

Rohingya Muslim Issue: A Threat to Indian Security and Peace

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Abstract

The Rohingya muslim issue in India has become a complex and sensitive topic that threatens the country's security and peace. The Rohingya people are ethnic muslim minority, they are pro-active a Sufi-inflected variation of sunni muslim of Islam. Myanmar's Rohingya community experienced genocide gradually, and then suddenly decades of increasingly human rights restriction came to global attention during 2017 with brutal army -led clearance operation' within Rohingya community. The Rohingya's are muslim minority group from Myanmar, have been fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in neighboring countries, including India. However, their presence in India has raised concerns about national security and communal tensions. This research paper aims to explore the causes and consequences of the Rohingya issue in India, and how it poses a threat to country's security and peace. The paper also highlights the challenges faced by India in dealing with refugees and illegal immigration, particularly in a country with a diverse population.

Key words: Rohingya muslims, UNHCR, Terrorism, Security Threat

Introduction

The Rohingya crisis in Myanmar is the result of a clash of identities between the muslim minority and Buddhist majority in the Rakhine state of the country. The 2017 crisis started after simultaneous attacks on 30 police post and an army base in Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung township on the northern side of the Rakhine state on 25th August 2017.¹ Due to an increase in violence, a large number of Rohingya muslims have crossed into Bangladesh. Many have also fled to India and other parts of Asia. This has resulted in great tension in Myanmar relations with Asian countries. On its part, the Indian government is planning to deport the Rohingya muslims living within borders. Now it is to consider whether the crisis is just a humanitarian challenge or a security threat.

The desperate conditions of the Rohingyas in Myanmar made them flee from their native country and search shelter and refuge in the other countries. Fleeing from the persecutions of Myanmar, the

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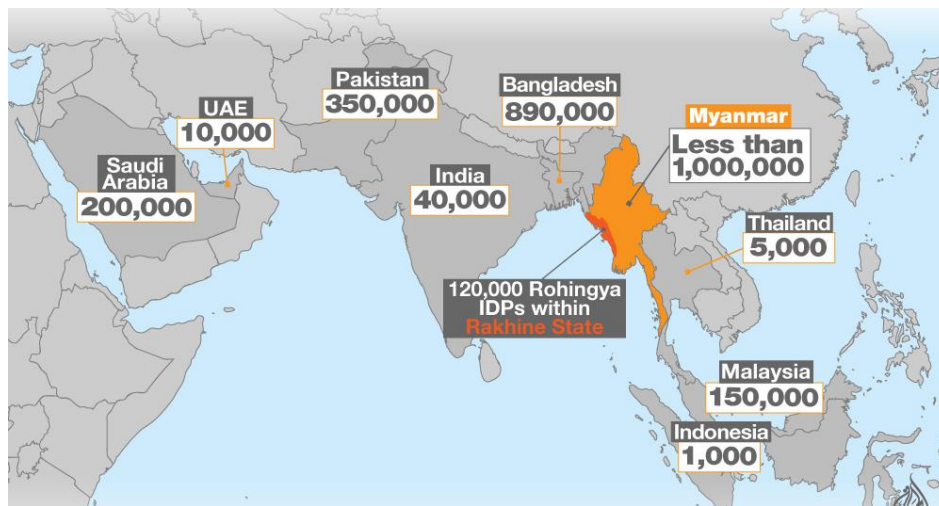
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Rohingyas entered there neighboring states mainly Bangladesh, India, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Pakistan, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The enormous number of refugee influx has posed various problems and challenges to the government of India. India hosted many Rohingya refugees. India has strongly supported the government of Myanmar. As well as fears that the Rohingya refugees fleeing to Bangladesh could travel further to India, New Delhi needs Myanmar's cooperation to combat insurgents in India's north- eastern states, who use Myanmar as base.

Map No. 1.1

Following Myanmar's fleeing Rohingya since 1970s, nearly one million Rohingya have Fled Myanmar due to widespread persecution



Source: Al Jazeera and agencies, UNHCR, IOM, 2017, Internet Source: [Persecution path: Following Myanmar's fleeing Rohingya | Infographic News | Al Jazeera](#). (Accessed On: 9th November 2022).

There is a presence of few numbers of Rohingya refugees in Punjab who reside around the area of Dera Bassi and Lalru in Mohali District of Punjab. Hundreds of Rohingya reached Jammu seeking asylum in Hindu majority union territory. Refugee issue is debatable topic and has been one of the most significant issues in today's National and International politics. India has strong economic and strategic interest in Myanmar, for example India-funded Kaladan multi-modal project which is designed to provide a sea- river-land link to its remote northeast through Sittwe port. In an official

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visit to Myanmar in September 2017, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not mention the Refugee crisis but rather expressed concern about extremist violence' in Rakhine and solidarity with the Myanmar government in its fight against terrorism.²

The Narendra Modi government is concerned over Rohingyas stay in India for security regions. In its affidavit to the Supreme Court, the government said that some of Rohingyas with militant background were found to be very active in Jammu, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mewat. They have been identified as having a very serious and potential threat to the internal and external security of India the center told the supreme court.³

The Indian stance on the Rohingya crisis has led anger in Bangladesh. India has been receiving refugees for many generations. At present, India is one of the biggest refugee hosting countries in the world. Soon after that visit the Bangladesh High commissioner in Delhi met the Indian foreign secretary; in a subsequent public statement the former stressed that the refugees were Myanmar responsibility and said regional neighbor should use their good offices to emphasis this point to Myanmar's government, about the ground reality.

A mixed method and sources are applied for this research paper. This research paper includes a qualitative research methodology to analyze primary and secondary sources, including government reports, news articles, and academic literature. The primary sources include the U.N convention on the law of the refugees and various conventions adopted by international community.

The secondary sources include the published material in the form of books, articles, research paper, newspapers which are concerned with policies and relevance of this humanitarian Crisis and the human rights the present research work has been analysed in historical and descriptive perspective.

India's Stance on Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The presence of Rohingya in India is portrayed as problem. In fact, there are instances when the Rohingya have been described as terrorists and accused of having links with organization like ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). According to UNHCR, more than 3 lakh Rohingya muslims have fled Myanmar since August 2017 when the latest phase of violence broke out in the Rakhine province of the country. Earlier in May this year, the UNHCR stated that about 1, 68,000 Rohingya muslims had fled Myanmar since 2012, when clashes with Buddhists erupted in the trouble-torn-Arakan region. Over 40,000 of those Rohingya muslims, who fled Myanmar, have entered India illegally according to government's estimate.⁴

The government of India is concerned over Rohingyas stay in India for security regions. In its affidavit to the Supreme Court, the government said that some of the Rohingya with militant background were found to be very active in Jammu, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mewat. A few hundreds of Rohingyas muslims, fleeing the persecution of Myanmar, reached Jammu seeking asylum in the hindu majority Union Territory. They scattered in 22 locations across the city of Jammu mainly around the areas of Narwal, Bathindi, Channi Himmat and Bhagwati Nagar.⁵

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However, Rohingya Muslims in Jammu have also been facing anti Rohingya campaigns organised by certain groups which instilled fear among the Rohingya refugees in Jammu and some of them have started to flee Jammu again in searching for better refuge. Anti-Rohingya campaigns which have been carried out further influenced the local residents of Jammu which changed the outlook and perceptions of the locals towards the Rohingya refugee community. They are present as a threat to national security.

In Hyderabad, Rohingya Muslims reside in Hafizbabanagar, Balapur, Babanagar, Sainagar, Chandrayan Gutta and Kishanbagh areas of the Old City. In 2019, around 4000 Rohingyas recorded the refugee camps in Hyderabad.⁶ They have been identified as having a very serious and potential threat to the internal and national security of India, the Central government told the Supreme Court. India's decision to deport the Rohingya Muslims back to a country which is again on the cusp of a civil war will set a dangerous precedent. India's response to the Rohingya crisis has undergone three phases. In the first phase that saw an exodus in 2012, India considered it an internal matter of Myanmar and instead of intervening and speaking against the attacks of Rohingya Muslims, it was more sympathetic to the Myanmar government.

The second phase seems to have begun sometime in 2017. It saw a hostile attitude in the government towards the Rohingya and there was a declaration to deport the Rohingya who have settled in different parts of India. Minister of state for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju has stated it categorically that the government is looking for ways to deport over 40,000 Rohingya Muslims living in the country illegally. The government is worried about the suspected infiltration of terror outfits among the displaced people living in various camps.⁷ The second phase is also a reiteration of the BJP government's declaration of dealing with infiltration in its 2014 election manifesto they take on priority to deal with illegal immigrants in the north-eastern region on a priority basis.

The third phase saw a reaction to China's approach to the Rohingya crisis. China's forward a 'three-step' solution for the Rohingya refugee crisis. This was followed by a signing of the repatriation agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar. India believed that it should play a bigger role in the solution of the crisis. In 2018, India was also a part of the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) delegation along with Laos, Thailand and China that visited Myanmar. Then the External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj stressed the need to create a feasible environment for the speedy and safe return of the displaced persons to the Rakhine State.

The Rohingya Muslims who have lived in India for almost a decade stated figuring prominently when Indian government issued notices for their deportation, calling them illegal immigrants and a threat to national security. While India's stance might have changed slightly on the Rohingya question, it is intertwined with shifts in India's domestic politics.

Issues with Rohingyas Living in India

Though India has the biggest number of refugees in the country in the entire South Asia and dealt

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with one of the biggest refugee issues in the world during partition of the country seven decades back, New Delhi does not have a refugee specific law. The constitution of India only defines who is a citizen of India. The subsequent law also does not deal with refugees. In legal terms, a person living in India can be either a citizen or a foreigner defined under the Foreigners Act, 1946. According to the UNHCR, a refugee is a person living in another country following persecution in his own on grounds of "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."⁸

Before the Rohingya muslim as their crisis acquire international proportion, their population in Myanmar was estimated at around 10 lakhs. Under the 1982 citizenship law, Myanmar government recognised only about 40,000 Rohingya muslims as its citizens. The rest were dubbed as "illegal Bengalis"-immigrants from Bangladesh. Over the year, no refugee groups in India are seen as threat by the Indian government but the Rohingya muslims in India are as a threat to nation's security and unity.

However, in case of Rohingya refugees, India has to balance between its national security and its long tradition of providing humanitarian assistance to the refugee. In India there is absence of a well-defined refugee policy backed by a law passed by Parliament, India won't be able to accommodate Rohingya muslims as their stay in the country will give a spin to political narrative. The Central government has told the Supreme Court that many Rohingya muslims have acquired documents meant for Indian citizens only like Aadhar, PAN and Voter-ID. This raises the concern of naturalisation of illegal migrants by fraudulent means.⁹ In the absence of a law to deal with refugees, their identification and surveillance will become difficult especially when the intelligence agencies have warned the Jihadi terror outfits are looking to exploit the vulnerability of Rohingya muslims. Till now the successive governments have dealt with refugee question on case-by-case basis.

Rohingya Muslims: threat for India

Myanmar's government enjoys full support of its population in its action against the Rohingya muslims. The delicate transition to democracy currently underway in Myanmar is another complicating factor. While Islamic countries, the United Nations, Muslim countries of ASEAN and others have all issued strong statements, India and China have been far more restrained in their reactions. In the region India reportedly told Bangladesh that it would pressurise Myanmar to end the military crackdown in Rakhine province and to take back the Rohingya refugees from other nation-state. India also decided to provide around 7,000 metric tonnes of relief and aid through operation Insaniyat (Humanity) to Rohingya refugees stranded in Bangladesh. "The relief material consists of items required urgently by the affected people, namely rice, pulses, sugar, salt, cooking oil, tea, ready to eat noodles, biscuits, mosquito nets etc."¹⁰

The first batch of relief reached Chittagong on 14th September 2017. The statement by the ministry of External Affairs also said, "India has always responded readily and swiftly to any crisis in Bangladesh, in keeping with the close ties of friendship between the peoples of India and Bangladesh. The

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Rohingya issue has become a factor in Bangladesh-India and Myanmar relations though India can do very little to pressure the Myanmar government-a step that some sections in Bangladesh seem to expect. To address this humanitarian crisis, the Rohingya issue needs a permanent solution not an incremental fixing.

Every country has a right to protect its environment and security and India also has sovereign right to do the same. The few Rohingya muslims have been deported by the Indian government are the ones who are staying in India illegally without any form of documents and legal registration at the UNHCR and this action by the Indian government has been condemned by many countries. Because this is a security concern for India that is why, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has articulated a clear policy designating the refugees in India as illegal and dangled the threat of deportation. The Indian Supreme Court has been dragged into the issue.

During Indian PM Narendra Modi's visit to Myanmar from 5th to 7th September 2017, the two countries came out with a joint statement in which "India condemned the recent terrorist attacks in northern Rakhine state, where several members of the Myanmar security forces lost their lives. Both sides agreed that terrorism violates human rights and there should, therefore, be no glorification of terrorists as martyrs...The two sides shared the view that the situation in Rakhaine state had a developmental as well as a security dimension."¹¹ With the current massive outflow of Rohingyas into Bangladesh, those hopes have clearly been dashed, and relations with Myanmar look set to be extremely tense for the foreseeable future.

Security Threat in the form of Terrorism

As per the principle of international statecraft, "security" dates to the end of cold war 2nd and the rise of the United States as a superpower. In the context of global geopolitics, the role of states in providing what might be called security, is unavoidable. Security in international relations refers to the measures taken by countries and international organizations to protect their interests and ensure the safety and stability of their citizens in the global arena. The current emerging security threats in countries can vary depending on the specific region and context. However, several global security challenges have gained prominence in recent years: cybersecurity, terrorism, climate change, nuclear proliferation and Human security etc. The Rohingya refugee crisis is a complex issue that involves both human security and state security considerations.

It is widely known that Rohingyas are world's most persecuted ethnic minority and often identified with muslim religion. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have been fleeing to other countries. Before the current crisis an estimated 200,000-400,000 Rohingya muslims refugee were already living in Bangladesh. This crisis creates tension between the two countries including disputes over maritime boundaries, arms trafficking and cross-border movement of armed insurgents. Under such conditions, the Rohingya crossed the border to India mainly via Bangladesh in search of security and better livelihood and for employment opportunity. In the context of the border politics, forced

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migration, refugee and stateless people and its intricate developments in South Asia. The recent debates ignites on India's response to the Rohingya muslim issues and its various stages of policy formulations to resolve the issue.

After witnessing the susceptible conditions of the Rohingya muslims in India, they have been viewed primarily from two opposite perspectives, namely as 'illegal immigrants' and 'security threat'. Awami League government in Bangladesh make them hysterical to cross the border of the north-eastern part of India, often with the help of human traffickers. Rohingya muslims refugees in Bangladesh to be recruited by extremist groups. The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) emerged as a shadowy organisation called the "Harakat-ul-Yaqin", mentored by one Abdu Qadooda Burmi, a Pakistani of Rohingya origin who was born in Karachi. Burmi has appeared in social media videos calling for "jihad" in Myanmar and has intimate link with the Pakistan state-sponsored terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba. Pakistani Jihadi outfits have called for jihad against Myanmar to avenge the atrocities committed against the Rohingya muslims.

It is undeniable that foreign jihadis are now part of the ARSA. Reports indicate that Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Malaysians and Thailand Muslims have joined the ranks of the ARSA. Training of jihadis have taken place along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border and also in Aceh in northern Sumatra in Indonesia. Jihad elements in Bangladesh have extended support to the ARSA. The various separatist yet powerful groups like Al-Qaeda's offshoot, Aqa Mul Mujahideen or Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and their anticipated solidarity in favour of Rohingya muslims create a paradigm of the question of identity and interrogating their lived experiences in India.¹²

Historically, it is quite acceptable that the splendid and vibrant Indian history is full of migration, events and examples of offering basic hospitality to migrants since the dawn of civilization. As an example, we can cite the incident of the partition of India in 1947, which had led to ingenuous demographic upheavals causing migratory flow of more than 10 million people. Thus, India's journey as a postcolonial phenomenon had started with hosting those displaced refugee people.

There are various reasons that could be instrumental in making the Rohingya muslim refugees a potential threat to the national security of India. To believe or to move towards this attitude, there are several catalysts one can identify, involved directly or indirectly, that lead to considering the refugees as stigmatization, segregation, alienation and marginalization. While framing Rohingya muslims as 'illegal' or 'terrorist' it may also lead radical groups to express their resentment against the Indian state and this has been further interrogated by the political sociologists. Eventually, they had been able to reach Hyderabad through the possible routes of Bangladesh and West Bengal mainly for better employment and livelihood and to avoid state-sponsored carnages.

Due to the substantial muslim presence, the Rohingya muslim refugees prefers to move to Hyderabad at the very outset. The environment and standard of living condition in Hyderabad proved to be

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initially worrisome for them. Despite such an environment prevailing in Hyderabad, hundreds of Rohingya muslim refugees have been able to consider the city as their own. The state of suspicion started to amplify further only when a Rohingya muslim from Myanmar, Khalid Mohammad was arrested by the National Investigating Agency (NIA) for his purported links to the blast in Khagragar of Burdwan district in West Bengal and the media has been constantly telecasting it for public attention.¹³

According to the reports of the intelligence officials Khalid had received large amounts of funds from the Rohingya who are based in Karachi; Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. It has been found that khalid had meetings with other Rohingya refugees in Delhi, Lucknow and Jammu, before setting up a base in Hyderabad, and has acted as one of the prime agents for conducting such blasts in India. Now the government of India and its officials by pointing out this incident has cast the entire Rohingya community under the shadow of suspicion and subsequently public outrage engulfed, which went against them.

Jammu is another option of taking refuge that produced more pain and sufferings in subsequent times. Their influx in Jammu had started since 2012. Jammu and Kashmir has been a deliberate and natural choice for them as the majority of population in these regions are Muslims. Rohingya muslim refugees has been brought to the forefront in the highly polarized society of Jammu. Beside National Panthers Party (NPP), on the other hand, sponsored billboards at different places, asking the 'Rohingyas and Bangladeshies' to quit Jammu in early 2017. They launched slogans like 'Chodho Hummara Jammu Pradesh, Rohingya jao Bangladesh' (Move away from jammu, Oh! Rohingya return to Bangladesh ;).

Rohingya muslims were labelled as a 'ticking time bomb' and a 'threat to communal harmony' in Jammu. Spearheading campaigns like, the NPP invokes Article 370 of the Constitution as the justification for their 'protect Jammu Campaign'.¹⁴ Moreover, some seventy-eight Rohingya muslim refugees' families living in Jammu's Bhagwati Nagar area had to shift to other places after a mysterious fire gutted their shelters and the reason behind this also remains unknown. Despite having the local political parties and their anti-Rohingya campaigns, the other political parties are also suspicious about them and been trying to pursue a persistent campaign to describing them as 'terrorist'. India have further convoluted the atmosphere and raised the slogan of hate and apathy against them. Their statelessness and broadly refugee-hood tendency make their situation all the more worsened in India as they are not properly welcomed due to their marked identity. The Indian government has highlighted the security threat posed to Rohingya muslim refugees.

India's Political and Economic Interest: China as a Factor in the region

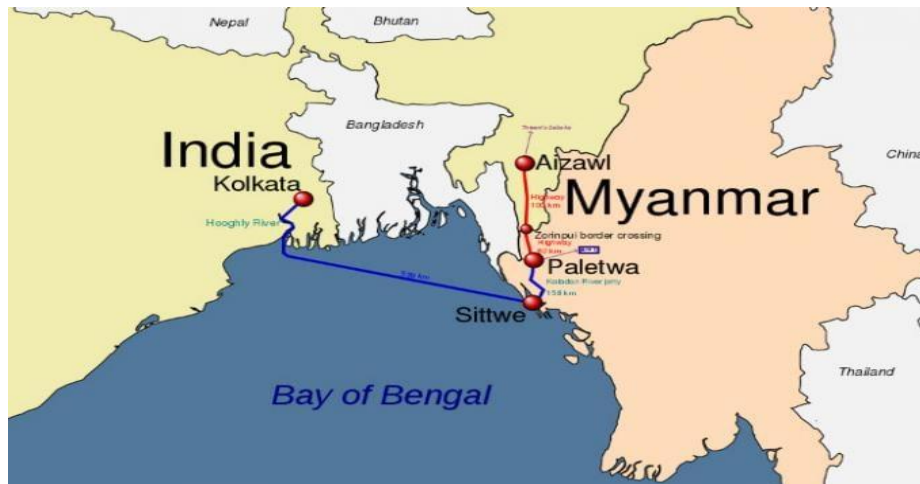
Rohingya muslims are described by the United Nation as the most persecuted minority in the world. To escape discrimination and violence in Myanmar, minority Rohingya muslims have for decades fled from the Buddhist-majority country to neighbouring muslim majority country Bangladesh and other

countries, including India. In India there are issues and concerns to India's security and national interest. It impacts the interests of local populations in the areas seeing large-scale influxes of illegal immigrant and also increases the political instability when leaders start mobilising the perception of the citizens of the country against the migrants by the elites to grab political power.

Economically, the continued violence in the Rakhaine state of Myanmar has affected the operationalization of all sections related to India's Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport project, which link the western part of Myanmar with India's northeast. The KMMTTP is the ongoing infrastructure development project initiated by the ministry of External Affairs, Government of India to establish a close relationship between India and the neighbouring countries. More importantly for North East Indian region, it will bring them closer to Kolkata by half the existing distance.

Map-1.2

Indian firm appointed for road building under the Kaladan project in Myanmar.



Source: Chan, Ay. "Kaladan Project Expected to Complete in December." *Myanmar Insider*. Internet Source: [Kaladan Project Expected to Complete in December - Myanmar Insider](#) (Accessed on 17th November 2022)

The KMMTTP comprises land, river and sea routes connecting Mizoram with Kolkata Sea port-Lawngtlai to Zorinpui (Mizoram) land route which is 87.51 km, Zorinpui border to Kaletwa (Myanmar) land route which is 60.70 km, Paletwa to Sittwe (Myanmar) River Route which is 539 km. The total length of the route is 882.21 km which is far shorter than the existing land link between the

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endpoint of the project at 1764 km. The MPWD (Mizoram Public Work Department) is entrusted to look after the construction of a new 2-lane Highway to support KMMTTP under Phase of SARDP-NE (Special Accelerated Road Development Programme in North East) within Mizoram from Lawngtlai to Zorinpui, the Indo-Myanmar border point. The remaining sector beyond the border of Mizoram (India) is being taken up by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.¹⁵ Because India has strong economic and strategic interest in Myanmar that's why India is actually using the crisis to improve relations with Myanmar. In an official visit to Myanmar in September 2017, Indian PM Narendra Modi did not mention the refugee crisis, but rather expressed concern about 'extremist violence' in Rakhine state, and solidarity with the Myanmar Government in its fight against terrorism.

Like India, China has vital geopolitical interests in Myanmar; it also sees the crisis as an opportunity to re-establish close ties with Myanmar, China has therefore also been very supportive of Myanmar. The country provides China with access to Indian Ocean: China is funding Kyauk Phyu port, which is to be the starting point of an oil-gas pipeline and road link from the Bay of Bengal, through Myanmar to Yunnan Province, shortening supply routes from the middle east. The port is part of two projects, which also include a trading estate, to develop a special economic zone in Rakhine. Beijing has therefore been a vocal supporter of the Myanmar government. In March 2022 China stopped the introduction of a UN Security Council resolution against Myanmar argues that the crisis could strengthen China's position in the region.

Three and half year on from the latest exodus of Rohingya refugees Who fled Myanmar and sought refuge in Bangladesh from August 2017 onwards, challenges persist and continue to evolve. The COVID-19 pandemic has added additional complexities. The international community must not only maintain support for refugees and their host communities, but adapt to critical needs and expand the search for solutions. Rohingya communities estimate that up to three-quarters of the Rohingya muslim are living outside on Myanmar.

UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh have individually registered over 860,000 Rohingya refugees in the refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar. Bangladesh has demonstrated a profound humanitarian commitment to Rohingya refugees. This generosity must be acknowledged through continued investment in both Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi host communities. Bangladesh needs more support from international communities to resolve this crisis. The country may expect that world leaders will consider all the relevant issues including socio-economic conditions of Bangladesh before making any recommendations to resolve the protracted Rohingya refugee crisis.

Findings along with Suggestions

The issue of Rohingya Muslims in India is complex and multifaceted. Here are some of the findings and potential solutions to address this issue:

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Findings

1. The Rohingya Muslims are a stateless ethnic group who have faced persecution and discrimination in their home country of Myanmar.
2. Many Rohingya Muslims have fled Myanmar and sought refuge in other countries, including India.
3. India has been hosting to a significant number of Rohingya Muslims, estimated to be around 40,000 - 60,000, but their status in India is often precarious.
4. The Indian government has expressed concern that Rohingya Muslims could pose a security threat, as they are perceived to have links to extremist groups.
5. Potential solutions:
6. India could work with the international community to address the root causes of the Rohingya crisis, including the persecution and discrimination of Rohingya muslims in Myanmar.
7. India could create a legal framework for dealing with refugees, which would provide greater clarity and protection for Rohingya muslims and other refugees in India.
8. India could provide temporary protection to Rohingya muslims, while working with the international community to find a durable solution to the crisis.
9. India could work with other countries in the region to address the Rohingya crisis, and to ensure that refugees are not forced to move from one country to another.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that repatriation is seen as the most sustainable resolution. However, past experiences of the Rohingya repatriation do not show much hope of a quick solution to the crisis. The inability to ensure the safety, security and citizenship of the Rohingya will not bring a sustainable resolution for them. During this grave humanitarian crisis, when the international community spoke with one voice in condemning the violence and human-rights abuses committed by the Myanmar security forces, India was caught in a dilemma. It had to choose its priorities, but instead stayed tight-lipped. India felt that amid the growing chinese presence in many threats including southeast asia, upsetting the Myanmar government would be a strategic mistake. Apart from the ego-strategic concern, there is a real security interest in remaining tight-lipped on the Rohingya muslim refugee issue. On the other hand, the Rohingya issue provided the opportunity for a comeback by China, another long-time strategic player in Myanmar that shares a significant border with the southeast asian country and which until now, had shied away from involving itself in the internal politics of

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another country. In fact, Beijing saw in the Rohingya issue a unique opportunity to regain its lost opportunity in Myanmar and once again bring the country into its orbit. At this point India should try to resolve this issue diplomatically using India's soft power and smart power.

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