



PROCEEDINGS

Hybrid Seminar on

Rohingya Crisis and the Emerging Security Challenges: Response Strategy of Bangladesh

23 February 2023



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Rohingya Crisis and the Emerging Security Challenges: Response Strategy of Bangladesh

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a Seminar on **Rohingya Crisis and the Emerging Security Challenges: Response Strategy of Bangladesh** on 23 February 2023. H E Mr Anisul Huq, MP, Honourable Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The Seminar was chaired by **Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, Former Chairman, BIISS. **Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc**, Director General, BIISS, delivered his Welcome Address.



Four presentations were delivered in the Seminar. **Lieutenant General (Retd) Mohammad Mahfuzur Rahman, OSP, rcds, ndc, afwc, psc, PhD**, Former Principal Staff Officer, Armed Forces Division, Prime Minister's Office, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh presented a paper on **"Regional Security Dimensions of the Rohingya Crisis"**. **Dr Niloy Ranjan Biswas**, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka delivered a presentation on **"Rohingyas and the Emerging Non-traditional Security Challenges"**. **A S M Tarek Hasan Semul**, Research Fellow, BIISS, presented a paper on **"Myanmar and the Rohingyas: The**

Political Economy of Arms and Business”. Dr Delwar Hossain, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka and Member of Bangladesh Public Service Commission, delivered a presentation on “**Rohingya Crisis and Security Concerns: Response Strategy of Bangladesh**”.

There was an open discussion session in the Seminar. Senior officials from different ministries of the government, media, academia, students from various universities, and representatives from international organisations participated in the Seminar. They expressed their thoughts and insightful comments in the open discussion session.



Welcome Address



Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc
Director General, BIIS

At the outset of the welcome address, **Major General Sheikh Pasha Habib Uddin, OSP, SGP, BAMS, afwc, psc**, Director General, BIIS paid his most profound reverence to the memory of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and to all martyrs who laid their lives for the long-cherished independence. He also paid tribute to the language martyrs who sacrificed their lives for establishing Bangla as the mother tongue.

The Director General recalled 2017 when thousands of persecuted Rohingyas began to flee violence, atrocities and crimes against humanity committed by the Myanmar Army. During that time, the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took a humane stance to open the borders. This compassionate gesture came from a country that does not have a large landmass, is overpopulated and yet to fulfil its dream of being a prosperous and developed nation. Yet when the Honourable

Prime Minister said that, “we will share our food with them”, this act of benevolence stems from Bangladesh’s collective memory of sufferings as a nation in 1971 and a normative vision for a peaceful world that is bounded by brotherhood and based on international norms and empathy. After recalling the courageous step of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to give shelter to Rohingyas, the Director General shed light on the severe condition that Bangladesh has been facing. Despite the goodwill, the pressure of more than 1 million Rohingyas has put severe strain on society, security, economy, natural resources, environment and ecology. Some of these socio-ecological effects are irreversible. While many of Myanmar’s south and southeast Asian neighbours made it clear that Rohingyas are not welcome on their shoreline, Bangladesh gave shelter to them. As a consequence, Cox’s Bazar has become the largest settlement camp for displaced people in the world. For the international community, he stressed the importance of realising Rohingyas’ stay in Bangladesh is temporary and in his opinion, the permanent and sustainable solution to this crisis has to be reached through the immediate repatriation of the Rohingyas. The international community, he further added, has so far remained engrossed in the humanitarian aspect of the issue rather than the resolution of the prolonged crisis through sustainable repatriation.



The Director General, then, shared his concern that further delay in repatriation might utterly frustrate the displaced Rohingyas and entice them to

fall prey to human and drug trafficking, criminal activity, radicalisation and other dangerous underground ventures. From news reports, it is already known that some of the Rohingyas have been involved in and simultaneously were victims of various criminal activities ranging from robbery and abductions to smuggling of arms and drugs in the region. In recent years, Rohingyas have also become the targets of human trafficking networks focusing on refugee camps. According to him, the deteriorating security situation in the Myanmar border and Rakhine State signals grave security implications for the South Asian region and beyond.



In conclusion, the Director General highlighted that appeasement should be replaced by leveraging political and economic ties with Myanmar to help the distressed Rohingyas and realise their cherished ambition of returning to their homes free from fear. It would have been more encouraging to get the international community assertively vocal on severe restrictions of movement, health care, education, access to mobile and internet and livelihood opportunities in Rakhine – thereby fostering an environment conducive to voluntary repatriation. Having said this, the Director General commented that, for the greater interest of those persecuted people and the stability of the region, the Rohingya crisis needs to be resolved in a durable manner with the utmost priority.

Presentation

Regional Security Dimensions of the Rohingya Crisis



Lieutenant General Md Mahfuzur Rahman, OSP, rcds, ndc, afwc, psc, PhD
Former Principal Staff Officer, Armed Forces Division, Prime Minister's Office, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

At the outset of his speech, **Lieutenant General Md Mahfuzur Rahman OSP, rcds, ndc, afwc, psc, PhD** mentioned that he would primarily focus on the southeastern part of Bangladesh, where the Rohingyas are located now. In his view, insurgency could escalate in such a geopolitical setting. In the prevailing geophysical condition, the insurgents or separatists can melt away quickly and it is a nightmare for regular forces. In this part of the world, big power relationships and regional power rivalry dominate geopolitics which has ramifications for various events. The regional competition between India and China is entangled with their relationship over the Indian Ocean. He noted that both India and China are energy-hungry powers for whom energy security plays a key role. In particular, China's



energy security is its centre of gravity; hence, it needs Myanmar as a vessel state for ensuring its energy security via oil and gas pipelines. On the other hand, for India's north eastern states', the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project is crucial by setting up linkage to the rest of the country via the Bay of Bengal and the Rakhine State of Myanmar. India, including its allies, does not want Myanmar to totally fall into the hold of China for geostrategic reasons.



From his perspective, in the Indian Ocean region, China is vertically expanding while India is horizontally expanding. China is vertically expanding through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects via its pivot states in the Indian Ocean through Myanmar and Pakistan. On the contrary, India is expanding from peninsular India on either side; to the west Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Middle East (ME) and in the east through its 'Look East' and 'Act East' policy. As a consequence, there is a condition of geopolitical and geostrategic 'Tectonic Plate' movement of these two regional powers in two different directions causing geopolitical and geostrategic tremors, where Bangladesh is trying to make balance with these relationships. This has caused Bangladesh to be in a buffer state that he believes has inbuilt side effects. He further added that it is easier to tame smaller countries with security threats and instability.

In this regard, he mentioned that 1.2 million Rohingyas increased security concerns for Bangladesh and emerged as a threat for the future stability of the region. Although India claims to have a peace deal with separatist groups in Mizoram and Tripura adjacent to the Bangladesh border, it is not all that peaceful to the latter. It is worth mentioning that there is a peace deal with Parbatta Chottogram Jono Songhoti Somity in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) since December 1997 and at present, four groups are working including their Armed Wings. In the case of Myanmar, the Chin and Rakhine States bordering Bangladesh also signed peace deals with the Myanmar Authority. However, as yet, the situation is almost uncertain. In the case of Myanmar, the condition is a little different now because the Arakan Army controls in many parts of Rakhine where the Junta mostly controls the cities. Having relations with one group may antagonise the other. In this conundrum, there is a likelihood that Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and the freshly resurfaced Rohingya Solidarity Organisation will further complicate the situation. Regarding Rohingya repatriation, it is a matter of concern that General Min Aung Hlaing, Myanmar Chief of Defence and Major General Tun Myat Naing, Arakan Army Chief at Rakhine, have opposing viewpoints. Above all, geopolitics of regional and global powers. Therefore, Lieutenant General Rahman queried how Bangladesh should navigate in this murky water remains a complex question.

Lieutenant General Rahman further mentioned what everyone is deserving now in Bangladesh's southeast has been a complicated issue since it is the combination of risks, both traditional and non-traditional. This part of the region has the potential to be severely affected into the vortex of the 'Golden Triangle' and 'Narco Terrorism' associated with arms smuggling and human trafficking and Rohingya refugees would be a readily available target group in this further adding complexity to an already dwindling security situation. However, in his opinion, these kinds of non-traditional security issues do not take place in a vacuum. Interestingly, they have the potential to destabilise bilateral relations with neighbours which may turn into a traditional security concern.

He noted that the traditional and non-traditional security threats emanating from the security environment in the Southeast are known to many of the country's security forces. Infact, they are preparing themselves in such a way to avoid surprises. It can further be said that they are preparing based on what is happening now but possibly not what is lurking around the corner. The question



is, how many of them were there? Maybe 10,000, 20,000 or 30,000, they created havoc, but they mostly came from pretty decent backgrounds. Not only they or their families suffered from injustice, but they were also drawn there by curiosity and a perception of injustice that led them to become monsters. Now everyone should realise that there are more than 400,000 children growing up in Rohingya camps inside Bangladesh without proper education, hope and dream and overall, they have seen the horrors of their lives. Many of them have witnessed the abuse of their mothers in 2017, and for them there is no bottom line. By 2030, it will add more concerns since most of them will turn into adults.



He expressed his deep concern that homeless, with trauma in their minds; hatred in their hearts; and without hope and dream, it is unthinkable what could turn into the future. In this circumstance, he put forward two options; Bangladesh can address it now or address it later when it becomes a full-blown security situation. As a student of security studies, he predicted that Bangladesh will not be the only country affected by the impending security crisis. It will have regional and global ramifications. He presumed that it is going to be a big burden for Bangladesh to handle, where the country is just a victim of geopolitical circumstances.

Lieutenant General Rahman then provided several recommendations. He stated that the Rohingya issue cannot be resolved on a bilateral basis. Rather it has to be considered as a global issue. This is a political problem created by Myanmar and they tried to address it militarily. Neither Bangladesh nor the Rohingyas are party to it, both are victims of circumstances and Bangladesh has to face some realities due to its geographic location. He suggested that the Rohingya issue needs to be addressed in three tiers; first, within the ambit of global governance, international legal frameworks and principles to arrive at a political solution. Second, at regional and extra-regional levels, the involvement of regional organisations i.e., Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) would be paramount.



Hence, the involvement of China, India, Japan and Korea could be instrumental. Finally, at the bilateral level, Dhaka should maintain engagement with Naypyidaw, however, traumatic it may be at present. In this aspect, Lieutenant General Rahman also expressed his opinion that the inability of Dhaka and Rohingya organisations to meaningfully engage the National Unity Government (NUG) led

by the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the United League of Arakan (ULA) or Arakan Army in Rakhine State may be expensive in the future. Afterwards, he is hopeful that a substantial Track II engagement with them could provide a dividend out of proportion to the effort expended in resolving the Rohingya issue sustainably. Under the circumstances, both NUG and ULA have expressed their willingness to engage. However, the proposition is risky and the cautiousness of Dhaka and Rohingya is understandable. Nonetheless, it is necessary to remember that the window of opportunity will not remain open for infinity. He concluded his speech by posing the question whether the opportunities for Rohingyas are slipping away.

Rohingyas and the Emerging Non-traditional Security Challenges



Dr Niloy Ranjan Biswas

Associate Professor

Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka

Dr Niloy Ranjan Biswas started his presentation with a small disclaimer that non-traditional security challenges related to the Rohingya crisis are briefly examined for last few years. However, he tried to provide a broad overview of what traditional and non-traditional security challenges Bangladesh has at this moment on the side that includes both Rohingyas and the host community. He then raised a question from the Security Studies scholarship, “whose security are talking about”? According to him, when scholars are talking about non-traditional security challenges, one of the most important questions that arises is-what kinds of security threats need to be explored? He said that the security studies paradigm has two divisions between traditional and non-traditional. Traditional security is



state focused while non-traditional security emphasis on human being. The biggest challenge of these divisions between traditional and non-traditional security is only on the basis of the state and non-state actors. For example, crimes, drugs and human trafficking, health, food, education, migration, and law and order issues are mostly the non-traditional security challenges and by and large, these have implications in broader context.



Dr Biswas argued that the Rohingya crisis is not bilateral in nature, rather this crisis has regional implications. These challenges are also very much transnational in nature, he adds. Thus, while discussing about the ways forward, it needs to be a multi-stakeholder process. While considering the non-traditional security threats posed by the protection racket or protection services, it is important to consider what safeguards have been put in place so far through the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh and international development partners. He highlighted that the services have considered all camp-based Rohingya people and from particularly 2018, there was a local demand to consider at least 25 per cent of the host community. According to their statement, there are 541,000 local people whose communities are also under the protection services now.

Dr Biswas further noted that the demography is composed of 48 per cent male and 51 per cent female among the Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN's) population and almost 50 per cent in each size in the host community. He stated that a pledge of roughly US\$881 million was supposed to be made in 2021 and that studies conducted in the preceding years several times had shown that the percentage of unmet demands was still at a critical point. It means a significant portion of what is expected to be made by the international development actors and the government who are involved over there is still lagging behind.

Thus, the basic needs of the FDMNs are under severe stress along with the local host population. According to the findings of a UNHCR-Yale survey published in June 2022, more than half of Rohingya refugees (68 per cent) living in Cox's Bazar face shortages in food and essentials even after receiving humanitarian assistance. The survey highlighted that 44 per cent of food requirements, 48 per cent of clothing, 50 per cent of healthcare, and 63 per cent of education necessities were unfulfilled.

Then Dr Biswas talked about the climate risk, which is significant in the changing global context. Official statistics suggest that nearly 8000 hectares of the local forest land and hill areas were affected to accommodate Rohingyas. This massive loss of greenery has made the region susceptible to natural disasters. He highlighted that in the last five years, deep tube wells were established to ensure drinking water. But this excessive use of underground water has created the risk of lowering the level of the groundwater. This has made the area even more vulnerable to landslides and sinkholes. In this regard, he informed that since July 2019, 26 landslides in Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, killed one person and left more than 4,500 without shelter. Since 2020, some reforestation activities have started in the camps in Cox's Bazar.

Dr Biswas mentioned that law and order issues such as drug, human trafficking, fake identity, organised crime, and armed violence, and undocumented movements have made the situation critical. He cautioned about over-sensitising and securitising some of the issues which might affect the safety and security architecture in camps and host communities. He said that security is a crucial issue in any refugee camp environment. Nevertheless, it is necessary to identify the source/s of the security crisis in the FDMN and host community to avoid

over-securitise the events and criminalise any specific community. An effective and coordinated role of the security agencies will be required to address the root causes of these security issues. In addition, instability in neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, is often cited by academics as a contributing factor to the problem which Bangladesh needs to take into consideration. Dr Biswas further said that Bangladesh has been facing economic issues in those areas for both Rohingyas and the host community. For example, when the crisis emerged, due to aid agencies and their employees' presence, house rents have increased by more than 120 per cent.



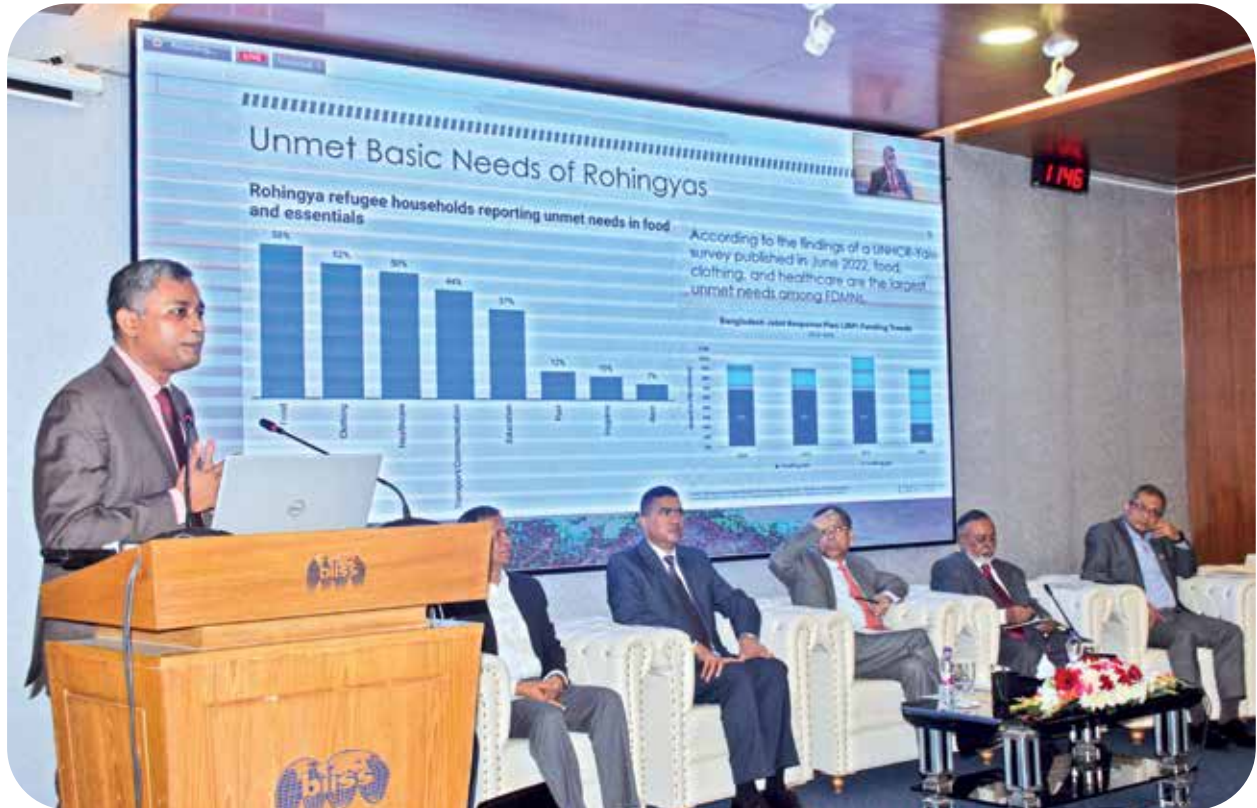
Dr Biswas and his colleagues at Dhaka University collected 225 micro narratives from 2019 to 2021 of the host communities and the Rohingya. The host communities shared that there were lower wages for the local host community because of the labour market situation and there was a demand for natural resource sharing. That is why a common policy may be difficult to consider comprehensive economic recovery plans.



Dr Biswas remarked that there is a funding shortage in the education sector, in particular, for the Rohingyas as well as for the host community. Rohingya children are mostly sufferers as more than 400,000 children out of 1 million Rohingyas are children. He mentioned that there are more than 3400 learning centers for education. The Myanmar curriculum is the basis of these skill development plans at this moment. He then raised concern that what will happen for the Rohingya children after completing grade nine, as there is a demand for skill-based education at this level. This is, in fact, a big question because it is not only about the right but also related to strategic issues. The education issue is also linked with the future of the Rohingya youth in Myanmar, in particular, to ensure their safe and secure repatriation to Myanmar.

Dr Biswas highlighted that the health sector was an interesting success story, with some caveats in 2018 and 2019. The major health issues were respiratory problems, unexplained fevers with diarrhoea, and a few others. Now the experience of the health workers in this period of both government and the international community has helped Bangladesh to contain the health crisis during the COVID-19 period. The infection was contained and the number of deaths was quite lower than

what was suspected when there was a COVID-19 situation going on. Nevertheless, health issues are still pertinent, particularly when experts are talking about critical health issues.



Dr Biswas pointed out that undocumented migration, particularly maritime migration, is not an issue limited to just one nation. For instance, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, more than 3,500 desperate Rohingyas attempted to cross the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal in 2022 and they were found in Indonesia and Malaysia. There were 348 individuals missing and if this situation has not been addressed at this moment, this might create havoc in the future and it is very difficult to constrain these people within the camps.

Lastly, Dr Biswas brought up the concern of whether or not a longer stay of Rohingyas would increase non-traditional security challenges. He further commented that, Bangladesh needs to understand that this crisis is transnational in nature. Therefore, the non-traditional security issues that he discussed have roots in different other places and factors of countries. Thus, understanding



context is very important. Considering the concerns of the host community is also important as they require protection services on non-traditional issues. According to him, safe repatriation is the most preferable and critical to solve the crisis. Therefore, Bangladesh needs to de-securitise or avoid over-sensitising the issues while understanding the root causes of the crisis for both the Rohingyas and the local host community.

Myanmar and the Rohingyas: The Political Economy of Arms Business



A S M Tarek Hassan Semul

Research Fellow BIISS

At the commencement of his presentation, **Mr A S M Tarek Hassan Semul** highlighted the inherent flaw within the international legal regime and political system, which has allowed Myanmar to carry out atrocities against its citizens and Rohingyas, with impunity. The global justice system was established by the international community in the aftermath of World War II. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Refugee Convention of 1951 are a few examples of codified documents that indicate the progression of human civilisation. Following the end of the Cold War, the triumph of liberalism further solidified the grounds for democracy, individual rights and protection of citizens vis-à-vis state-perpetrated violence. But when it comes to Myanmar and its pseudo-democratic government of Aung San Suu Kyi, the international community essentially turned

a blind eye despite the 2017 influx of nearly 740,000 Rohingyas from the Rakhine State of Myanmar to Bangladesh.

According to Mr Semul, the Rohingyas faced horrible atrocities at the hands of the Tatmadaw, dubbed as the “textbook case of ethnic cleansing” by the United Nations (UN). Despite such allegations against the Myanmar military and the civilian regime in power, Myanmar was spared from any meaningful international punitive response. Such a lukewarm response was based on the argument that any harsh international measure would put the democratically elected Suu Kyi government under pressure and destabilise the democratisation process of Myanmar. He further informed that, around 2018-19 under the Trump Administration, the US started to put some targeted sanctions. Given Myanmar’s history of fending off the pressure of sanctions, such measures were “too little and too late” and failed to protect the Rohingyas. Mr Semul then argued that the international community could not take necessary action to protect Rohingyas, hoping that if not disturbed, the democratically elected government would resolve this crisis.



On the other hand, he noted that such hope was based on the false promises of democracy in Myanmar. Since the Asian rebalance, the Obama administration looked to curb the Chinese influence on the ASEAN countries. In 2011, when Washington saw a possible opportunity for democratic reform in Myanmar, they

ignored the other warning signs, such as the ethnic divisions, lack of freedom of expression, decades of military rule, absence of civil society, weak political culture and so forth. Hence, in his opinion, the democratic backsliding in 2021 through the February Military Coup was written on the wall of Myanmar's political fate. Following the Coup, nationwide mass atrocities by the Military Junta on other civilian ethnic groups cleared the Western disillusionment with Myanmar's democratic transition.



According to Mr Semul, during the second anniversary of the coup, the European Union (EU) imposed the sixth round of fresh targeted sanctions on 16 individuals and entities since the military seized power in Myanmar. The sanctioned list includes the Energy Minister Myo Myint Oo, Armed Forces Chief-of-Staff General Maung Maung Aye, Navy Chief Admiral Moe Aung and the heads of three firms providing weapons to the military. Mr Semul noted that the EU sanction came following the US sanctions in January 2023. In this new wave of sanctions, Washington banned 80 individuals and 30 entities, which included the senior leadership of Myanmar's Ministry of Energy, Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) and Myanmar's Air Force, as well as an arms dealer and a family member of an earlier designated business associate of the military. He also argued that there are discourses regarding the effectiveness of these sanctions.

Furthermore, there are arguments against full-scale sanctions, which might hurt the civilian population engaged in sectors like Readymade Garments (RMG).

Mr Semul pointed out a few other cases, such as North Korea, Iran and so forth, where the consideration for the civilian population was not the immediate priority. He identified such hesitancy as the stumbling block for creating meaningful pressure on Myanmar's military junta. Many private entities have used loopholes in these sanctions and continued to supply weapons and do business with Myanmar's Military Junta. In this regard, he highlighted a Report published in August 2022 titled by an activist group called "Justice for Myanmar". According to that Report, a total of 116 companies supplied millions of dollars of arms and equipment to the Myanmar military. Of these, 31 companies have had active business with the military since the February 2021 Coup, while another 27 firms have done so since 2017 despite the atrocities carried out by the Tatmadaw against the Rohingyas in the Rakhine State. Mr Semul argued a symbiotic relationship exists between different weapons industries and arms purchased by Myanmar. Such a relationship assists Tatmadaw in purchasing weapons through various subsidiaries and third parties by rendering all the targeted sanctions obsolete.



Mr Semul mentioned another report published by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar that came out in January 2023. The report claims that 45 firms, including some based in Austria, China, France, Germany, India, Israel, Japan, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Ukraine, and the United States (US), have provided or are still providing supplies that have helped sustain an elaborate “arms industrial complex.” They also claimed that these countries’ governments may or may not be aware of such a connection between Myanmar Military Junta and private firms, which were mentioned in the report. Singapore has been identified to be the transit hub for many of these companies to make financial transactions. In conclusion, he identified the unwillingness of many regional countries and the lack of multilateral and coordinated sanctions against such businesses as a stumbling block for preventing Tatmadaw from receiving continuous support.

Rohingya Crisis and Security Concerns: Response Strategy of Bangladesh



Professor Delwar Hossain

Department of International Relations University of Dhaka

Professor Delwar Hossain, in his presentation, mainly discussed the response strategy of Bangladesh. While defining the crisis, he stated that the Rohingya crisis is a domestic problem of Myanmar with bilateral, regional and global consequences. He informed the audience that Bangladesh has sheltered the Rohingya population, almost equivalent to the population size of Mauritius. This population can also be compared to the combined population of Bhutan and Maldives. Back in 2017 when Bangladesh sheltered a large number of Rohingyas was a tough year for the country. Since 2017 to till now, handling such a vast Rohingya population has been most formidable challenge for the Bangladesh government. This situation can be understood from the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's speech at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), where she shared her frustration by saying that, "not a single Rohingya was repatriated to Myanmar". At the same



time, according to Professor Hossain, the crux of security challenges and the issue of response strategy of Bangladesh can also be understood by the Prime Minister's UNGA speech, where she defined a new situation by saying, "the ongoing political turmoil and armed conflicts in the country has made the repatriation of the displaced Rohingyas more difficult".

Afterwards, as no crisis or no security challenge could be understood without understanding the context, thus, Professor Hossain discussed the domestic factors of Myanmar which are responsible for not only the Rohingya crisis but also other atrocities over ethnic minorities who are suffering violence due to very repressive political structure in Myanmar over the decades particularly since 1962. Then he discussed the nature of the state—Myanmar, which has been using systematic torture and repression over its ethnic minorities. As said by him, Myanmar government's denial of the identity of the Rohingyas by declaring that they are not included in 135 recognised ethnic groups and it could be considered a case of systematic torture and repression. Along with such discriminatory attitudes and policies, the Myanmar government also uses stigma and misinformation to define the status of Rohingyas and justify the ethnic cleansing and genocide they perpetrated against them.

The regional and global determinants were also mentioned by Professor Hossain, that are shaping the new security landscape in Bangladesh's vicinity. These factors are (a) the rise of China; (b) salience of the Indo-Pacific region; (c) Sino-Indian rivalry; and (d) strategic shifts at regional and global levels. These factors create the ground for a Cold War-like situation where new polarisation and confrontation are emerging and diplomacy as well as geopolitics are becoming more complex. Having said the regional and global determinants, he focused on the consequences of the mass exodus of Rohingyas in 2017 in Bangladesh. Observing the pattern of the exodus, he stated that the mass exodus of Rohingyas is still continuing. It created large-scale humanitarian concerns, including statelessness, ethnic cleansing, genocide, extreme form of violation of human rights and marginalisation. Due to this mass exodus of Rohingyas, Bangladesh has been facing multiple economic, social, security and environmental challenges. The concerns sourced from mass exodus of Rohingyas in Bangladesh also raised moral and ethical questions to the global community. He also referred to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's speech at a high-level side meeting in the UN in 2022 where she clearly described the Rohingya crisis as a sort of security challenge.

To understand the security concerns related to the Rohingya crisis, Professor Delwar mentioned politico-strategic issues, including radicalisation and violent extremism, maintaining safety and order in the camps, and instability and continuing forced displacement from Myanmar. In addition, there is also news about some sort of nexus among the Myanmar regime, militancy and drugs. The Military Coup in Myanmar on 1st February 2021 has created a new situation. The recent Myanmar's violation of the Bangladesh border in 2022 has also created new concerns for the latter. He further informed that the global community has reduced humanitarian assistance to the Rohingyas, amounting to only 38 per cent of what is needed for the total required fund in 2022. This crisis, needless to say, has social and health security dimensions aside from economic uncertainties. It includes a wide range of apprehensions such as rising crimes, drug and narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, social unrest, health services and the widening of the host community-Rohingyas gap. He, then, discussed the security concerns from different levels. For example, resource, safety and security concerns are important at the local level. At the national level, security, economy and environment concerns are important. Bilateral-level concerns include tension, mistrust and, lack of cooperation, and violations of border. Sub-regional concerns are cross-border crimes, violent extremism and instability. At the regional and global levels, transnational crimes, violent extremism, geopolitics and instability are the main concerns.



Regarding the challenges, Professor Hossain stated that this crisis has created a long-term diplomatic predicament for Bangladesh in the international arena and the issue might gradually draw global attention. It is because of Myanmar's continuing false claims against Rohingyas about their identity and activity in their country. In his perspective, Bangladesh is becoming a demographic dumping ground for a further influx of Rohingyas living in Myanmar. As also remarked by him, deliberate negligence of the plight of the Rohingyas and failure to ensure their speedy repatriation create instability and threats in the whole region. He stressed on seeing no scope to abate the humanitarian responsibility of regional actors and urged the international community to create effective pressure on the Myanmar regime to resolve the crisis.



Professor Hossain highlighted Bangladesh's immediate response to the Rohingya crisis in 2017. Regarding humanitarian support, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina extended an extraordinary gesture towards the Rohingyas. Sheikh Hasina became known as the “Mother of Humanity” for this act of compassion and generosity. Prime Minister uttered during the mass influx of Rohingyas, “if we can feed 160,000,000 people we can also feed an additional 500,000 to 700,000 people at their time of distress...If necessary, we will eat one meal a day and share

another meal with these distressed people. After all, we are human beings and we stand for mankind.” According to Professor Delwar, Sheikh Hasina’s speech showed the crux of Bangladesh’s immediate response to the distressed Rohingyas during their mass exodus in 2017.

Professor Hossain then pointed out that the response strategy of Bangladesh towards the Rohingya crisis could be divided into two phases. Phase one spans from 2017 to 2019. In this phase, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared five points of demand to deal with the crisis at the UN. The focus of those five points were to stop violence in Rakhine, provide temporary shelter and humanitarian support, mobilising global public opinion, build national consensus and nurture bilateral engagements with Myanmar. Phase two of Bangladesh’s response strategy spans from 2020 to present. In this phase, three types of development have been noticed, such as the emergence of a COVID-19 pandemic, the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War and the Military Coup in Myanmar. These developments, according to him, created a context of growing uncertainty about repatriation.

However, in the second phase, Bangladesh came up with a robust diplomatic posture to deal with this crisis but the changed global situation created a difficult situation for Bangladesh. He then described the fundamental stances of Bangladesh which include supporting the Rohingya people; searching for a permanent solution to the crisis; repatriating them to their homeland; ensuring humanitarian assistance; and peaceful settlement of all disputes. According to him, the essential elements of Bangladesh’s response strategy include: (1) humanitarianism (2) non-coercion and diplomacy and (3) pragmatism. These three elements combinedly constituted the basic parameters of Bangladesh’s response towards the Rohingya crisis. Bangladesh so far conducted bilateral, trilateral and multilateral diplomacy to deal with this crisis. He also discussed the misperceptions and propaganda about Bangladesh’s response strategy. There are people who think that this crisis can be solved quickly, which according to him, is not possible.

Regarding the outcomes of Bangladesh’s response strategy, Professor Hossain shared his findings. Over the last five years, Bangladesh has been able to ensure global humanitarian support for the Rohingyas, increase global empathy and engagement, nurture multilevel involvement of civil society actors, mainstream the issue of repatriation, question the policies and attitudes of big powers and ensure the recognition of the genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Myanmar regime.



As future steps, Professor Hossain suggested some recommendations. In his view, Bangladesh government needs to continue its effort to ensure the repatriation of the Rohingyas; protect the camps and adjacent areas from transnational crimes, terrorism and violent extremism; make the world aware of the new threats in the region; emphasise the special role of China and India; and strengthen global humanitarian assistance for the Rohingyas. He also suggested combining bilateral and multilateral diplomatic engagements to tackle this crisis. According to him, national capacity building to deter any threats is also necessary. Relocation of Rohingyas at the Bhasan Char was another suggestion of him. Finally, he suggested focusing on long-term camp management and ensuring the local community's safety, welfare and livelihoods.



In conclusion, Professor Hossain focused on the adverse consequences of neglecting the plight of the Rohingyas by the regional and global powers. He reiterated that repatriation is the key to solve the problem. In addition, he highlighted that though it seems normative, it is important to mainstream the “humanitarian cause” or the “civilisational cause” of the Rohingya crisis over geopolitics.

Open Discussion



Professor Dr Syed Anwar Husain

Bangabandhu Chair Professor, Bangladesh University of Professionals

At the outset of his intervention, **Professor Dr Syed Anwar Husain** mentioned that although he had no specific question, he thanked the presenters for bringing up the Rohingya issue in its true perspective. He added that he had three points to be clarified from the paper presenters. According to him, the Rohingya crisis is undoubtedly multifaceted. And it would lead to social, demographic, economic, security, environmental and even ecological problems. Second, he opined that Bangladesh should play proactive diplomacy in sorting out this problem which Bangladesh has not yet done. He gave an example: between September to November of 1971, Shrimati Indira Gandhi travelled through Moscow to Western capitals to discuss the Bangladesh crisis. That is how she motivated a large section of the public about sympathising with the Bangladesh crisis. He opined that Bangladesh and especially Bangladesh's Prime Minister, should talk personally to Russia, China and India, that has not yet been done up to the level. The personal



touch in diplomacy is undoubtedly something which can do wonders in the world. In this regard, he mentioned Gias Uddin Azam Shah, the independent Sultan of Bengal between 1393 and 1410, Dr Husain, as the Father of small-state diplomacy in the history of Bengal. He followed cultural diplomacy with Persia and political diplomacy with China. He then suggested taking Giasuddin Azam Shah's example to follow in order to solve the problem. He gave an example of India and mentioned that whenever he visits India, he stays in the Indian cultural centre. They have an extensive establishment for conducting cultural diplomacy. As a third point, Dr Husain mentioned that the permanent solution to the Rohingya crisis lies in ending the military rule in Myanmar and to that end, the global community needs to work in a body.



Brigadier General (Retd) Dr M Sakhawat Hossain

Former Election Commissioner and

Senior Fellow, South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance, North South University

Brigadier General (Retd) Dr M Sakhawat Hossain noted that the deliberations and discussions of the Seminar were illuminating. However, According to him, the discussions on the opportunities or difficulties or security

difficulties unfolded by the 'BURMA Act' were missing in the deliberations of the presenters. He stated that the 'BURMA Act' has unfolded an opportunity and simultaneously has put Bangladesh in a complex geopolitical situation. Then he suggested a possible solution for Bangladesh; that is, according to him, the country needs to look at the National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG) and Arakan Army and also the opportunities the 'BURMA Act' is providing. Although Bangladesh has tried through the eastern approach to resolve the issue by discussing it with India and China, the problem is yet to resolve. However, Bangladesh is in the sixth year of the crisis. According to him, it is a critical issue considering the situation that Bangladesh is going to face in future.



Major General (Retd) A M S A Amin

Major General (Retd) A M S A Amin pointed out that there are geographical, historical and diplomatic predicaments for Bangladesh to solve the Rohingya crisis. He talked about the colonial legacy under British rule in this region and how that has affected the geographical difficulties that Bangladesh suffers from. In this context, he asked about the possible approach that Bangladesh may

take toward the Rohingya crisis and questioned whether this should be a national security approach.



Salahud Din Ahmed

Former Member, Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission

Salahud Din Ahmed raised a question of how can more focus be given on the fact that the Rohingya children who are going to attain adulthood in seven or eight years from now. He opined that managing each of this children is going to be a great challenge for Bangladesh in the future. Thus, mentioning this potential regional and global threats, he urged to stress on this particular issue and bring more countries to Bangladesh's side to deal with such a threat.



Dr Jorge Martinez

Head of WHO Sub-Office, Cox's Bazar

In the case of mitigation, **Dr Jorge Martinez** commented, if an infectious disease like cholera breaks out in Dhaka, it can be contained, but in Cox's Bazar, particularly in the Rohingya camps, it would be far more challenging. To deal with the Rohingya situation, he further commented that regional countries such as India, China, and Singapore need to take on greater responsibility than the Western countries.



Md Makshudul AM Mondal

Focal Person Coordinator, Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project-1

Mr Mondal asked why Bangladesh is not engaging with ASEAN as it has a significant stake in Myanmar and has scope to address the Rohingya crisis.

Response by the Panelists



In his response, **Lieutenant General (Retd) Md Mahfuzur Rahman** argued that brute force only responds to brute force. As an example, he referred to the previous Rohingya exodus and their repatriation. He argued the case for building credible deterrence against such an aggressive posture by Myanmar.





In his response, **Professor Delwar Hossain**, stated that the US has not only incorporated the BURMA Act in the 2023 National Defense Authorisation Act (NDAA) but also formally recognised the Myanmar Military which committed the crime of genocide against Rohingyas. Nonetheless, he brought up the point that the actions of the USA could be questioned. According to him, there is room for criticism because it is not entirely apparent whether the US is engaging in all of these activities in order to support the Rohingyas or contain China.

In his opinion, there is still a lot of doubt regarding the US's activities and whether it is creating a proxy kind of situation to contain China by the BURMA Act. According to him, if the US truly backs the Rohingyas, he claimed, it might lead to a situation in Myanmar similar to the one in Kosovo. Although the US has expressed interest in finding a solution to the Rohingya problem, it has taken little action to actually accomplish the problem. The simple reason behind that is commercial interests are interconnected. It is observed that the majority numbers of the 13 firms operating in Myanmar are from the US.

Professor Delwar Hossain argued that in light of the current geopolitical situation, it is important to analyse the operations of the major powers and other groups while keeping in mind their true interests and intentions. He emphasised the need for national capacity building. Although it is gradually happening, he remarked that it needs more attention. The recent Report by the annual Global Firepower 2023 military strength ranking, Bangladesh secured 40th position out of 145 countries. It proves Bangladesh's positive development in national capacity building. In this context, Professor Delwar Hossain added that the Bangladesh government's current policy based on non-coercive mechanisms can be seen as more effective than military deterrence.



Remarks by the Chief Guest



Mr Anisul Huq MP,

Honourable Minister for Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs,
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Mr Anisul Huq MP, Honourable Minister for Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, offered his solemn reverence to the memory of the Father of the Nation, *Bangabandhu* Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and valiant freedom fighters as well as two hundred thousand mothers and sisters who made their supreme sacrifice in the country's War of Liberation in 1971. He expressed his deep condolence to *Bangabandhu's* family members who were brutally assassinated in August 1975 and four national leaders who were killed in Dhaka's Central Jail in the same year. In addition, in the glorious month of February, he paid his profound homage to those valiant sons of this land who sacrificed their lives to establish the rightful position of the country's mother tongue on 21 February 1952. He thanked BIIS for inviting him

to this discussion on the vital and multifaceted Rohingya crisis that Bangladesh has been facing for a long time, particularly after the en masse forced displacement of Rohingyas into Bangladesh in October 2016 and August 2017.

Honourable Minister started his deliberation about the Rohingya influx in Bangladesh. He informed the audience that from time to time, Myanmar pushed this ethnic minority group to Bangladesh's land. However, in 1978, they took back nearly 200,000 of them; again, in 1992, out of 253,000 Rohingya, they took back over 230,000 with honour and dignity through dialogue and discussion. The unprecedented magnitude of the inflow of Rohingyas after the terrible incidents in Rakhine in August 2017 created an accumulated figure of the Rohingyas sheltered in Bangladesh to about 1.2 million by now, with 32,000 newborns yearly. He then praised the Honourable Prime Minister for temporarily giving shelter to such a massive number of forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals on humanitarian grounds that saved thousands of innocent lives. The singular gesture, has been recognised by the international community as the Honourable Prime Minister is known as the "Mother of Humanity".

He added that Bangladesh stepped into the sixth year of the prolonged Rohingya crisis last August without seeing a single FDMN or Rohingya returning to their homeland Rakhine in the absence of a conducive, safe and secure environment there. He pointed out that the Rohingya crisis is not a bilateral issue between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Bangladesh has been paying a very high price for this problem formulated, orchestrated, originated and executed in Myanmar. He believed that a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis lies with Myanmar, as the Honourable Prime Minister stated at the successive United Nations General Assembly meetings.

According to the Honourable Chief Guest, Bangladesh always peacefully tried a durable solution to the Rohingya crisis through negotiations with Myanmar. The two countries signed three instruments after the exodus in 2017. Two attempts were made in 2018 and 2019 to start repatriation but these were unsuccessful as the selected Rohingyas were unwilling to join the process in the absence of a secure and conducive environment in Rakhine, lack of sufficient assurances about their security, and livelihood opportunities by the Myanmar government upon return. He further opined that Cox's Bazar is now hosting the largest camp in

the world, with one of the most significant humanitarian operations in terms of scale and dimensions. Bangladesh has been trying its best, with the international community's support to ensure the safety and well-being of FDMNs. They are also receiving food, shelter, health care and other services. Even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic challenges, Bangladesh has included this population in the country's national vaccination programme to effectively control the spread of COVID-19 infection.



While describing the current scenario, he informed that the situation is increasingly becoming untenable in the camps in Bangladesh both for the Rohingyas and the host community. The prolongation of the stalemate in repatriation is making this vulnerable population more frustrated, making them susceptible to unlawful activities, and encouraging them to undertake ventures risking their lives. These can flare up the flame of security volatiles for the region and beyond. In his view, it is natural that such a large operation with no definite end in sight is extremely destabilising both for the hosting population and those who have taken shelter.



Honourable Minister expressed his apprehension and frustration that although the Rohingya crisis is a matter of concern between Myanmar and its people, it has created greater economic, environmental and social security challenges for Bangladesh. Beyond that, it has more significant ramifications on regional security concerns like radicalisation and transnational crimes, human and drug trafficking, arms smuggling, etc. The status of statelessness indicates the long history of systematic deprivation of Rohingyas in Rakhine, especially deprivation from basic rights and education. He highlighted the point that Rohingyas became more vulnerable to radicalisation, and global terrorist outfits might take the chance to recruit and employ them in terrorist acts and transnational crimes.

He mentioned some other related concerns including drug trade and human trafficking. Drug trade, particularly the Yaba business in this region, has gained a continuous rise. The Rohingyas became prey to transnational drug traffickers. Moreover, a serious concern is that the bordering areas of this region could be turned into a transit route for drugs produced in the Golden Triangle. He opined that human trafficking is another major security concern. A group of transnational human traffickers is targeting Rohingya youths, women and children, particularly for forced labour in different countries of Southeast Asia. Mostly, he stressed the sea route through the Bay of Bengal, which has become a prominent spot for illegal migration and human trafficking.

According to the Honourable Chief Guest, Bangladesh government has engaged about three thousand committed security personnel and members of security agencies to improve the security situation inside the 33 camps in Cox's Bazar. Three Armed Police Battalions (APBN) are engaged to manage law and order situations inside the camps due to their skill and mandate to handle such extraordinary situations. In addition, Cox's Bazar district police and other security agencies run operations as and when required. Community policing involves Rohingya volunteers patrolling inside the camps at night alongside the security agencies. It has been noticed with deep concern that some vested groups are raising allegations against such efforts, particularly that of APBN, alleging its involvement in torture, extortion of money, and indiscriminate detention of Rohingyas. Soon after such allegations came to the notice, Bangladesh ran a detailed investigation into the reported cases. It found the report's content which was based on personal opinion and perception rather than facts and realities.



In his view, that perhaps all are aware of that various Rohingya miscreant groups are active inside the camps and often engage in armed clashes with each other to take control of certain areas and illegal business, including drug (mostly Yaba) and arms trafficking from the border. On several occasions, particularly during anti-drug operations inside the camps, APBN personnel came under attack by armed Rohingya criminals. Bangladesh is fully committed to ensure the safety and security of the Rohingyas following international standards. Such

disinformation against Bangladesh's security apparatus may rather promote the illegal activities of terrorist groups.

Honourable Law Minister stated that the Bangladesh government has built proper infrastructure and better amenities than Cox's Bazar in Bhasan Char, spending more than US\$350 million from its own budget covering an area of 13,000 acres to voluntarily relocate around 100,000 Rohingya people to de-risk and decongest the camps in Rohingyas. So far, around 32,000 FDMNs have been voluntarily relocated to Bhasan Char and the security situation in Bhasan Char is very stable. There is hardly any criminal activity or armed conflict in Bhasan Char. Honourable Law Minister further commented that increased number of relocations of Rohingyas to Bhasan Char will contribute to improving the security situation in Cox's Bazar camps to some extent.

He further added that the Bangladesh government is adopting measures to keep the Rohingyas, particularly children and youth, engaged in productive activities. The government in collaboration with the UN Agencies, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are imparting education to the Rohingya children following Myanmar curriculum through more than 6000 learning centres, developing skills of Rohingyas in the traits available in Rakhine and engaging Rohingyas as volunteers in humanitarian operations in a systematic and effective way. These initiatives are helping them to practice their distinct cultural identities and help their reintegration when they return to their homes in Rakhine State.

Honourable Chief Guest brought in the question of international justice and accountability, which will be critical in finding a durable solution to the Rohingya crisis. In his opinion, it would act as an important confidence-building measure for the sustainable repatriation of the Rohingya to their homes in Myanmar with their legitimate rights restored. Bangladesh is against any form of impunity from justice and will support any initiative to ensure justice and accountability. The declaration by Germany and the United Kingdom (UK) to support the case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) along with Canada and the Netherlands definitely steps in the right direction. The US's recognition of genocide and the recent announcement of the third country resettlement are also encouraging developments. Rising awareness among the Rohingya, irrespective of gender and age, through mass campaigns is one of the ways to reduce violence, crime, and trafficking of drugs

or persons among them. Bangladesh hopes the UN Agencies, INGOs and NGOs would work vigorously to motivate the Rohingyas to avoid any criminal activities, trafficking and so on.



Honourable Law Minister emphasised that Myanmar must bring a durable solution to the crisis, complying with the broader mandate of the UN. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) should play a constructive role beyond its political agenda for the greater peace and stability of the region. Bangladesh welcomes the resolution adopted by the UNSC on 21 December 2022 on the situation in Myanmar, expressing solidarity with Bangladesh's efforts towards ensuring a sustainable solution to the crisis through arranging voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of the Rohingyas to their homeland. It also underscores the need to create the necessary conditions in Myanmar. In this regard, Bangladesh expects an effective initiative from the UN Special Envoy on Myanmar. He is optimistic about finding a peaceful and sustainable solution to the problem and hopeful that Bangladesh will be able to arrange voluntary, sustainable and dignified repatriation of Rohingyas to their own land.

Honourable Chief Guest recommended a number of solutions to the longstanding Rohingya crisis. For instance, the creation of a safe, conducive

situation in northern Rakhine and the smooth conduct of the repatriation and reintegration of Rohingyas by ensuring political will of the Myanmar government, he believes are enormous tasks. Thus, support and engagement of the UN agencies, regional bodies, and international partners are much needed. The UN and the partners must undertake tangible actions and projects to create an environment conducive to sustainable repatriation. ASEAN, its humanitarian arm, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management also called as AHA centre and individual member countries, with their deeper historic relationship and leverage *vis-à-vis* Myanmar, can take meaningful roles in such comprehensive engagement.

Apart from ASEAN's 5 points, they should undertake elaborate efforts to fully implement the Kofi Annan Advisory Commission on Rakhine State's recommendations and create a pathway for the citizenship of Rohingyas. Finally, he remarked that AHA centre may be empowered and their volunteers' meaningful presence as civilian observers will boost the confidence of the Rohingyas for their voluntary return.



Concluding Remarks by the Chair



Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad
Former Chairman, BIIS

Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad said that despite the magnitude of the problems, challenges and threats, Bangladesh government has handled the Rohingya issue relatively well and managed to keep the crisis under control. He suggested that Bangladesh must remain vigilant and progressively strengthen its efforts to resolve the crisis. He then extended his special thanks and gratitude to Honourable Minister for Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs, Mr Anisul Huq MP, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for gracing the programme as the Chief Guest.

Ambassador Ahmad stated that the Bangladesh government is doing good in cost benefit analysis of using military deterrence. According to him, the Father of the Nation's policy of "friendship to all, malice towards none" has worked successfully. He further commented that this needs to be maintained and military confrontation should be avoided. He also agreed with what General AMSA Amin

said during the open discussion that it is very unfortunate that Myanmar has completely denied citizenship to the Rohingyas. This issue needs to be resolved before dealing with the Rohingya crisis. In this regard, the Kofi Anan Report might suggest some solutions.



Ambassador Ahmad then said that China, India and Singapore are important stakeholders in the Rohingya crisis. Bangladesh should engage more with these countries to resolve the issue. The country must make the regional countries understand that the crisis lies in Myanmar and the Rohingya issue is also hampering their own interest. Thus, the only solution to the problem is a peaceful and dignified repatriation of the Rohingyas.

Regarding the ASEAN's engagement in the process of resolving the issue, he remarked that when Bangladesh thinks about engaging with Singapore or any other ASEAN member countries, Bangladesh should simultaneously think about engaging with the ASEAN. At present, Bangladesh is taking diplomatic pursuits in both bilateral and multilateral platforms. In this regard, he believes it is never too late, nor too early in diplomacy. Bangladesh should continue these engagements with all the countries until the goal is achieved. He said that the formation of NUG

in April 2021 raises some hopes for successful repatriation of Rohingyas. Another important development is the Rohingya displacement which was viewed by the US administration as 'genocide'. The EU's renewed sanctions and cases against Myanmar in international courts for trial are raising rays of hope for a successful repatriation. But, the initiation of BURMA Act appears a double-edged knife, hence, Bangladesh should act cautiously on this issue .

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