Practices. Link: [https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/graduate\\_projects/m326m865f](https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/graduate_projects/m326m865f); Hossain Ahmed Taufiq, "Rohingya Refugee Crisis and the State of Insecurity in Bangladesh," *arXiv Preprint arXiv:2107.12080*, 2021, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2107.12080>.

<sup>73</sup> BSS (2023), UNHCR, Partners Seek \$876m for Rohingyas, Host Communities. *The Business Standard*. Link: <https://www.tbsnews.net/rohingya-crisis/unhcr-partners-seek-876m-rohingyas-host-communities-595934>.

<sup>74</sup> UNHCR (2024), UN and Partners Seek \$852.4m to Support Rohingya Refugees and Bangladeshi Hosts. *UNHCR*. Link:

Since the crisis unfolded in 2017, the plan has been aiming to address many needs—from necessities like food and shelter to more complex issues—such as protection services, education, and livelihood opportunities.<sup>75</sup>

However, the reality on the ground is still grim. Despite rigorous humanitarian efforts, UNHCR found that nearly 45% of Rohingya families need to relish a sufficiently healthy diet, which further causes widespread malnutrition.<sup>76</sup> In late 2022, it was stated that the financial resources allocated to the food assistance program for displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh would be reduced.<sup>77</sup> Due to insufficient funds, the World Food Programme (WFP) reduced food aid from US\$12 per person per month to US\$10 in March 2023 and further down to US\$8 in June 2023.<sup>78</sup> The World Food Programme (WFP) has been compelled to decrease the food supplies in camps in Bangladesh by 30% due to a significant lack of money. This decision is likely to worsen existing health issues and catalyze the swelling cases of child marriage, child

labour, and gender-based violence.<sup>79</sup> The allocation of rations was initially intended to be zeroed out in 2024. USAID, conversely, committed to providing a donation that would sustain the program by contributing US\$10 each month.<sup>80</sup> However, the reduction in rations has already deteriorated food security, as the whole displaced Rohingya population hinges upon humanitarian aid to fulfill their essential survival requirements.<sup>81</sup>

When discussing health problems, one has to state that the camps' living conditions are not the best for health purposes.<sup>82</sup> In this regard, affected refugees experience overcrowding; one million live in crowded and congested places. This dilemma poses adverse consequences to the quality of life of refugees and involves health and safety issues. In addition, the annual monsoon season and the threat of cyclones further composite these risks, necessitating more efforts in disaster risk management and climate change mitigation.<sup>83</sup> Also, over 50% of the refugees in the camps are children and youth, being left with a

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<https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/un-and-partners-seek-852-4m-support-rohingya-refugees-and-bangladeshi-hosts>.

<sup>75</sup> BSS (2023).

<sup>76</sup> BSS (2023) and UNHCR (2024).

<sup>77</sup> WFP (2024), Bangladesh - Impact of Food Ration Cuts on the Displaced Rohingya Population in Cox's Bazar. *ReliefWeb*. Link: <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/bangladesh-impact-food-ration-cuts-displaced-rohingya-population-coxs-bazar-may-2024>.

<sup>78</sup> WFP (2024).

<sup>79</sup> BSS (2023), *ibid*; European Commission (2024), Food Ration Cuts in Bangladesh: A Year of Struggles and Hope for Rohingya Refugees. *European Commission*. Link: [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/food-ration-cuts-bangladesh-year-struggles-and-hope-rohingya-refugees\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/food-ration-cuts-bangladesh-year-struggles-and-hope-rohingya-refugees_en).

<sup>80</sup> WFP (2024).

<sup>81</sup> Christine Pirovolakis (2023), Rohingya Refugees Face Hunger and Loss of Hope after Latest Ration Cuts. *UNHCR*, Link:

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/rohingya-refugees-face-hunger-and-loss-hope-after-latest-ration-cuts>; Crisis Group (2023), Crisis Mounts for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh.

*International Crisis Group*, Link:

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/bangladesh/355-crisis-mounts-rohingya-refugees-bangladesh>.

<sup>82</sup> Shahana Afrose Chowdhury and Ayesha Tasnim Mostafa (2020), Rohingya Refugees: Risks and Safety in Bangladesh. in *Citizenship, Nationalism and Refugeehood of Rohingyas in Southern Asia*, ed. Nasreen Chowdhury and Biswajit Mohanty. Doi: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2168-3\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2168-3_8); Mallik Akram Hossain, A. K. M. Ahsan Ullah, and Md. Mohiuddin, "Rohingya Refugees in the Pandemic: Crisis and Policy Responses," *Global Policy* 14, no. 1 (February 2023): 183–91, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13156>.

<sup>83</sup> Bapon Fakhruddin, Karunakar Kintada, and Quamrul Hassan (2022), Understanding Hazards: Probabilistic Cyclone Modelling

temporary future. The youngsters, who are deprived of their right to proper education, are not only presently disadvantaged, but they are likely to become a 'lost generation' unable to construct their future in Bangladesh, Myanmar, or anywhere else<sup>84</sup>. In January 2024, UNHCR reported the swelling in the number of Rohingya refugees dying or going missing while escaping Bangladesh and Myanmar by boat journeys in 2023.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the security milieu in the camps has worsened in recent years, with reports of provoking violence and criminal activity. The conflicts among the different groups have given rise to more than 100 killings over the past seven years, including the high-profile assassination of prominent Rohingya leader Mohibullah, the chief leader of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights (ARSPH), who unrecognized gunmen killed in Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar.

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for Disaster Risk to the Eastern Coast in Bangladesh, *Progress in Disaster Science*: 100216; Katja Neef, Evan Jones, and Jay Marlowe (2023), The Conflict, Climate Change, and Displacement Nexus Revisited: The Protracted Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Bangladesh. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 18, no. 3. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/15423166231190040>.

<sup>84</sup> Robin E. Al-Haddad, Kendra L. Duran, and Saleh Ahmed (2022), A Lost Generation: Perpetual Education Insecurity among the Rohingya. *Race Ethnicity and Education* 25, no. 6. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2022.2069738>; Rubayat Jesmin (2019), Without School, a 'Lost Generation' of Rohingya Refugee Children Face Uncertain Future. *The Conversation*, Link: <http://theconversation.com/without-school-a-lost-generation-of-rohingya-refugee-children-face-uncertain-future-118805>.

<sup>85</sup> Gwen Robinson (2024), Rohingya Refugees Signal Despair and Hope in World's Most Crowded Camp. *Nikkei Asia*. Link: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/The-Big-Story/Myanmar-s-rohingya-refugees-signal-despair-and-hope-in-overcrowded-camp>.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel P. Sullivan (2021), Dire Consequences: Addressing the Humanitarian Fallout from Myanmar's Coup. *Refugees*

## V. The 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar and Possible Outcomes of Repatriation:

However, the broader geopolitical context in the region has been shaping the Rohingya crisis. The 2021 military coup in Myanmar has further convoluted prospects for repatriation, as the country is entangled with widespread civil unrest and armed resistance against the junta.<sup>86</sup> In this respect, the National Unity Government (NUG) has been leading a civil disobedience movement, while various regional 'insurgent' groups and People's Defense Forces (PDF) engaged in violent resistance.<sup>87</sup> This ongoing politico-economic instability makes safe repatriation impossible in the near term and raises concerns about the long-term feasibility of return even if political environments were to progress.<sup>88</sup> About this aspect, the international community's response to the Rohingya crisis has been diverse. While there was notable

*International*; Iqthyer Uddin Md Zahed (2023), Myanmar's Military Coup: The Rohingya Caught 'Between the Devil and the Deep Sea,'. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 23, no. 2: 213–31. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12394>; Adam Simpson (2021), Coups, Conflicts, and COVID-19 in Myanmar: Humanitarian Intervention and Responsibility to Protect in Intractable Crises, *Brown J. World Aff.* 28: 201.

<sup>87</sup> Chosein Yamahata (2022), Myanmar at a 'Point of No Return': Unity Reborn Despite Junta's Terrorization," in *Demystifying Myanmar's Transition and Political Crisis*, ed. Chosein Yamahata and Bobby Anderson. Doi: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-6675-9\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-6675-9_16); Anna S. King (2022), Myanmar's Coup d'état and the Struggle for Federal Democracy and Inclusive Government. *Religions*.

<sup>88</sup> Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides (2024), The Rohingya Repatriation Myth: Why Repatriation from Bangladesh to Myanmar Is (Nigh) Impossible, *Development in Practice*. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2024.2338213>.

financial assistance—the United States alone provided \$1.9 billion in aid between 2017 and September 2022—funding levels have been weakening recently.<sup>89</sup> Although countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, and Australia have imposed economic sanctions on Myanmar’s military junta, these measures have done little to address the Rohingya crisis directly.<sup>90</sup> However, two endeavours regarding repatriation, in November 2018 and August 2019, failed because no Rohingya were willing to return, mentioning unchanged and unsafe situations in Rakhine State.<sup>91</sup> About this, recent “go and see” visits by Rohingya delegations to camps in Rakhine state’s Maungdaw town have done little to rekindle hope for voluntary and safe repatriation.<sup>92</sup>

Currently, the situation in Myanmar itself continues to evolve in ways that have not only been impacting the Rohingya crisis but also driving away the focus on repatriation<sup>93</sup>. The humanitarian crisis has deteriorated further in the country due to the civil unrest, where Rohingya have been trapped between Military operations and ethnic armed groups such as the Arakan Army (AA). There are also reports

concerning the forced enrolment of young adults by the military junta and armed groups, thus adding risks to the remaining vulnerable population in Rakhine State as well as to the displaced ones in Bangladesh.<sup>94</sup> As per the reports of various human rights bodies since February 2024, Myanmar forces have enrolled more than 1,000 Rohingya Muslim male teenagers and children from camps of internally displaced people in Kyaukphyu, Sittwe, Maungdaw, and Buthidaung townships.<sup>95</sup> These individuals are reportedly subjected to abusive training sessions lasting two weeks before being deployed to the front lines of the conflict between the junta and the Arakan Army, resulting in numerous casualties<sup>96</sup>. The exploitation of Rohingya by both the Myanmar military and various armed groups and the protracted status of the displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh highlights the overall vulnerability of the population in the region. This disquieting development violates international humanitarian law and further complicates prospects for safe and voluntary repatriation, making it protracted for many years.

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<sup>89</sup> UNHCR (2024).

<sup>90</sup> Daniela Gavshon (2024), Australia’s Myanmar Sanctions, a Step Forward. *Human Rights Watch*. Link: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/06/australias-myanmar-sanctions-step-forward>; GOVUK (2024), Myanmar Military-Linked Enterprises and Infantry Divisions Sanctioned 3 Years on from the Military Coup. *GOV.UK*. Link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/myanmar-military-linked-enterprises-and-infantry-divisions-sanctioned-three-years-on-from-the-military-coup>; US Department of State (2024), Burma Sanctions. *United States Department of State*. Link: <https://www.state.gov/burma-sanctions/>.

<sup>91</sup> Nasir Uddin (2023).

<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group (2023).

<sup>93</sup> Robinson (2024).

<sup>94</sup> Kawsar Uddin Mahmud (2024), Why Has the Myanmar Junta Banned Its Male Citizens from Going Abroad for Work? *The Geopolitics*. Link: <https://thegeopolitics.com/why-has-the-myanmar-junta-banned-its-male-citizens-from-going-abroad-for-work>; Sreeparna Banerjee (2024), Rohingya Crisis: Exploitation, Recruitment, and Challenges. *Orfonline.org*. Link: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/rohingya-crisis-exploitation-recruitment-and-challenges>.

<sup>95</sup> Banerjee (2024).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

## VI. The Future of Rohingya Crisis and Repatriation: Recommendations

The question of repatriation is one of the vital aspects while we discuss the future of the Rohingya crisis. However, the current conditions in Myanmar make any large-scale, voluntary return of refugees soon doubtful. The 2021 military coup in Myanmar has not only derailed Myanmar's fragile democratic transition but has also aggravated conflicts across the country, including in Rakhine State, where the Rohingya would have been repatriated. The ongoing fighting between the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) and various ethnic armed organizations, including the Arakan Army in Rakhine State, has spawned a volatile and dangerous environment that is not suitable for Rohingya repatriation.<sup>97</sup> As one refugee noted, "I want to be in Myanmar tomorrow. But relatives and friends in Myanmar know no peace"<sup>98</sup>. However, in this regard, the role of regional organizations such as ASEAN, BIMSTEC, and BCIM in addressing and taking initiatives to resolve the Rohingya crisis has been inadequate and largely unsuccessful. ASEAN, in particular, has been

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<sup>97</sup> Al Jazeera (2024), Rohingya 'Genocide Intensifying' as War Rages in Myanmar's Rakhine: BROUK. *Al Jazeera*. Link: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/26/rohingya-genocide-intensifying-as-war-rages-in-myanmars-rakhine-brouk>.

<sup>98</sup> Sullivan (2022).

<sup>99</sup> Huong Le Thu (2021), ASEAN Has Risked Too Much in Inviting Myanmar's Junta Leader to Summit. *The Strategist*. Link: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/asean-has-risked-too-much-in-inviting-myanmars-junta-leader-to-summit/>; Al Jazeera (2021), Criticism over Myanmar ASEAN Deal with Military Coup Leader. *Al Jazeera*. Link: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/25/scant-support-for-in-myanmar-asean-deal-with-military-coup-leader>.

criticized for its poor response to the coup in Myanmar and its failure to effectively create pressure on the junta to make safe and sound conditions for safe repatriation<sup>99</sup>. ASEAN could play a more robust and constructive role by expediting dialogue between Myanmar and Bangladesh, providing humanitarian assistance, and supporting efforts to create a conducive environment for repatriation<sup>100</sup>. Nevertheless, the ASEAN's decision-making process and the divergent interests of its member states make it challenging to adopt a unified and forceful approach.<sup>101</sup>

BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation) are other regional. However, like ASEAN, these organizations have thus far played an inadequate role in addressing the crisis's political, human rights, and other dimensions. In this respect, the international community's approach has also been marked as a mix of humanitarian support, diplomatic pressure, and calls for accountability. However, the effectiveness of these efforts was limited by several

<sup>100</sup> Sadia Aktar Korobi (2024), Rohingya Resettlement: Where Is ASEAN? *Australian Institute of International Affairs*. Link: <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/rohingya-resettlement-where-is-asean/>.

<sup>101</sup> Imtiaz Ahmed (2020), Special Issue on the Rohingya Crisis: From the Guest Editor's Desk. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 5, no. 2. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891120929570>; Imtiaz Ahmed and Niloy Ranjan Biswas (2022), Prominent Bangladeshi Experts Dr Imtiaz Ahmed and Dr Niloy Ranjan Biswas Author a New Book – Rohingyas in Myanmar and Bangladesh. *Rohingya Khobor*. Link: <https://rohingyakhobor.com/prominent-bangladeshi-experts-dr-imtiaz-ahmed-and-dr-niloy-ranjan-biswas-author-a-new-book-rohingyas-in-myanmar-and-bangladesh/>.

factors, including donor fatigue, competing global crises, and the challenges of engaging with Myanmar's military regime. One of the critical challenges in resolving the Rohingya crisis is the lack of a comprehensive regional and international strategy. While there were numerous statements of concern and calls for action, there was little concrete progress in resolving the root causes of the crisis or creating conditions for safe and voluntary repatriation. In this respect, the UN Security Council, hampered by divisions among its permanent members, has also failed to take concrete action regarding the safe repatriation of the Rohingya people<sup>102</sup>.

Looking at the future, several scenarios are conceivable for the Rohingya crisis and the prospects for their repatriation. In the most optimistic scenario, the international pressure associated with internal changes in Myanmar could bring about meaningful improvements that address the root causes of the Rohingya's displacement<sup>103</sup>. A more realistic scenario is that the crisis will remain protracted for many years ahead<sup>104</sup>. In this case, the focus would need to shift toward improving conditions for Rohingya refugees in

Bangladesh and other host countries while continuing to work toward eventual repatriation and third-country resettlement<sup>105</sup>.

However, even though there have been some rays of hope, in the current environment, the Myanmar authorities do not possess the capability or the political will to implement Rohingya repatriation<sup>106</sup>. By the way, any repatriation efforts must be voluntary. As Human Rights Watch notes, "Rohingya refugees have consistently said they want to go home, but only when their security, access to land and livelihoods, freedom of movement, and citizenship rights can be ensured"<sup>107</sup>. In the meantime, the stakeholders should work on improving the conditions—expanding access to education, livelihood opportunities, and healthcare—for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and other host countries must be stepped up.

The Rohingya crisis will necessitate long-term focus and commitment from the international community in the future. The media of Bangladesh should prioritize their spotlight on the crisis while dealing with major wars and crises like the Russia-Ukraine War.<sup>108</sup> Still, the prospects for the Rohingya

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<sup>102</sup> Joshua Carroll (2019), Why the UN Failed to Save the Rohingya. *Al Jazeera*. Link: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/6/28/why-the-un-failed-to-save-the-rohingya>.

<sup>103</sup> Michelle J. Lee (2021), Media Influence on Humanitarian Interventions: Analysis of the Rohingya Refugee Crisis and International Media Coverage. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 6, no. 1. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-021-00108-5>.

<sup>104</sup> Mohammad Zaman (2023), Six Years on, a Solution to the Rohingya Crisis Is Still Elusive. *The Daily Star*. Link: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/six-years-solution-the-rohingya-crisis-still-elusive-3387131>.

<sup>105</sup> Sm Najmus Sakib (2023), Bangladesh Reiterates Call for Rohingya Resettlement in 3rd Countries. Link: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/bangladesh-reiterates-call-for-rohingya-resettlement-in-3rd-countries/2965874>.

<sup>106</sup> Al Jazeera (2024).

<sup>107</sup> HRW (2023), Bangladesh: New Risks for Rohingya Refugees. *Human Rights Watch*. Link: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/18/bangladesh-new-risks-rohingya-refugees>.

<sup>108</sup> Kawsar Uddin Mahmud and Nasrin Jabin (2022), Responses of Bangladesh and Myanmar to the Ukraine Crisis: A Comparative Analysis from a Neo-Classical Realist Perspective. *Southeast Asia:*

repatriation are in a dilemma, but not without hope. Essentially, it depends on the international community, regional organizations, and all other stakeholders; they must work thoroughly to ensure the rights and dignity of the Rohingya people, keeping them at the centre of resolving this protracted crisis. On the whole, the below-mentioned recommendations can be suggested in this regard:

1. Priority should be given to creating conditions for safe and voluntary repatriation in Myanmar. The international community, posing substantial pressure on the military junta, should work towards establishing a roadmap for repatriation that includes concrete yardsticks for developing conditions in Rakhine State.
2. Improving education and skills development programs targeting the Rohingya people, mainly young people. In this regard, some specific actions may include offering stipends to Rohingya teachers and students and promoting educational projects, both offline and online educational services.
3. Concerned authorities should improve security in refugee camps through solid coordination. The concerned authorities should develop an investigation and apprehension of armed actors and enhance coordination among law enforcement inside and outside the camps.
4. Expanding livelihood opportunities for Rohingya refugees, providing freedom of movement and access to employment in certain areas.
5. The regional organizations must play a central role in staging the negotiations among the parties and accelerate the repatriation process in the future. ASEAN, BIMSTEC, and BCIM must play a more proactive role in resolving the Rohingya crisis by pushing forward the steps of repatriation. ASEAN, in particular, could play a robust role in accelerating dialogue between Myanmar and Bangladesh by providing humanitarian assistance and supporting endeavours to create environments conducive to repatriation<sup>109</sup>.
6. Advocating for increasing international support for host countries, particularly Bangladesh. With over one million Rohingya refugees, Bangladesh confronts diverse challenges. The international community should increase humanitarian funding, especially in light of the potential dwindling due to donor fatigue and competing global crises—the Russia-Ukraine war and the Palestine-Israel conflict.

7. Upholding the discussions of the third-country resettlement options. Although repatriation is still the most preferred long-term solution, increased resettlement options can offer immediate relief for the vulnerable population. The government of Bangladesh can think of the offers that countries like the United States and Canada provide for third-country settlement opportunities in limited ways through their mobility programs, such as Welcome Corps at Work<sup>110</sup>.
8. And the Bangladeshi government should work on keeping the international focus on the Rohingya crisis. The media outlets, especially in Bangladesh, must prioritize coverage of the Rohingya situation alongside other major global crises<sup>111</sup>.

## VII. Conclusion

More than a million Rohingya refugees remain stranded in refugee camps in Bangladesh for more than six years after being displaced from Myanmar. They do not have any legal status as such to claim their better livelihoods and human rights. As Nasir Uddin notes, since Myanmar stripped them of citizenship and Bangladesh does not recognize them even as refugees, the Rohingya exist nowhere in the legal framework of

any state.”<sup>112</sup> The government of Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the international community still rest on voluntary repatriation as the most durable solution to this crisis. However, the political and security scenario of Myanmar due to the 2021 coup and the outbreak of civil and ethnic strife pose significant challenges to materialising this policy at present and shortly. The territorial control over Rakhine State, either by the Arakan Army or the government of Myanmar, is crucial in this regard, given that both these entities are not so willing to take back their people from Bangladesh. The future of the Rohingya crisis and the prospects for repatriation are indissolubly associated with the broader political and security developments in Myanmar, the strategies of host Bangladesh, and the obligation of the international community to work to find sustainable solutions. While the instant prospects for large-scale repatriation are still dim and full of pessimism, there is room to advance the lives of the Rohingya in the short term while working towards long-term solutions. Finally, any sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis must be rooted in the rights and dignity of the Rohingya people themselves, prioritizing their safety and voices at the centre of all negotiations and decision-making processes.

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<sup>110</sup> AFP (2018), Canada Offers to Take in Rohingya Refugees, Pledges Aid. *Dhaka Tribune*. Link: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/world/146363/canada-offers-to-take-in-rohingya-refugees>; UNB (2023), US to Resettle More Rohingyas from Bangladesh in 2024, *The Daily Star*. Link:

<https://www.thedailystar.net/rohingya-influx/news/us-resettle-more-rohingyas-bangladesh-2024-3495801>.

<sup>111</sup> Mahmud and Jabin (2022).

<sup>112</sup> Uddin (2023).

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## Annex

Some definitional clarification according to BPO Codebook.

**Gunfight.** A shootout between law enforcement agencies and criminals, militants, or other irregular forces, including the latter, does not match the definition of a non-state armed group.

**Clash.** Two-sided violence between groups outside of the context of war or insurgency. Example: supporters of rival political parties fight each other.

**Assault.** One-sided violence by an individual or small group against another individual or small group. Example: stabbing or shooting of someone by a perpetrator

**Fight.** Two-sided violence between individuals or small groups. Example: brawl between 3-4 people.

**Sexual assault.** One-sided sexual violence, such as rape or attempted rape, by an individual or small group against another individual or small group.

**Destruction of property.** One-sided violence is perpetrated with the intent of damaging property—examples are vandalism and arson.

**Mob violence (large group assault).** One-sided violence by a mob or large group against an individual or a comparatively small and defenseless group. Examples: the lynching of a thief, looting of shops and houses owned by a religious minority



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