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# Humanitarian Calamity of Rohingyas' in Bangladesh

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## Sisyphian Complexity of Bangladesh's Foreign Policy

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*Humanitarian Calamity of Rohingyas' in Bangladesh: Sisyphean Complexity of Bangladesh's Foreign Policy.*

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**Abstract:**

Since late August 2017, almost 1.1 million Rohingya Muslims have fled Burma's Rakhine State to escape the military's large-scale campaign of ethnic cleansing. The atrocities committed by Burmese security forces, including mass killings, sexual violence, and widespread arson, amount to crimes against humanity. Military and civilian officials have repeatedly denied that security forces committed abuses during the operations, claims which are contradicted by extensive evidence and witness accounts. The Rohingya have faced decades of discrimination and repression under successive Burmese governments. Effectively denied citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law, they are one of the largest stateless populations in the world. Restrictions on movement and lack of access to basic health care have led to dire humanitarian conditions for those displaced by earlier waves of violence in 2012 and 2016. Policies that are taken to reduce the crisis are not enough. In near future this manmade calamity will turn into a disaster if not taken proper care. In this research a brief historical analysis of Rohingya crisis and refugee influx has been discussed in focus on contemporary incidents. Bangladesh's presence and stances in this issue has been evaluated but most of the scene has given a negative flow in the picture. Thus Sisyphean Complexity has been used as an anecdote in this research to describe the many negative flows in national, international and regional forums.

**Keywords:** Diplomacy, Sisyphean Complexity, Duel-Concern Model, Rohingya, Repatriation.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction:**

In the present world, Rohingya exodus is considered to be the most alarming issue of all. Bangladesh, Myanmar along with international and regional community got involved in this crisis. This is a crisis with historical background. In chapter three of this research paper, a brief historical background with relevant context has been discussed. The history was brief as well as comprehensive as it discusses histories from pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial and contemporary histories particularly focusing on Arakan, Rohingya and these Muslim communities' push-pull factors. In Chapter four, a very contemporary trends of historical evaluation of Rohingya crisis was discussed. In that particular chapter, relevance with Sisyphian nature of this crisis has been logically narrated. In chapter five, a conceptual framework for the arguments of this research has been presented. The 'Dual concern model' of conflict has been used as the conceptual framework of this paper. Finally it is drawn to a conclusion that the whole history, policies, and actions fall under Sisyphian Complexity; Where King Sisyphus was made to endlessly roll a huge boulder up a steep hill as a punishment. Zeus accordingly displayed his own cleverness by enchanting the boulder into rolling away from King Sisyphus before he reached the top, which ended up consigning Sisyphus to an eternity of useless efforts and unending frustration. Thus it came to pass that pointless or interminable activities are sometimes described as Sisyphian. All these chapters were focusing on national, bilateral, international concern and actions of Rohingya crisis. Many actions and programs are taken in bilateral to multilateral sphere to prevent the ongoing crisis, yet the question remains; Will these actions are worthy enough to stop the textbook example of genocide in South Asia?

## **Chapter Two: Methodology:**

Primary Data Collections were added as the methodology of this research. However, expert interviews from various news magazines were added. Qualitative analysis made the research focuses on a conceptual framework used in chapter five; the 'Dual Concern Model' of conflict, which made the research standard for evaluating upcoming issues regarding Rohingya issue.

### Chapter Three: History of Bitterness: From Naramaikhla to Su-ki:

According to Imtiaz Ahmed (2009) there are Two Assumptions about earlier history of Rohingyas' origin: One is, they are the descendants from Moorish, Arab, Persian, Mongol, Tark and Pathans who used to trade in this region, mostly timber. Myths narrate that these were inevitable due to a shipwreck incident near Rakhine region. The other one is during Colonial period; Bangladeshis intrude the region due to works and other issues (Ahmed, 2009). In the following part a brief historical background will be set up to evaluate Rohingya Refugee crisis in four historical phases:

**3.1 Pre-Colonial Period:** Islam reached Arakan before 788 A.D (Collis, 1960). According to Global Security (2011) A flow of refugee influx can be seen in 1400s when Min Khaung, to punish Naramaikhla, invaded Arakan in 1404 and again in 1406, and Naramaikhla, king of Arakan, fled to Bengal in the latter year. There he remained under the protection of the king of Bengal for over twenty years (Global Security 2011). It is the earlier historical evidence of migratory flow from Rakhine to Bengal.

With the help of Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah, Arakan king regained his power in 1430. A number of Mughal soldiers remained in Arakan area and get mixed with the native. This is another explanation how Rohingyas are historically Muslim (Yegar, 2002).

But in 1437 Jalaluddin Shah died and Arakan was no longer a vassal state. However, still during 1500s Mughal influence was severe in Arakan. With the help of the business, Magh Pirates started to get active in Arakan area along with Chattagram area. In 1661 Shah Shuja, posted 'Kamain' soldiers to withdraw Arakan king, and in 1666 Shayesta khan invaded this region to stop Magh piracy. Interestingly in 1982 Citizenship Act, Myanmar added this 'Kamain' ethnic group in 135 groups but not the Rohingyas (Ullah, 2016). This is a clear sign how Rohingyas are targeted specially for this genocide.

In 1784-85, Burmese King Budyapwa attacked Arakan, 20 thousands to 2 lakh people pleaded in Bangladesh, a refugee influx was seen. Among them two-third was muslim. In 1796, Hiram Cox was assigned to take surveys and research in Cox's Bazar area due to this influx (Ullah, 2016).

**3.2 Colonial Period:** Francis Buchanan Hamilton named these refugees the 'Rooinga' in 1799 (Ullah, 2016). In Colonial period, there were ups and downs in three broad phases.

In *First Anglo- Burmese War* (1824-25) British were deploying forces as they were seriously threatened by Burmese Kings. In *Second Anglo- Burmese War* (1853) British reined their power to lower Burma to acquire resources. In *Third Anglo-Burmese War* (1885) British took power almost half of the Burma and to acquire and manage resources, they started to deploy work forces from Bengal and present-day Bangladesh (Downing, 2017). Throughout the colonial period till Second World War both in and out migration was seen.

In Second World War, when Japan bombed Rangoon in 1941, a large number of people fled in Cox's Bazar. A number of Refugee influxes has been seen. Interestingly Muslims in Arakans supported British while a Buddhist of Rakhine supported Japan (Downing, 2017).

When in 4 January 1948, Myanmar got independence, before and after that Muslim leaders of Arakan people wanted to join Pakistan while, others wanted to remain independent. This attitude of Arakan or Rakhine Muslims made the leader of Myanmar more ferocious against them. And atrocities began in many forms. Up until 1960s the Muslim people of Rakhine were remained in under developments .

**3.3 Post-Colonial Period:** In post- colonial period there were two pushes of refugee crisis (Ahmed, 2012):

1. 1978-79: Operation Nagamin in 1977 created a huge influx of Rohingya refugees in this part of the Asia. It created 2.5 lakh Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh.
2. 1991: a second push, known as Operation Pyi Thaya or Operation Clean and Beautiful Nation, was launched with the same purpose, resulting in further violence and another massive flow of 200,000 Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh. This push followed 1982 new citizenship law that identified 135 national ethnic groups. The Rohingya aren't one of them, effectively rendering them stateless (Hunt, 2017).

To have a clear understanding of recent refugee crisis the brief timeline from 2010 is being discussed.

**3.4 Contemporary Age and the 'Nobel' One:** In 2010 Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest. International community thought this event as new uprising of democracy in the historical exploitation of Junta rule in Myanmar. But From 2012 to 2014 a number of riots occurred in Rakhine state.

The violence were mostly between Buddhist and Muslims. Men, Women and Children died and houses were burnt. From 2012 to 2015, 12 thousand Rohingyas fled, largely by boat to Malaysia (Hunt, 2017). An undocumented number of Refugees fled to Bangladesh as well. It is an evident that how the new hope that emerged from Aung San Suu Kyi didn't last.

In November 2015, In the first democratic elections since end of military rule, Rohingya aren't allowed to participate as candidates, nor as voters. Suu Kyi's party wins and she becomes de-facto leader in a power-sharing agreement with the military (Hunt, 2017). But this winning of the 'noble' one was not a hope for the Rohingya people as well.

In 2016 About 300 Rohingya men attacked border posts in Rakhine State, killing nine police officers, according to state media. The attacks spark an intense crackdown by the Myanmar military and trigger an exodus of 87,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh. Rohingya insurgent group, now known as Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), claimed responsibility for the border post attack. And finally in 25th August 2017, Myanmar's state media reports 12 security officers were killed by ARSA insurgents during a series of coordinated attacks targeting at least 20 police outposts and an army base in Rakhine State. Military responds with what they describe as

"clearance operations," burning down villages and triggering a mass exodus of Rohingya to Bangladesh (Hunt, 2017). There is no such acceptance of state-act military atrocities in counter-terrorism. The 'nobel' prize winner didn't make any steps to stop the violence.

In september 19, 2017 In a televised speech, Suu Kyi condemned any human rights violations but was widely criticized for failing to acknowledge the alleged atrocities by the military. Myanmar's military has repeatedly denied conducting atrocities, saying it is targeting terrorists (Hunt, 2017). But it is obvious that 1.1 million refugees who are residing in Bangladesh in so much inhumane conditions are not all terrorists. If they were being saved from terror attacks, they would not have fled in Bangladesh as 'refugee'.

This history is a outline of a constant push and pull from both Myanmar and Bangladesh. In many times, Bengali muslims went to Myanmar in large numbers and also the opposite happened. Here a initial Sisyphian Complexity is seen. Isn't it obvious that, a 'peace-maker' with 'peace prize' is just being a show piece in this sisyphian complexity of modern day genocide. In the next chapters, detailed analytical explanations will be given from the lessons of history.

#### **Chapter Four: The Recent Trends of Sisyphean Activities in Rohingya Issue:**

ARSA attacked on 25th August 2017 killed 71 to 89 people including policemen, immigrant officer, soldiers and insurgents (Lone and Naing, 2017; Hitusan, 2017) catalyzed the recent influx of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh to a number of 1.1 million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals - Rohingyas (UNB, 2018). A report surveyed between 25th August to 24th September 2017 by Doctors Without Borders showed that 6700 Rohingyas were killed within 4 weeks of the attack among 730 were of the age of five years and less. The survey also estimated that between 9,425 and 13,759 Rohingya died during the initial 31 days following the start of the violence, including at least 1,000 children below the age of 5 years (Doctorswithoutborders.ca, 2017). For a long period of time Myanmar authority made almost impossible to conduct any survey in Rakhine state by any humanitarian organizations and made their legitimacy as a legal authority vulnerable by rejecting Rohingyas as 'refugee'.

In international relations, Myanmar has a strong stock of economic, trade and military relations with China, India and Russia. From the beginning, China and Russia has been vetoed any decisions taken against Myanmar regarding Rohingya issue in United Nations Security Council. Kishore Mahbubani (2013) pointed precisely that in theory, UNGA has a role to play in conflict resolution and peace-building. In practice, especially since the end of the cold war, the UN Security Council (UNSC) has played the key role in this area, but its record on this is chequered (Mahbubani, 2013). Often manipulated by Permanent Five, UNSC lost its appeal towards humanitarian calamities. This is the very first step where the world community took the Sisyphean complexity[1] in Rohingya issues along with other genocides.

In 30 June 2018 President of World Bank and the Secretary General of United Nations visited Bangladesh. This is a proof that international humanitarian community is trying their best to put Rohingya issues in first priority. But what Myanmar is trying to do is to make the situation protracted. The situation in Bangladesh will worsen due to the illegal activities of undocumented 1.1 million Rohingyas. This will create havoc within the Bangladesh. Moreover, International Criminal Court is ineffective in this area. Myanmar is not a member or signatory of ICC charter. Any kind of judgment that ICC will provide will not become a headache for Myanmar. Thus the Rohingya issue will fall into the Sisyphean complexity again.

However, Myanmar signed a repatriation deal on November 2017 and subsequently a Joint Working Group, comprising of officials from Bangladesh and Myanmar, was formed on December. This Joint Working Group of Bangladesh and Myanmar agreed in January 2018 to complete the return of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims who had fled an army crackdown last year in Myanmar within two years. Statements from both the Myanmar and Bangladesh foreign ministries said Bangladesh would set up five transit camps on its side of the border. Those camps would send Rohingyas to two reception centers in Myanmar. Myanmar said it would build a transit camp that can house 30,000 returnees. Myint Kyaing, permanent secretary at Myanmar's Ministry of Labor, Immigration and Population, told Reuters that



Myanmar would begin processing at least 150 people a day through each of the two camps by Jan (Paul and Lee, 2018).

Here comes the third argument how the process is a failure and turning into a Sisyphean Complexity. Center for Policy Dialogue, a renowned think tank of Bangladesh, reported that if

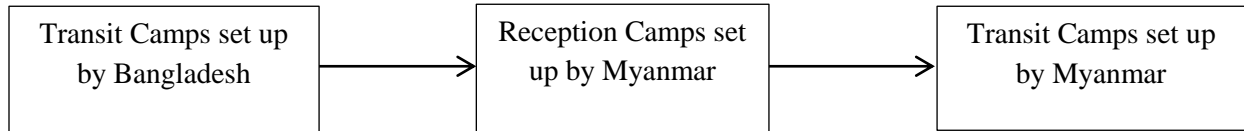


Figure: The repatriation procedures agreed in the recent MoU.

Myanmar takes even 300 Rohingyas per day, it will take seven years to complete the whole repatriation procedure (Islam, 2018). But, Myanmar has a history of denial and withdrawing from promises just like North Korea has been historically withdrew herself from many Nuclear Deals. If such thing happens within this projected seven years, the Rohingya issue will remain a bone of contention between these two countries.

The final argument can be said that, the Transit Camps that will be set up by Myanmar (see figure) can turn out to be concentration camps as Myanmar reject the Rohingyas through their national policies.

In concluding remark, it can be said that the Rohingya Refugee crisis will be a Sisyphean Complexity for national, bilateral and international arena. The brief of the arguments are given below:

- a. In UN, China and Russia has been taken side with Myanmar as they have their national interest in Myanmar,
- b. The Rohingya issue will become a protracted headache of Bangladesh for a long period of time, and the socio-economic conditions of Bangladesh will become worsen,
- c. The recent MoU for the repatriation process is complicated and faulty in many sectors.
- d. Even if a successful repatriation occurs, the transit camps will become another factor for re-influx of Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

This is how the whole Rohingya issue is turning into a Sisyphean Complexity for Bangladesh and International world. In the next chapter a conceptual understanding will be created along with the recent trends that have been discussed in this chapter and also the lessons from historical background that has been narrated in the previous chapter.

## Chapter Five: Conceptual Framework of Sisyphean Complexity in Diplomatic Sphere Regarding Rohingya Issue:

In chapter Four, A number recent trends were given to evaluate the text-book genocide that is happening in Asia. There were also evidences to show how the whole mess is turning into a Sisyphean complexity. In this chapter a bit conceptual understanding and arguments will be presented to show evidences for the rising Sisyphean Complexity in Rohingya issue.

In the previous chapter it was shown that, The Rohingya issue will become a protracted headache of Bangladesh for a long period of time, and the socio-economic conditions of Bangladesh will become worsen and also the recent MoU for the repatriation process is complicated and faulty in many sectors. Both of these issues are mostly national or bilateral by nature. These complexities can be evaluated through the dual concern model (Pruitt and Rubin, 1986) which is used to describe the basic orientation that people take toward conflict. This model proposes that the individuals in conflict have two levels of related concerns: a level of concerns for their own outcome, and a level of concerns for the others' outcome. Savage, Blair and Sorenson (1989) propose a similar model for the choices of the negotiation strategy. According to this model, an actor's unilateral choices of strategy are reflected in the answer of two simple questions (Lewicki et, al., 2003):

1. How much concern does the actor have for achieving substantive outcomes at the sake in this negotiation (substantive goals)?

2. How much concern does the negotiator have for the current and future quality of the relationship with the other party (relational goals)?

A mix strategy is thus seen in answering the mentioned question. A strong interest in achieving only substantive advancement will lead to a competitive mix strategy. In achieving only relational goals will lead to accommodative approaches. If both substance and relationship is important, negotiators should pursue collaborative approaches. Finally if the actors expect neither substantive nor relational goals they will follow avoidance strategy Here avoidance is mostly refer as non-engagement strategy, while other three; collaborative, competitive and accommodation is considered as active- engagement strategies (Lewicki et, al., 2003).

In the Rohingya issue, from the very beginning Myanmar has been using 'Avoidance' strategies ( scholars argue that Myanmar is still following such strategies). In this phase they were expecting either substantive or relational goals. On the other hand Bangladesh were expecting

		Substantive outcome important?	
		Yes	No
Relational outcome important?	Yes	Collaboration	Accommodation
	No	Competition	Avoidance

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‘Competition’, in the major sense, as both the country do not enjoy massive bilateral trades or agreements. She was also tilted towards ‘Collaboration’, if possible. This mix strategy was not on positive side. But after the huge pressures from international community, Myanmar was reshaping its policies toward competitive.

Again, recent research shows that Myanmar is apparently trying to delay the repatriation process without taking any quick step to create conducive environment in Rakhine for the safe return of Rohingyas (Myanmar tactfully delaying Rohingya repatriation | [theindependentbd.com](http://theindependentbd.com), 2018). It shows that still Myanmar is following Avoidance strategy in deceptive manner. However, Bangladesh with her diplomatic successes, having some advantages in national, regional and international spaces.

## **Chapter Six: Recommendation:**

Identifying potential shortcomings in the planning process is necessary. Effective plannings also required hard work on several fronts (Lewicki et, al., 2003):

1. Defining the issue
2. Assembling issues and defining the ‘Bargaining Mix’
3. Defining interests
4. Defining limits
5. Defining one’s own objectives (targets) and opening bids (where to start)
6. Defining the constituents to whom one is accountable
7. Understanding the other party and its interests and objectives
8. Selecting a strategy
9. Planning the issue presentation and defense
10. Defining Protocol- where and when the negotiation will occur, who will be there, agenda etc.

From the very beginning of any negotiations of treaties (international or bilateral) Bangladesh should define this Rohingya crisis. She should frame it with proper priorities. By defining her own interests Bangladesh should put her ‘Bargaining Mix’ in the table before Myanmar and international world. The ‘Bargaining Mix’ should carry all sorts of priorities or logical demands that she expects. However, Bangladesh has often failed to define her limitations on the international forums. If she defines her limitations clearly she would have created an open space for international supports. Bangladesh needs to set rigorous strategies with strong objectives. Finally by putting down plans to resolve the issues, conflicts Bangladesh will lead in formation of protocol. Though this is a broad and holistic manner to reduce the conflict, these steps can lead Bangladesh to effective resolution of ongoing conflict in Myanmar- Bangladesh area.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

In concluding remark, a certain stand point can be taken that the Rohingya issue has been protracted for a long period of time and still being done so. Actions and policies in bilateral, national, regional and international levels have been failed. These actions are not worthy enough to create conflict resolution and a safer place for 1.1 million refugees in Bangladesh. The humanity seeks rigorous actions in shorter period of time otherwise this will turn out to be another manmade calamity toward world consciousness.

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