

## **Rohingya Crisis: Call For Rescaling The Role of International Community**

Tawfiq - Ei - Elahi

Since October 2016, thousands of Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar due to persecution in the Rakhine State. Myanmar, being reluctant to embrace its rich ethnic, religious and cultural diversity refused to recognize the Rohingya population as their citizens and labeled them as illegal immigrants. The way Myanmar acted upon the allegation and executed their mission of removing the Muslim minority from their mainland took the world by storm. Soon the exodus had become a humanitarian crisis. The United Nations believes that Myanmar wants to expel its entire Rohingya population.

Since late August 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya have fled across the border into Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The total number of Rohingya refugees there has swelled to around one million people. They were initially given shelter in the two dedicated camps of Kutupalong and Nayapara. Since then Bangladesh government has searched every nook and cranny to come up with a solution for this issue. Starting from basic food, shelter, health care and other basic needs they have reached out to all the world leaders as well as the international community to look into the matter. Bangladesh has taken several attempts both directly or through the UN to convince Myanmar to take back the Rohingya refugees but all were in vain as till date there has been little progress in the repatriation process. Bangladesh has permitted 139 NGOs to work in the Cox's bazar camps and provided Army and Navy support as required to ensure safety and security of the refugees.



# CFISS STRATEGIC HIGHLIGHTS

At the beginning of the persecution, the International Community was very responsive as most countries expressed their concern and even asked the Myanmar government to stop the brutality. However the whole community was not on one page as some of the world leaders - Russia and China seemed determined to not take any stand against Myanmar which ultimately stopped the UN to take any major step against Myanmar. India is also a neighboring country which shares its border with both Myanmar and Bangladesh and they too refused to play an active role. The US president Donald Trump was also very reluctant regarding the matter which was made even clearer in 2019 when he expressed his unawareness of the location and situation regarding Myanmar and the Rohingya crisis. Therefore, although the international community is constantly talking about something must be done, till now the only help that came from them are aids and relief goods. But this is not a sustainable solution.

Starting from 2017 this crisis has been the matter of contention till 2020. The COVID-19 outbreak on a global scale started in 2020 and the world's focus shifted towards that. But the Rohingya issue was a major factor even here as the world was promoting social distancing whereas the camps in Cox's Bazar are very cramped and social distancing was just not a possible situation. The Bangladesh government had to take extra measures to not only protect its own people but also to ensure safety for the people living in the camps. Our government tried to come up with a sustainable solution when the international community was not stepping up. The government has taken a project of BDT 23 billion in Bhashan Char which is already tested and ready to operate. It covers an area of about 40sq km accessible by boat. The Bangladesh government built 1,440 housing structures to shelter



# CFISS STRATEGIC HIGHLIGHTS

around 100,000 people on the island, as a part of a project started in 2017 to relieve the overcrowded camps in Cox's bazar. The houses are built, solar panels are set for electricity, biogas fuel system has been introduced for cooking, waste management systems are developed, the cyclone centers are constructed and a mobile network is made available. The island has been developed in a way that will not only introduce a comfortable living but also make the Rohingya community financially and socially empowered.

However, more problems are surfacing from different sides. The Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar camps are being fed false information by different NGOs and reporters which is leading to a disruption of Bangladesh government's plan to shift them to Bhashan Char. The Bangladesh government had organized a 'go and meet' visit of Rohingya leaders to clarify the false information and prove the feasibility of the new camp. Some NGOs have been suspended because of the violation of terms and conditions set forward by the Bangladesh army. The recent activities of the NGOs who seemed to be more focused towards keeping the refugees in Cox's Bazar where they can continue their work instead of a better environment has given rise to many doubts regarding the true motives of the NGOs. The NGO's constant usage of connection with the international community to control the aid wave and more importantly creating sentimental dramatic news to make the work of the Bangladesh government look bad has been an extra issue for Bangladesh government to deal with.

The Bangladesh government has used a lot of budget in building the new Rohingya Camp because they don't want to include the refugees in their mainland. Bangladesh being a high density country as it cannot afford such an influx of people

in its mainland. Still, it is not only sheltering the refugees from the very beginning, it is also doing everything in its power to provide the best possible arrangement for the survivors. The international community which till now has only aided in material relief has to recognize the good work Bangladesh has done and step up to save the Rohingya people. The 'stateless' people as they are being called are still humans of this world who deserve every basic right just like any other human being. The international community needs to recognize this as a concern of great humanitarian disturbance. They need to come together and either convince Myanmar to take them in or convince the other countries to come forward in "third country relocation". As the world is preparing for the second wave of COVID-19 which is predicted to hit Asia by end of November the relocation of the survivors from cramped camps is an absolute priority. Even as the world stands now, in the post COVID-19 era Bangladesh will not be able to shelter all these people whose numbers are increasing every day. The international community needs to recognize this issue and understand that material aid is not enough any more. A call for rescaling the role of the international community is being made, and they must answer.

---

\*Tawfiq - Ei - Elahi is currently working as a Research Assistant at Central Foundation for International Strategic Studies (CFISS). His research interests include Migration & Refugee Crisis, United Nations & International Institutions, Climate Change & Environmental Degradation and Media & Communication.