

# MYANMAR CRISIS: STATELESSNESS AND SURVIVAL

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 Analysis

Myanmar won its independence from the British in 1948. But soon after its independence thousands of Muslim inhabitants' - that had fled the 1942 massacre in Arakan - return was denied. Their properties were confiscated and restriction imposed upon their movements. The Muslims reacted in organizing a group under the name Jihadi Movement. The group's goal was to avenge the policies of Burmese administration. The Jihadi Movement faced harsh responds by the Burmese administration, causing a big massacre to Arakanese Muslims with deaths of hundreds of Islamic intellectuals and general Muslims and forcing more than 50,000 of them to flee to then East-Pakistan (now Bangladesh). As a tactic, the Burmese administration isolated the jihadis from other Arakanese Muslims. Rohingya Muslims were formally recognized as a Burmese ethnic group in 1954. The government made a commitment for the establishment of a

Muslim national area in northern Arakan along with the power of autonomy.

The beginning of the military junta rule in 1962 again brought a dark period for Rohingya Muslims. All Arakanese Muslims banks and business enterprises were nationalized and the '1974 Emergency Immigration Act' marked the recognition of Rohingyas as foreigners, stripping them from their nationalities. Moreover, the Arakan Muslims were expelled from high-ranking offices except some posts of clerks and teachers; all student organizations and other social political-cultural organizations were banned in 1962-1965.

In addition, during a 20 year-term of Rohingya elimination plan by the military government (1962-1988), Operation Nagamin was conducted in 1977 by the Burmese immigration department and the military. The operation was conducted in



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the name of national venture to register citizens and identify foreigners ahead of an upcoming national census. This census identified Rohingyas as illegal residents, which allowed the Burmese military's widespread brutality, rape and murder against the Rohingyas. The genocide caused no less than 200,000 Rohingyas to seek refuge in Bangladesh in 1978. Most importantly, the 1982 Citizenship Law of Myanmar cancelled the citizenship rights of the Rohingyas as they could not meet the requirements for becoming citizens. This law granted citizenship only to those who were Burmans or a member of indigenous ethnic/linguistic groups or those who could prove they were the descendants of residents who had lived in what they called as Burma in 1823. The rest of the people were stripped off from their citizenship under this law. The reason for this was based on the censuses carried out during the British rule in Burma which did not mention the word Rohingya, which is why the Myanmar government and Buddhist intellectuals tended to pay an attempt to prove the Rohingyas as 'outsiders' in contrast to a strong historical evidence of Rohingya's more than 200 years long rule in Arakan.

The military junta started cleaning up Muslims through the 'Operation Clean and Beautiful Nation' in July 1991. It again forced more than 200,000 Rohingyas to take shelter into Bangladesh as refugees.

A decade later, the incident of rape and murder of a Buddhist woman in late May 2012 and the suspicion of three Rohingya men's connection with the crime led to clashes between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Arakan. It was soon followed with violent attacks on each other. The violence escalated after the killing of ten Muslims on 3 June 2012 due to a Buddhist attack on a Bus carrying Muslims. This incident also caused damages for the Buddhists. Again, on 9 October 2016, an attack on the police reportedly done by the Rohingya militants left nine police officers dead, triggering what rights groups allege as an indiscriminate and systematic campaign against civilian Rohingya villagers in

Arakan by the Myanmar's military force using gunships to fire (Huffington Post, 14 December 2016). But this time no Rohingya could enter into Bangladesh due to Bangladesh's decision of not to accept them and consequent to the highest alertness by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) along border. Since late August 2017 until recently, hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas crossed into Bangladesh to escape another military crackdown, which the United Nations' top human rights official Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini defined as 'a textbook example of ethnic cleansing' (The New York Times, 11 September, 2017). According to UNHCR, before the beginning of the last influx of Rohingya refugees on 25 August 2017, an estimated 307,500 Rohingyas were already residing in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, which the number has now reached 923,000 with the last influx of 615,000 Rohingyas (UNHCR operational update on Bangladesh, 10 November 2017). Among them, 73% are living in new spontaneous settlements, 13% in makeshift settlements, 9% in host community locations and 5% in official refugee camps (Needs and Population Monitoring Report, December 2017). Out of the total number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, only 36,583 are registered (UNHCR Family Counting Factsheet, 14 December 2017) who are now living in the two official camps, while the remaining 829,421 are unregistered, scattered in Cox's Bazaar. Certainly this is a matter of concern with the potentials of creating big cost for Bangladesh as the host community. The bigger number of Rohingya refugees is creating different socio-political impacts on Bangladesh.

## **Problems faced by Rohingya Refugees:**

The conditions of Rohingya refugees in Bangladeshi camps are inhumane. Nearly 10,000,00 refugees from Myanmar face dire conditions at Cox's bazaar camps after they survived violence and fled to Bangladesh. Human trafficking, poor health care, pain, misery, trauma, lack of educational facilities and scarcity of food are just some of the problems

faced by the refugees. The refugee camps along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border have become the most populated in the world. In camps there are problems with access to services, access to information and other basic things.

### **Trafficking of Women and Children:**

There are reports that women and children have become the targets of human trafficking. In the published by the United States' Department of State, it was stated that, "the government of Bangladesh does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but is making significant efforts to do so, "with a large section of the country's profile focused on the trafficking of the Rohingya."

Some reports suggest that Bangladeshi security officials are also involved in facilitating the human trafficking. "International organizations allege some Bangladeshi border guards, military, and police officials facilitate trafficking of Rohingya, including accepting bribes from traffickers to gain access to camps."

The Bangladesh government has said it plans to place fences around the camps but the Rohingyas have voiced reservations over the efficiency of this measure. The worst part of the situation is that when such incidents happen in refugee camps, victims have limited access to a judicial process.

### **No Access to Education:**

Rohingya refugees lack access to education. More than 683.000 children are left without access to education. The Rohingya children should have been at school, but there are simply no schools for them.

### **Food Scarcity:**

The refugee influx has put additional pressure on health services and exacerbated challenges around food security and nutrition. Wages have been forced down and the prices of basic food and non-food items have gone up. Although humanitarian agencies have provided jobs and increased business opportunities, refugees are severely affected. Cash, food security, shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene are among the most commonly cited unmet needs. People in the camps sell aid items in order to buy food items, firewood and cooking fuel.

### **Way Forward:**

The actions of the Myanmar military and government are the root cause for the Rohingya crisis. The Myanmar military's actions are accountable as Crimes Against Humanity for their genocide and other atrocities against the Rohingyas. They have to pay for their heinous crimes. Rights groups should pressurize the Myanmar government to abrogate the 1982 Citizenship Law, which is used to render the Rohingyas stateless. Long-standing impunity for violations has emboldened the Myanmar military in perpetrating its campaign to drive Rohingyas from the country, and continued impunity will only encourage further attacks. The ICC should proceed with their investigation, which in the end could put those responsible in trial. The cycle of violence, displacement and exploitation against the Rohingyas will continue until impunity ends, root causes are addressed and rights are assured. Until then, there is a very real danger that the tragic history of the Rohingya in Myanmar will continue to repeat itself.

*Nearly  
10,000,00  
refugees from  
Myanmar  
face dire  
conditions at  
Cox's bazaar  
camps after  
they survived  
violence  
and fled to  
Bangladesh.*