

AUNG SAN SUU KYI  
(SHAME ON YOU)

#PRAYFORHINGYA  
#S  
#S

IM  
HINGYAA  
STOP  
KILLING  
MY FAMILY  
IN BURMA

# THE ROHINGYA EXODUS AND RAMIFICATIONS FOR SOUTH ASIA (PART- I)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

• Executive Summary	1
• Myanmar	
• Who are the Rohingyas-An Understanding	2
• Myanmar's Contemporary Achilles Heel-Rakhine State? Political Response to Rohingya Issue	4
• Rohingya Marginalization-Roots for Transnational Islamist militancy?	7
• Bangladesh	
• Background to the Rohingya Crisis with respect to Bangladesh	11
• Bangladesh's contrasting viewpoints on the exodus	12
• National Refugee Policy 2014	12
• Relocation and associated challenges	13
• Why does Bangladesh continue to reject Rohingya Refugees	14
• Steps that need to be taken by Bangladesh	16

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Indian subcontinent is a rapidly-developing region with countries boasting a significantly younger demographic that has the potential to transform countries such as India, Bangladesh and Myanmar into catalyst economies. However, these countries owing to a tenuous geography also share challenges that carry the potential to significantly impede the development process in the long term. The accelerated influx of ethnic Rohingya refugees from Myanmar's Rakhine state into Bangladesh and India over the past weeks and months has emerged as a matter of diplomatic, security as well as humanitarian concern for these countries. So, who are the Rohingyas and what are the challenges surrounding their relocation and rehabilitation?

The following report seeks to address these questions by understanding the various characteristics of the ethnic issue and the consequent crisis on the basis of its individual as well as collective impact on Myanmar, Bangladesh and India. In that context, it is significant to comprehend the patterns of past responses from the respective administrations to the issue in a bid to identify the possible measures that may be adopted to address the refugee crisis and the resultant challenges.

One of the fundamental reasons causing the refugee influx since decades now is successive Myanmar government's refusal to recognize the Rohingya community as a native to the country. They are referred to as illegal Bengali-speaking immigrants who relocated to the country following the British colonial rule during the 20th Century. The failure to acknowledge their existence has rendered over two million ethnic Rohingyas stateless, thus making them vulnerable to exploitation due to their lack of state-guaranteed rights and freedoms.

The aforestated vulnerability of the Rohingyas, coupled with their characteristic Islamic faith makes the significant Rohingya population a ripe breeding ground for militant recruitment. The impoverished conditions of their livelihood, along with the absence of a sense of belongingness or a common identity enhances the security challenges that may result from the refugee crisis for the respective countries. The report will seek to address these common cause for concerns for Bangladesh, Myanmar, and India over the coming weeks even as the international community calls for a humanitarian response to the crisis. In that regard, will the issue continue to be a regional Achilles Heel or the Indian subcontinent will be able to secure the Muslim Rohingyas from further persecution even as militancy threatens to cast its shadow on the crisis?

## MYANMAR

### Who are the Rohingyas-An Understanding

The self-identified Rohingya population comprises an ethnic group of people concentrated in western Myanmar's province of Rakhine, with a majority of the population identifying themselves to be Muslim and a minority following the Hindu faith. Rakhine, bordering Bangladesh, remains one of the most impoverished provinces of Myanmar, with the restive region largely comprising of camps and lack of basic services and opportunities. Currently, approximately 1.1 million Rohingya Muslims are thought to be living in Myanmar, while over a million Rohingyas are either settled as refugees or migrants in other countries. Including the group's diaspora across the world, the Rohingyas are believed to constitute approximately 63 percent of the Rakhine state's population. The Rohingyas, who remain distinct from the majority Buddhist population in Myanmar, speak a language and dialect of Bengali, contrary to the country's largely native Burmese language. Although native to the South East nation since centuries, the marked ethnocultural differences and the perception regarding their alleged migration into Myanmar from Bangladesh during the British Colonial rule until 1948, the Rohingyas have been consistently denied a native citizenship status under the Myanmar law. The ethnic population in the past has essentially been treated as foreigners, limiting their employment and educational opportunities in the country.



Rohingya refugees at a Cox's Bazar camp



The 1982 Burmese citizenship law failed to recognize the Rohingyas among the 135 official ethnic groups, effectively denying the ethnic group citizenship rights and rendering them stateless. The law restricted the population's freedom to study, travel, practice their religion and access the country's health services. The Rohingya population, widely touted as the "most persecuted minority" in the world, have consecutively faced repression from various governments in Myanmar since decades now. Formerly insurgent groups such as the Arakan National Rohingya Organization (ANRO) have demanded the group's right to 'self-determination' within the country. In May-June 2012, the rape and murder of a Rakhine woman in a Rohingya dominated locality allegedly by three Muslim men caused over a month-long spate of violent incidents, precipitating casualties among both sects of the populace. International recognition of the Rohingya plight was piqued following the refugee crisis that was triggered in 2015, with significant population fleeing to other Southeast nations, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand via the Strait of Malacca. A crackdown by the Thai government disrupted the operations of human trafficking groups, which in turn, caused the latter to abandon Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants trying to seek refuge in the aforestated Southeast nations, eventually precipitating hundreds of casualties.

The election of a government helmed by the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi following over 20 years of military rule in the 2015 general elections was expected to address the issue of alleged human rights abuses targeting the Rohingya community in Rakhine state. However, the refugee crisis reached a peak when a series of attacks targeted security border posts along the country's border with Bangladesh in Maungdaw, leaving nine security forces dead as also a number of attackers. The insurgent attack, which saw the assailants looting significant arms and ammunition from the guard posts, precipitated a government counter-offensive in Rakhine state targeting Rohingya Muslims, leading to activist groups claiming major human rights abuses by the country's security forces.

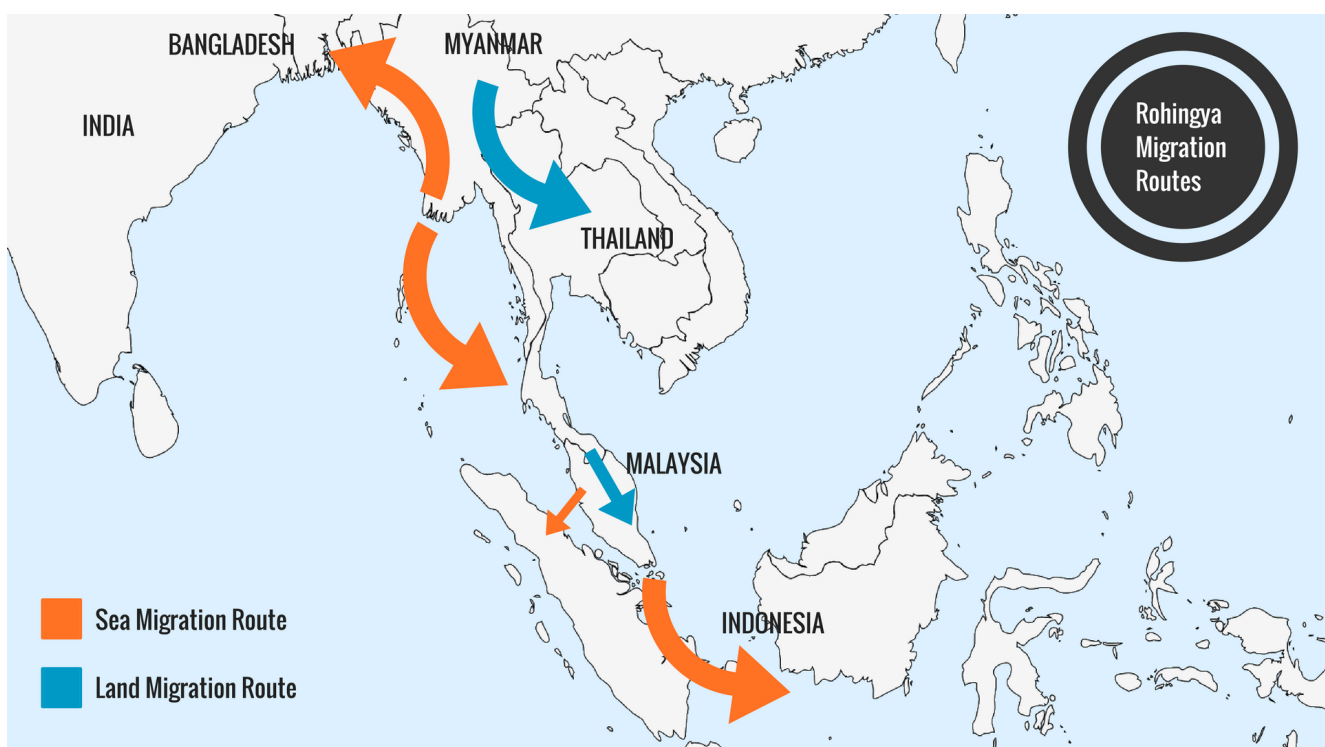


Muslims condemning army excesses in Myanmar

## Myanmar's Contemporary Achilles Heel-Rakhine State? Political Response to Rohingya Issue

On August 25, militants affiliated with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) also known as Harakah al-Yaqin (HaY) perpetrated a coordinated attack on 30 police posts and an army base in Rakhine state. The attacks engendered an incisive counter-insurgency operation by the Army in the province, killing over 60 alleged insurgents with 12 security personnel also dead in the operation. This “clearance operation” by the Myanmar armed forces included reports of targeted arson attacks and civilian deaths, catalyzing hastened exodus of refugees into neighboring Bangladesh and India over past weeks. Approximately 400 people have been reported to be killed since the beginning of clearance operations by the armed forces. Human rights activists’ have highlighted a higher casualty rate, with the deaths of at least 1,000 people, including hundreds of civilians.

The incumbent NLD government led by Suu Kyi has been criticised internationally due to the migration of tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh, thus straining the available aid in the relief camps. Exacerbating challenges regarding the distribution of aid to the refugees, the Myanmar government blocked all UN agencies from delivering food and medicine supplies owing to the region’s “security situation” since the August 25 attack. The NLD government succeeded the military rule in the country for over half a century, which continues to helm the country’s security policy with defense and national security remaining under their control. In that sense, the armed forces’ operations in the Rakhine state, while has been apparent to have had the approval of the government, is largely perceived as an operation undertaken by the country’s military leadership. Keeping in mind the intermittently tenuous relationship between the government and the country’s military, it is possible that the government’s restrained response with regard to the Rohingya crisis is likely an attempt to maintain a stable relationship with the latter as the government seeks to establish peace with the country’s insurgent groups.



Incidentally, the August 25 attack came in the wake of a report submitted by an advisory commission helmed by former UN Chief Kofi Annan on the current situation of the Rohingyas on August 24. The findings stated that the ongoing restrictions and denial of citizenship to the Rohingyas in the Rakhine state would only engender further violence and extremism in the restive state among the populace. The attack by the ARSA militants on the security posts likely effectively negated the possibility of the government's considerations of the Annan-led commission's report, thus rendering the ongoing refugee crisis continuous.

Additionally, taking into consideration the emergence of Buddhist nationalism in the country over the preceding months and their opposition to the Rohingya Muslims, the government's perceived indifference can also be likely attributed to the latter's attempt to appease the majority populace of the country. Ultra-nationalist groups such as the Ma Ba Tha or the Organisation for the Protection of Race and Religion, helmed by popular monks such as Ashin Wirathu, have used their following among the country's Buddhist majority to incite violence against the Rohingya community in the past. The country's highest Buddhist authority, Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee banned the Ma Ba Tha in Myanmar in a bid to curb the rising Islamophobia in the country, a move that followed a temporary ban on sermons by Wirathu for a period of 12 months due to his vitriolic anti-Muslim speeches. Wirathu claims that the Buddhist identity of Myanmar is in jeopardy due to the existence of the Islamic minority community in the country. The increasing nationalist sentiments owing to the perceived incitement of violence has also engendered increased vigilantism in urban townships of Yangon in an attempt to seek out Rohingya Muslims seeking refuge in the urban districts of Myanmar. In May, clashes were recorded between Buddhist nationalists, local residents and authorities after the former attempted to search the township for Rohingyas. Taking this into account, the populist appeal of leaders like Wirathu among the populace, coupled with the general anti-Muslim sentiment, is likely a significant impediment in the government's attempt to rehabilitate the Rohingyas in Rakhine state.

Taken together, the government's need to maintain a working relationship with the military leadership, coupled with its necessity to manage nationalist interests, it remains unlikely that the Suu Kyi government will adopt measures engendering a change in the contemporary refugee situation. With that being said, in a bid to placate the international community, as was witnessed following the Myanmar leader's call with Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan on September 5, the administration is likely to ensure the distribution of aid in the affected regions of the Rakhine state over the coming days. However, the military's involvement in the distribution of the aid will always bring into question their appropriate dispersal among the Rohingyas, given the general perception of the military's traditional denunciation of the Rohingyas' position in the state of Myanmar.

Given that economic development has been one of the major tenets of the Suu Kyi-led NLD government and the need for consolidation of support from populist leaders such as Wirathu as well as the military leadership, the former is likely to perceive the issue as a relatively dispensable one. This assumption can be better understood when considering Suu Kyi's rejection to acknowledge the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine state even before assuming office in 2015-16. The likely perception regarding necessary resource allocation for the country's development rather than the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons in Rakhine state is the possible driving rationale for the government's unwillingness to voluntarily address the issue at this time.

Furthermore, the government is liable to continue to justify its crackdown on the Rohingyas in the Rakhine state citing the challenges of the proliferation of violent extremism. This argument assumes credence particularly against the backdrop of the operational emergence of the ARSA and the potential for Rohingyas' sympathetic perception of the violence perpetrated by the group, especially in the wake of the government's perceived repression. The following section seeks to delve into the ongoing ethnic crisis as a potential tinderbox, inciting the genesis of transnational Islamist militancy in Myanmar and the likely spillover effects on the region, in general.



**Members of the ARSA, march somewhere in the Bangladesh-Myanmar border region**



## Rohingya Marginalization-Roots for Transnational Islamist militancy?

One of the contentions surrounding the Rohingyas is the group's majority Islamic faith. The Rohingya Muslims practice a Sufi-inflected variation of Sunni Islam, with a minority of the population also identifying themselves as Hindus. One of the most significant concerns regarding the alleged persecution of the Rohingyas has been the potential for Islamist militants including those with the Islamic State and al Qaeda to exploit the vulnerable Rohingya population for militant recruitment. This argument assumes international significance due to reasons such as the appeal of the jihadist ideology for Rohingya youth, the continued impoverished nature of the community while lacking a collective identity, wherein the recognition and belongingness to a group may hold a natural pull for the populace. The alleged abuses of the population by the Myanmar security forces may assume the role of a catalyst in furthering the militants' agenda to lay the groundwork for an anti-establishment agenda.

The vulnerability of the Rohingya crisis to transform into a potential militant breeding ground can be better understood when taking into consideration how militant groups have attempted to invoke the issue to cultivate appeal for their causes. This, in turn, likely gives the community a sense of being acknowledged and identified when they fail to be recognized as part of a geographical territory that they claim to be their native land. A look at the pattern of how jihadist groups have invoked the Rohingya issue will further add perspective to the possibility of the crisis transforming into a regional transnational militant issue in the future.

In September 2014, during the formation announcement of the al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), a satellite group targeting the government in the countries in the subcontinent, the militant group pledged to rescue Muslims in Myanmar from "injustice and oppression". In June 2015, the Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) group was reported to have offered resources and training facilities to help Muslims in Myanmar to take up the "sword". Additionally, in the April 2016 edition of the Islamic state's Dabiq magazine, Bangladeshi militant Abu Ibrahim allegedly pledged help to oppressed Muslims in Myanmar in "every possible way". In November 2016, Indonesian authorities discovered a plot targeting prominent sites across Jakarta, including the Myanmar embassy, when three individuals who had pledged allegiance to the IS were arrested. Furthermore, as recently as in January 2017, an IS follower allegedly traveling to Myanmar to carry out attacks was detained by Malaysian authorities. The intermittent arrests, as well as the militant group's recognition of the issue in Myanmar and their appeal to the oppressed Muslims, is indicative of an expanding footprint of radical Islamist elements in an ethnocultural crisis.



## ARAKAN ROHINGYA SALVATION ARMY

အာရ်ကန် ရိုဟင်ဂျာ ကယ်တင်ရေး တပ်မတော်

---

*"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful"*

Date : 29 March 2017

Ref No: ARSA/PR/01/2017

### PRESS RELEASE

Rohingya is an ethnic, indigenous and native race to Arakan (Rakhine), has been there for several thousand years even before the nation called modern day Burma (Myanmar) came to exist in the world map.

Arakan takes pride of several independent kingdoms which had nothing to do whatsoever with the Burmese colonial empire from the first day of the world until 1784 in which the Burmese king, Bo Daw Phaya Maung Waing, invaded and colonized Arakan with brutal, offensive military attacks.

Rohingyas have always been subjected to **genocide and crimes against humanity** committed stage by stage by the successive Burmese regimes and governments for decades since 1970s in attempting to exterminate them totally from their native land, Arakan.

Nowadays, the international community begins to witness that the successive Burmese regimes and governments have been committing genocide and crimes against humanity against Rohingya community for decades.

In view of that, the United Nations recognizes Rohingya community as the most persecuted people in the world and also acknowledges that persecutions of Rohingya community by the successive Burmese regimes and governments amount to crimes against humanity.

Page 1 of 4

ARSA Press Release



## ARAKAN ROHINGYA SALVATION ARMY (ARSA) PROFILE



**Strength: 500-600 fighters**

**Sources of funding:**  
Rohingya Diaspora, Saudi Arabian nationals

Earlier known as the Harakah al-Yaqin (Faith Movement), later evolved into the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Allegedly perpetrated multiple retaliatory attacks on Myanmar border police and Army. ARSA has been accused of conducting targeted attacks on the ethnic Buddhist community

## MAJOR ATTACKS

**October 9, 2016**

Then Harakah al-Yaqin claimed responsibility for attacks on Myanmar border posts killing nine border officers and four soldiers

**August 25, 2017**

Coordinated ARSA attacks on Myanmar border police posts and attempted raid on army base in Maungdaw

**August 27, 2017**

ARSA insurgents accused of killing six Hindus. Two Hindu men, one woman and three children dead.

## MILITANT STRATEGIES



Utilization of instigated embittered villagers



Usage of training received abroad (specifically Pakistan)



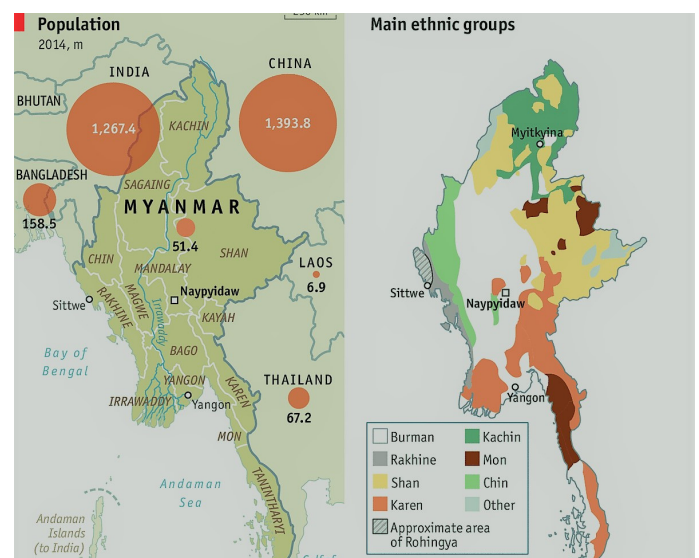
Call for international support from Muslim countries for greater goal of permanent homeland in Rakhine

### LEADER



Ataulah Abu Ammar Jununi is the current leader of the ARSA.

One of the concerns regarding the structural formation of an extremist satellite group against the backdrop of the ongoing crisis is the sympathy that ARSA has been able to garner among the local populace since it escalated its operations in the Rakhine state in October 2016. The insurgent group, which was outlawed as a militant organisation by the government following the August 25 attack, is reported to be led by a group of Rohingya expatriates operating out of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan along with on-ground fighters with guerrilla warfare experience. While the group's foundational ideology does not rest on religious motivations, more recently, senior Rohingya clerics have justified the violence perpetrated by ARSA as legal in Islam due to the security forces' campaign against the Rohingyas. The Rohingyas have conventionally been perceived to follow a conservative form of Islam, although concerns regarding the local clerics' potential use of radical ideology to indoctrinate the local population into the insurgency campaign and eventually militancy remain.



Ethnic groups in Myanmar (Source: The Economist)



The ARSA's escalation of violence over the recent months can be attributed as a broad-based, long-term strategy by the group to point toward the establishment's unwillingness to resolve the crisis or address the grievances of the Rohingya population. The resultant blanket crackdown and the alleged human rights abuses after the ARSA-perpetrated violence was likely an intended strategy by the group to invoke further hatred among the Rohingya population against the security forces and, at large, the government. While conventionally the Rohingya population has perceived violence as counterproductive to their cause, the sense of hopelessness due to the perceived indifference by the government is likely to cause the population to view insurgent groups such as the ARSA to secure them the right to self-determination resultant freedoms.

Put together, despite the international pressure on the Myanmar government to address the issue, the historical lack of action is indicative of a bleak likelihood for any administrative action by the Myanmar government to objectively address the issue in the near-term. Furthermore, the international clamor for action is likely to impel militant groups to take notice of the issue over the coming weeks and months, thus making the region a potential hotbed of Islamist militancy. This assessment further gains ground when considering that militant groups such as IS are seeking to establish remote satellite territories as they correspondingly lose territory in their erstwhile strongholds of Iraq, Syria, and Libya.

Given that Bangladesh and Pakistan have witnessed a sympathetic wave among pockets of its population for the Islamic State and other militant groups, as evidenced by frequent arrests over the recent months, potential recruiters for the militant groups are likely to seek to establish their foothold among the Rohingyas. In addition, potential help from other militant groups in the region in the form of resources such as arms and ammunition to ARSA or other insurgent groups is likely to only escalate the violent response, causing a cyclical response to crackdown and a further crisis in the region.



Ashin Wirathu, the monk who has allegedly been instrumental in issuing sermons and hate speeches



## BANGLADESH

### Background to the Rohingya Crisis with respect to Bangladesh

Operation Nagamin (King Dragon) began on February 6, 1978 in the village of Sakkipara in Sittwe district, Myanmar on the directions of Burmese strongman General Ne Win. The operation by the Tatmadaw (Burmese Army) was conducted, ostensibly for the purpose of checking illegal immigrants (Rohingyas) who had allegedly flooded eastern and southeastern Myanmar as a result of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. While the operation partially succeeded, with 300,000 Rohingyas being expelled out of Bangladesh, Myanmar took back most of the expatriated Rohingyas due to mounting international pressure. The Rohingya Crisis is directly associated with this above-mentioned operation and the subsequent persecution of the Rohingyas at the hands of the Burmese Army on the basis of the 1982 Burmese Citizenship Law, a legal expedient utilized by the Burmese Junta to isolate the resident Bengali-speaking population.

Taking into account the fact that the Rohingyas are believed to have migrated from Bengali-speaking regions of East India centuries ago, thousands of Rohingyas began migrating to neighboring Bangladesh with the hope of finding better living conditions and escaping the tyranny of the Tatmadaw. The Rohingya migration to Bangladesh began in 1978 and continued in phases in the aftermath of recurring military operations that were aimed at cleansing the country of its Bengali-speaking population, concentrated in the western Rakhine state. While multiple countries harbored the disenfranchised refugees, Bangladesh has remained the prime destination for Rohingyas to seek asylum. Consecutive Bangladeshi governments have had an ambiguous stance on the refugee crisis, oscillating between refugee-welcoming to refugee-hostile policies that have been criticized by international human rights bodies over the years. Following the arrival of the first batch of around 200,000 Rohingya refugees in 1978, Bangladesh that had recently gained its independence after the bloody Liberation War of 1971, dealt with the situation as a 'humanitarian crisis'.

The government ensured that the refugees were provided temporary shelters and other relief aid. Similarly, during the second phase of the exodus between 1991-92 in the backdrop of Burmese repression of the Rohingyas in the northern regions of Rakhine, Bangladesh accepted another 250,000 refugees and extended food and medical services while calling for humanitarian aid from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Approximately 20 refugee camps were erected in the vicinity of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, specifically in the Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts. As a result of this, around 250,000 were temporarily assimilated into the country as registered refugees with the UNHCR and Red Cross working hand-in-hand with the Bangladeshi and Myanmar governments. Additionally, efforts were made by both Bangladesh and Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya issue diplomatically, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the foreign ministries of both nations in early 1992.

## Bangladesh's contrasting viewpoints on the Rohingya Exodus

While the Bangladeshi government initially projected a receptive and humanitarian position with regards to the influx of Rohingyas, after 1992, the policies adopted by the administration were in a complete divergence of its primary stance. Throughout the 1990's, Dhaka refused to accept refugees from Myanmar, rejecting the status of registered refugees, that was earlier dispensed to the Bengali migrants, for new arrivals from Rakhine and other states. The MoU signed between the two countries was utilized to repatriate thousands of refugees with backing from the UNHCR between 1993-1998. Several thousand were physically evicted from refugee camps citing infrastructural drawbacks and illegal immigration into the country. Informal repatriation continued in the following decade with the Bangladeshi government expelling hundreds of refugees across the Naaf River and conducting arrests along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Myanmar's border security force, Nasaka played crucial roles in the repatriation of Rohingya refugees.

## National Refugee Policy 2014

### NATIONAL REFUGEE POLICY 2014



**LISTING UNREGISTERED REFUGEES**



**PROVIDING TEMPORARY HUMANITARIAN RELIEF**



**STRENGTHENING BORDER MANAGEMENT**



**DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS**



**INCREASING NATIONAL COORDINATION ON THE ROHINGYA CRISIS**

The Bangladesh government refused to allow additional refugees into the country on the pretext of developing a comprehensive state refugee policy. In 2014, the government unveiled its policy for Myanmarese refugees and asylum seekers with no documentation. The infographic on the left highlights the key components of the National Refugee Policy. While the policy provided a framework for dealing with the Rohingya crisis, it proved more or less unsuccessful due to several constraints and gross mismanagement by the administration. Further, the Bangladeshi security forces comprising of the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB), the elite Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and the Coast Guard were deployed by the government to enforce its directive of 'No New Refugee Arrivals' from Myanmar. The blockade of international humanitarian aid and an informal sealing of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border secured dividends for the Bangladesh government as it managed to stem the continuous inflow of Rohingya refugees.

## Relocation and the associated challenges

Bangladesh is the eighth most populous country in the world, with a population of approximately 166 million and a population density of 1237 people per square kilometer. These figures are indicative of the fact that Bangladesh faces severe overpopulation issues. Due to the perpetual influx of Rohingyas into Cox's Bazar district and other surrounding areas in Chittagong division, infrastructural issues have surfaced having an adverse impact on the capabilities of the government in resolving the refugee crisis. Due to the terrain indigenous to the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, it has reportedly become increasingly difficult for Bangladeshi security forces to check the migration of Rohingyas into towns and villages along the border. Refugee camps in Kutupalong and Nayapara have reached their occupancy limit and are struggling to meet the daily demands of the ever-increasing refugee numbers.

A 2015 proposal to relocate Rohingya refugees to the Thengar Char island in the Bay of Bengal was shelved following international criticism by human rights groups. However, the plan to relocate the refugees was revived in 2016, after another spate of violence directed at the Rohingyas in Rakhine. Thenghar Char is known to be underwater between June-September and emerged from the Bay of Bengal only 11 years ago as a result of silting. Currently, the island does not possess roads or buildings. Further, according to sources, the seas around Thengar Char are infested with pirates, who abduct fishermen and civilians for ransom. Thenghar Char is located between the Hatia and Sandeep islands off Noakhali District near Megna river and is also prone to cyclones. A complete restructuring of the island to make it habitable is liable to take around 15-20 years, especially for the introduction of minimum services and agricultural conditions for farming.

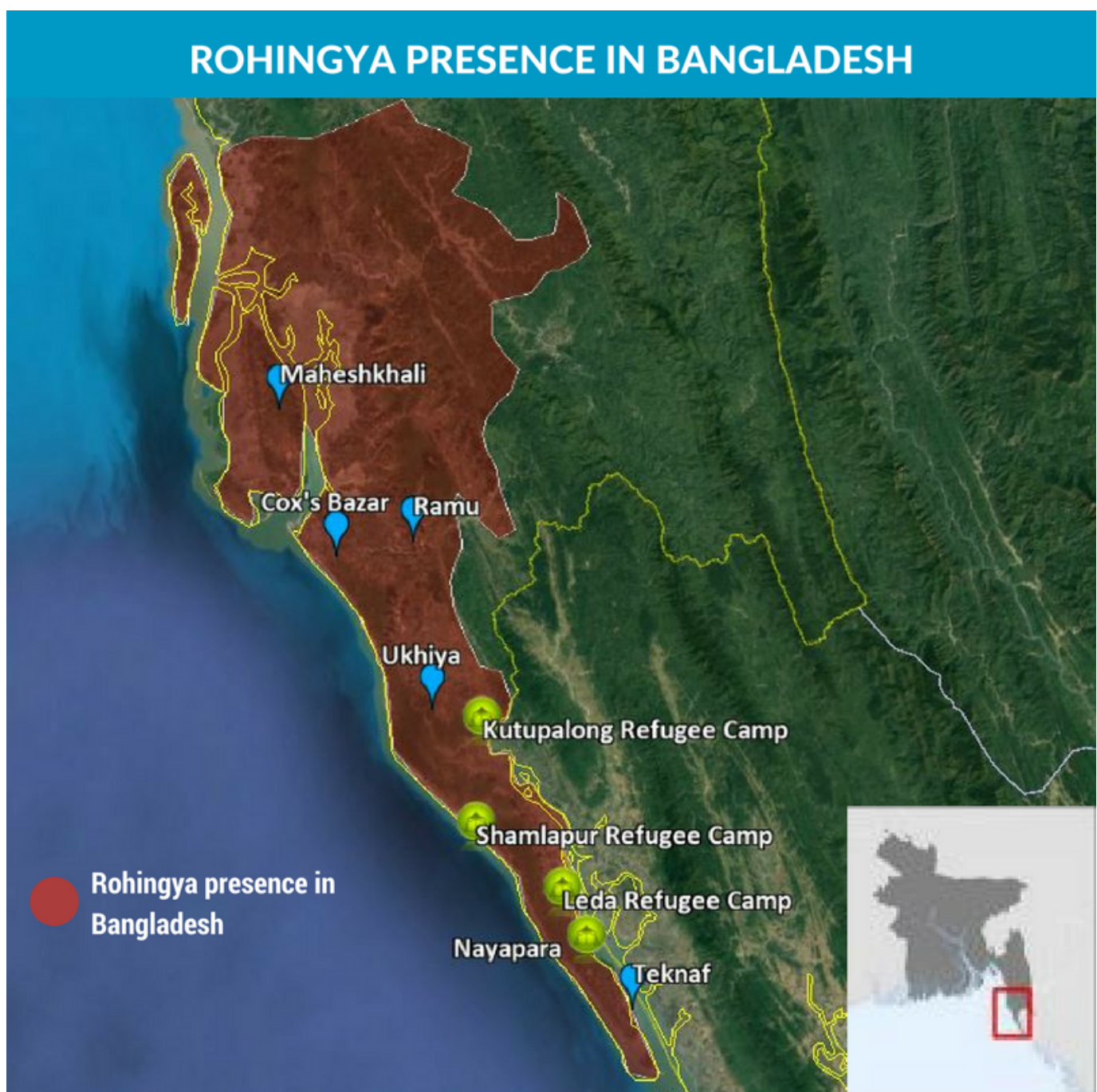


Thengar Char island



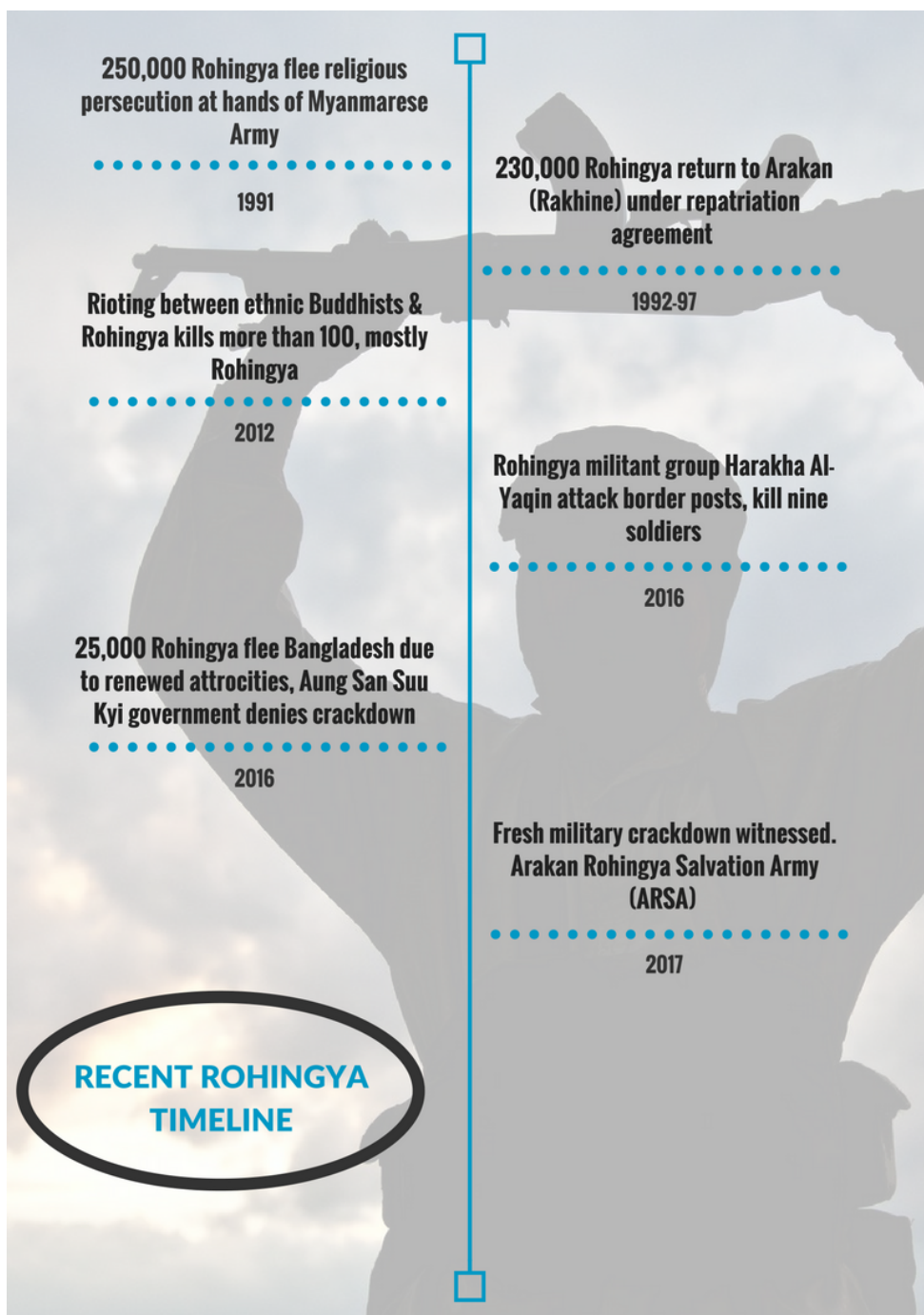
## Why does Bangladesh continue to reject Rohingya refugees?

Taking into consideration the limitations with respect to Bangladesh's infrastructure and deficient resources, the excessive incursions by Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, are known to have burdened the Bangladeshi administration which continues to face its own internal challenges with respect to poverty, distribution of state benefits and terrorism. The situation has further worsened due to failing diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar, with the latter refusing to comply with repatriation policies agreed to under the MoU signed between the bordering nations. Bangladesh has even blamed the exodus of harming its social fabric and deteriorating the law and order situation in the country. Moreover, given that the Cox's Bazar district that houses most refugees is one of the only tourist destinations in Bangladesh, the exodus has led to severe effects on the country's tourism industry.





Foreign remittances constitute a significant chunk of Bangladesh's national revenue, taking into account the large number of Bangladeshis working as semi-skilled workers in the Middle East as well as Southeast Asia. The Bangladeshi government has accused Rohingyas of using the country as a means to gain foreign jobs, leading to a loss of potential remittances for the emerging economy. Moreover, the alleged involvement of Rohingya refugees in the rampant drug trade along the porous Bangladesh-Myanmar border has led to growing resentment in the resident population against the refugees settled in the Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts. Methamphetamine, colloquially known as 'Meth' is known to be trafficked from transit points along the Myanmar border into Bangladesh. Notably, the usage of the addictive narcotic is reportedly on the rise in several urban centers of Bangladesh, including national capital Dhaka.



Finally, the permeable border and the accompanying pandemonium in relation to the Rohingya Crisis has supposedly provided breathing space to local and foreign insurgent groups that have used the chaos to establish themselves in the vicinity of the border. The Bangladesh military has been constantly tested with regards to Myanmar insurgent groups such as the Arakan Army, that has been fighting Myanmar forces for decades. Insurgent groups from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, a militant hotspot in Bangladesh, as well as Rohingya insurgent including members of the ARSA are also allegedly seeking refuge in the border region.

## Steps that need to be taken by Bangladesh

The unending woes of the Rohingya and the consequences experienced by Bangladeshi government in managing the crisis have compounded over the years. While certain measures have been taken by the government to alleviate the conditions of the refugees and in tandem reduce the effects on the country's resources and economy, most of these steps have proved ineffective. The resolution of the Rohingya Crisis should be a top priority for the current Awami League government in Dhaka and its leader Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Given that the Myanmar government has on several occasions blatantly refused to accept repatriation of Rohingya refugees and providing them basic rights, the Bangladeshi government needs to understand that Naypyidaw and its policies are going to remain more or less similar to those witnessed during the Junta rule. Aung San Suu Kyi's statements with respect to the persecution of Rohingyas have confirmed that the democratically elected NLD government's stand remains consistent with respect to the military-led government under General Thein Sein, that was well known for its brutal crackdown on Bengali immigrants. Keeping this in mind, while long-term uninterrupted bilateral negotiations should continue, Bangladesh will find it necessary to draft its own comprehensive refugee policy that provides certain takeaways for the impoverished and persecuted Rohingyas. This policy can be either state-drafted or might need the assistance from UNHCR and international NGO's.

Further, concrete measures with respect to the neutralization of militant and insurgent groups in the border areas need to be undertaken by the Bangladeshi security forces under the direction of the government. Given that militant activities and narcotics trade are usually related to each other, especially in border regions, it remains crucial that the BGB and other agencies ensure that combing operations achieve their desired goal. Furthermore, Bangladesh should cease motivating illegal immigration into the country by conducting background checks on new refugee arrivals with respect to narcotics and terror-links and should allow only screened individuals across the border. Additionally, the international condemnation of the alleged atrocities committed by the Burmese Army against the Rohingya is liable to aid Bangladesh's efforts in underscoring the challenges faced by country while attempting to defuse escalating tensions along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. Engaging neighboring countries such as India, which has played its own part in providing asylum to approximately 40,000 Rohingyas is likely to prove beneficial for Bangladesh, particularly in forestalling narcotics trade and assistance in battling insurgent elements. Lastly, Bangladesh's membership of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) might help it raise funds for regulating and sheltering refugees.

**\*This report is Part I of GRID91's Rohingya Series. The upcoming report will cover the implications of the Rohingya Exodus of India**

# CONTACT US

C 1003, ONE BKC, G BLOCK  
BANDRA-KURLA COMPLEX  
BANDRA (EAST)  
MUMBAI-400051  
INDIA

T: +912262364401

E: [connectingminds@grid91.com](mailto:connectingminds@grid91.com)

W: [www.grid91.com](http://www.grid91.com)