

Rohingya Influx from Myanmar and the Associated Security Challenges in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study in Kutupalong Camp, Cox's Bazar

Mohammad Mohiuddin and SM Ashfaur Rahman*

Abstract

The Rohingya refugee crisis, resulting from systematic persecution in Myanmar, has led to one of the largest and most enduring displacements in recent history. This study provides an empirical analysis of the influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh, highlighting the security challenges that have emerged from this humanitarian situation. By utilizing primary data collected from refugee camps through qualitative methods, the research examines the security challenges associated with refugee inflow, specifically socioeconomic, environmental, national, and political security concerns. It places special emphasis on security implications, including the rise of transnational crime, human trafficking, intergroup conflict, drug-related issues, and the potential for radicalization within and out of the camps. Findings indicate that while Bangladesh has demonstrated remarkable hospitality, the prolonged presence of refugees poses significant risks to national and regional stability. The paper concludes with policy recommendations aimed at mitigating security challenges, enhancing international cooperation, and pursuing sustainable solutions for the Rohingya population. This research contributes to the broader discourse on forced migration, refugee management, and the intersection of humanitarian crises with security concerns.

Key Words

Rohingya refugees, forced displacement, border tensions, regional stability, transnational crime, human trafficking, radicalized activity.

1. Introduction

The Rohingya crisis, often considered one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges of the 21st century, has attracted global attention to the plight of the Rohingya people, a Muslim ethnic minority from Myanmar's Rakhine State. Beginning in the late 20th century, the Rohingya have faced systemic persecution, violence, and denial of citizenship by the Myanmar government, which unfairly labels them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh despite their long-standing presence in the region¹. The latest and most severe outbreak of violence began in August 2017, following a violent military crackdown by Myanmar in response to attacks by a Rohingya insurgent group. This campaign, characterized by widespread killings, sexual

* Dr. Mohammad Mohiuddin is an Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh, Email: mohiuddin.socio@cu.ac.bd; SM Ashfaur Rahman is a Master's student (M.A.), Department of Sociology, Minnesota State University, Mankato, USA, Email: smashfaur.rahman@mnsu.edu. The authors thank all the research participants from the Rohingya and host communities of Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, who contributed to this study. In addition, we are grateful to the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), Camp in Charge (CICs), NGOs, and Security forces in the Rohingya camp for their enormous support and cooperation.



The articles in this journal are published Open Access subject to Creative Commons 4.0. CC BY-NC license. The Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial (CC BY-NC) License allows others to use, adapt, remix, or redistribute a copyrighted work for non-commercial purposes only, while requiring attribution to the creator or author.

¹ Brac Report (2017). *Impact of Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals' Influx on Host Community*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 25-26.

violence, and arson, led to over 700,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh², joining hundreds of thousands who had already sought refuge in previous years. Currently, Bangladesh hosts more than 1.3 million Rohingya refugees, making it one of the largest refugee populations in the world³. While Bangladesh has received praise for its humanitarian efforts, the large influx of refugees has also created significant security challenges, including socio-economic pressures, geopolitical tensions, and an increased risk of radicalization⁴.

The Rohingya crisis has deep roots in Myanmar's complex history of ethnic and religious divisions. The Rohingya, who are predominantly Muslim, have long been marginalized in a primarily Buddhist country⁵. The 1982 Citizenship Law effectively rendered them stateless by excluding them from the list of officially recognized ethnic groups. Over the decades, they have faced restrictions on their movement, education, and employment, as well as periodic outbreaks of violence. However, the 2017 military crackdown known as the "Clearance Operation" marked a dramatic escalation in the severity of their persecution⁶. Reports from international organizations and human rights groups documented widespread atrocities, including mass killings, rape, and the destruction of entire villages. The United Nations described the campaign as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing"⁷, and there have been calls for the situation to be investigated as genocide⁸. The sheer scale of violence and displacement has turned the Rohingya crisis into a global humanitarian emergency, with profound implications for regional stability and security.

Bangladesh, as Myanmar's immediate neighbor, has confronted significant challenges due to the influx of refugees. Despite being a developing country with its own economic and environmental issues, Bangladesh has demonstrated remarkable generosity by opening its borders to the Rohingya people. The government, in collaboration with international organizations and local communities, has provided shelter, food, and medical care to the refugees, many of whom live in large camps in the Cox's Bazar district. The Kutupalong refugee camp, now the largest in the world, accommodates over 800,000 people and has become a symbol of both the crisis's scale and the resilience of the Rohingya community⁹. However, the long-term presence of such a large refugee population has exerted immense pressure on Bangladesh's resources and infrastructure, exacerbating existing socio-economic challenges and creating new ones.

² Alam, M. (2018). How the Rohingya crisis is affecting Bangladesh and why it matters. *The Washington Post*. 7-10. <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/12/>>

³ Anwary, A. (2020). Interethnic Conflict and Genocide in Myanmar. *Homicide Studies*, Vol. 24(1), 85–102, SAGE Publications <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767919827354>>

⁴ Ansar, A. & Khaled, F., M., A. (2021). From solidarity to resistance: host communities' evolving response to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, 6:16, Open Access <<https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-021-00104-9>>

⁵ Anwary, A. (2018). Atrocities against the Rohingya community of Myanmar. *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 1&2, PP. 91-102 <www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26608825>

⁶ Chowdhury, R. (2021). The Mobilization of Noncooperative Spaces: Reflections from Rohingya Refugee Camps. *Journal of Management Studies*. 58 (3), 914-921. doi:10.1111/joms.12612

⁷ Levine, V.A. (2019). A Modern-Day Holocaust: The Genocide of the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar. *Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion*. Rutgers' Law School, Vol. 19, N. 398. <<https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/rjlr19&div=22&id=&page=>>>

⁸ Kirby, J. (2018, Sep 18). A New UN report documents evidence of mass atrocities in Myanmar against the Rohingya. *VOX*. <<https://www.vox.com/world/2018/9/18/17873638/rohingya-united-nations-myanmar-war-crimes>>

⁹ United Nations Human Rights Council- UNHRC. (2017). *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar report- IFFMM* <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/myanmar-ffm/index>>

One of the most pressing security challenges posed by the influx of Rohingya refugees is the strain on local communities and resources. Cox's Bazar, a region already grappling with poverty and underdevelopment, has experienced a population increase of over a million people in just a few months. This sudden surge in demand for food, water, and healthcare has overwhelmed local systems, resulting in shortages and rising prices¹⁰. Furthermore, the environmental impact of the refugee camps has been substantial, with extensive deforestation and soil erosion occurring due to the demand for shelter materials and firewood¹¹. These pressures have intensified tensions between the refugee population and local communities, who feel that their needs are being neglected in favor of the Rohingya. At times, these tensions have escalated into violence, further complicating security¹².

The ongoing crisis worsens socio-economic challenges. While the international community has provided significant aid, the funding has frequently been insufficient to meet the basic needs of the refugees¹³. Moreover, there is no clear solution in sight. Efforts to repatriate the Rohingya to Myanmar have consistently failed, primarily due to the lack of guarantees for their safety and rights. The Myanmar government has shown little willingness to address the root causes of the crisis or establish conditions that would allow refugees to return safely¹⁴. As a result, the Rohingya remain in limbo, unable to return home and facing limited opportunities for integration into Bangladeshi society. This prolonged displacement has created a sense of hopelessness among the refugees¹⁵, which in turn has security implications.

One of the primary security issues is the potential for radicalization within the refugee community¹⁶. The Rohingya have endured years of persecution and displacement, creating an environment conducive to the emergence of extremist views. While most Rohingya refugees are peaceful and primarily focused on survival, concerns arise that militant organizations might exploit their grievances to recruit individuals or establish a foothold in the camps¹⁷. The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), an insurgent group whose actions triggered the crackdown in 2017, along with several other militant groups, has been active in these camps, heightening

¹⁰ Abrar, C.R. (2017, March 19). Lost in conversation: voice of the host community. *The Daily Star*. <<https://www.thedailystar.net/starweekend/the-shadow-violence/voice-the-host-community-1475143>> & Khuda, E., K. (2020). The impact and challenges to the host country, Bangladesh, due to sheltering the Rohingya refugees. *Cogent Social Sciences*, Taylor & Francis, 6.1, 8-11.

¹¹ Department of Environment. (2019). Geospatial technology-based Water Quality Monitoring system for Bangladesh. centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 55-62.

¹² Fajth, V., Bilgili, O., Loschmann, C. & Siegel, M. (2019). How do refugees affect social life in host communities? The case of the Congolese refugees in Rwanda. *Comparative Migration Studies*, VOL. 7:33 <<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0139-1>> &

Abraham, I. (2020). Host Communities and Refugees in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 178-196, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26883625>>

¹³ Sattar, Z. (2021, Oct. 28). Rohingya crisis and the host community. *The Financial Express*, Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, Accessed on May 20, 2025. <<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/reviews/>> ; Imtiaz, S. (2018). Ecological impact of Rohingya refugees on forest resources: remote sensing analysis of vegetation cover change in Teknaf Peninsula in Bangladesh. *Scientific journal of European Ecocycles Society*, vol.4.1 pp.10-15.

¹⁴ Chowdhury, J. (2019, Sep.11). Bangladesh, growing tired of hosting Rohingya refugees, puts new squeeze on the teeming camps. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/bangladesh-growing-tired-of-hosting-rohingya-refugees-puts-new-squeeze-on-a-displaced-minority/2019/09/10/4488cfb4-cfd5-11e9-a620-0a91656d7db6_story.html>

¹⁵ Ramsden, M. (2022). Strategic Litigation before the International Court of Justice: Evaluating Impact in the Campaign for Rohingya Rights. *European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp.441–472.

¹⁶ Filipski, J. M., Rosenbach, G., Tiburcio, E., Dorosh, P., Hoddinott, J. (2020). Refugees who mean business: Economic activities in and around the Rohingya settlements in Bangladesh. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 0, No. 0, pp. 08-10.

¹⁷ Islam, D., M. & Siddika, A. (2021). Implications of the Rohingya Relocation from Cox's Bazar to Bhasan Char, Bangladesh. *International Migration Review*, pp. 1-11.

worries about the potential for renewed violence¹⁸. Furthermore, the presence of a large, stateless population with limited access to education and employment creates conditions that transnational terrorist groups could exploit. Bangladesh, experienced in addressing Islamist extremism, is particularly aware of these threats and has implemented measures to enhance security within the camps¹⁹. Nonetheless, the challenge of preventing radicalization while respecting the rights of refugees requires a careful balancing act.

The Rohingya crisis also carries significant geopolitical implications for Bangladesh. The situation has severely strained the country's relationship with Myanmar, as Bangladesh accuses Myanmar of failing to take responsibility for the displacement of its citizens²⁰. Diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis have seen little progress, raising concerns that the situation could escalate into a broader regional conflict. The involvement of international actors, including China, India, and the United States, adds another layer of complexity. China, for instance, has supported Myanmar amidst international criticism while providing economic assistance to Bangladesh²¹. Conversely, India has adopted a more cautious approach, reflecting its concerns about regional stability and its relationship with Myanmar²². The United States and other Western nations have condemned Myanmar's actions and imposed sanctions, yet their ability to influence the situation remains limited²³. For Bangladesh, navigating this complex geopolitical landscape poses a significant challenge, particularly as it seeks to balance its humanitarian obligations with its national interests.

In addition to these external challenges, the Rohingya crisis has also exposed internal weaknesses in Bangladesh. The arrival of such a large refugee population has put a strain on the country's political and social structures. The Bangladeshi government has faced criticism from opposition parties and civil society organizations over its management of the crisis, with some accusing it of using the situation for political gain²⁴. There are concerns that the crisis could exacerbate existing religious and ethnic tensions in Bangladesh, which has a history of sectarian conflict. The government's efforts to address these issues have been further complicated by the need to maintain stability and security in a region already vulnerable to natural disasters, including cyclones and flooding²⁵.

Despite these challenges, Bangladesh has exhibited remarkable resilience and compassion in addressing the Rohingya crisis. The international community has praised the country's

¹⁸ Bashar, I. (2017). Exploitation of the Rohingya Crisis by Jihadist Groups: Implications for Bangladesh's Internal Security. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, vol. 9, No. 9, pp. 5-7, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26351550>>

¹⁹ Wolf, S. (2015, April 6). Myanmar's Rohingya conflict is "more economic than religious." DW News, Accessed on May 20, 2025 <<http://www.dw.com/en/myanmars-rohingya-conflict-more-economic-than-religious/a-18496206>>

²⁰ Tayeb, T. (2024). Civil war in Myanmar: Bangladesh should revisit its national security strategy. *The Daily Star*, June 26, 2024, Accessed on May 28, 2025 <<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/closer-look/news/civil-war-myanmar-bangladesh-should-revisit-its-national-security-strategy-3641321>>

²¹ Joy, A. (2018). Understanding China's Response to the Rakhine Crisis. *US Institute of Peace*, Special report, February <<http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep17671>>

²² United States Institute of Peace (2018). *China's Role in Myanmar's Internal Conflicts*. September, ISBN: 978-1-60127-735-0 <<https://www.usa.gov/agencies/united-states-institute-of-peace>>

²³ Selth, A. (2018). Myanmar armed forces and the Rohingya crisis. *United Nations Institute of Peace*, 2301 Constitution Ave., NW.

²⁴ Khuda, *supra note* 10 at 3

²⁵ Ahmed, N., Islam, N.M., Hasan, F.M., Motahar, T. & Sujauddin, M. (2019). Understanding the political ecology of forced migration and deforestation through a multi-algorithm classification approach: the case of Rohingya displacement in the southeastern border region of Bangladesh. *Geology, Ecology, and Landscapes*, Vol. 3, N.4, pp. 282-294 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/24749508.2018.1558025>>

initiatives, and it has played a crucial role in bringing attention to the struggles faced by the Rohingya. However, the long-term sustainability of this response remains uncertain. The ongoing presence of over a million refugees poses significant risks to Bangladesh's stability, security, and development²⁶. Addressing these issues will require a coordinated and multifaceted strategy that involves not only the Bangladeshi government but also the international community, regional stakeholders, and NGOs²⁷.

In summary, the influx of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar has led to a complex security challenge for Bangladesh. The socio-economic, environmental, and geopolitical impacts of the crisis are substantial, and the risk of radicalization and violence should not be ignored. Addressing these issues will require sustained international support, along with a commitment to finding a lasting solution to the Rohingya crisis. Until a resolution is achieved, Bangladesh will bear the burden of a crisis it did not cause, which has now become an integral part of its recent history. The international community must not turn a blind eye to the suffering of the Rohingya, or the difficulties faced by the nation that has welcomed them.

In the upcoming sections, this paper will focus on the methodological issues and findings derived from the empirical data collected at the refugee camp in Bangladesh. It will address the security challenges and the matters related to increased conflict, militancy, and radicalization within the camp and the nearby host community villages.

2. Methods and Data Collection Process

We conducted exploratory research to understand the Rohingya camp area's socioeconomic and environmental changes. Utilizing various qualitative methods, including case studies and key informant interviews (KIIs), we navigated our research's non-linear trajectory and applied grounded theory²⁸. A non-probability purposive sampling method was used to select participants. The sample aligned with the study's objectives, focusing on three primary target groups: Rohingyas, members of the host community, and service providers. The service providers included Camp in Charge (CiC) officers, representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and police officers. The sample distribution was asymmetrical, with thirty (30) participants selected from the host community and twenty (20) from the Rohingya population. Additionally, we conducted ten (10) KIIs with service providers, including CiC officers, NGO representatives, and police officers. These interviews were essential for gaining insight into the changes occurring within the camp. A detailed distribution of the samples is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sampling distribution among the stakeholders

Stakeholders	Sampling method	Sampling distribution
Host community	Case study	Interviewees 30
Rohingya people	Case study	Interviewees 20
CiC	KII	Interviewees 5
NGO	KII	Interviewees 2
Police	KII	Interviewees 3

²⁶ Crimes in the Rohingya camps. *The Daily Star*, 18 August 2020: 1-3, Accessed on May 25, 2025. <<https://www.thedailystar.net/editorial/news/crimes-the-rohingya-camps>>

²⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council (2018). *Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar*. Advanced edited version, September 10-28 <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/home>>

²⁸ Punch, K. F. (1998). Research Design in Qualitative and Quantitative Research. *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. The Gromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, pp. 123-126.

Total samples	Cases (50) + KII (10)	60
---------------	-----------------------	----

Data were gathered following the Case Study protocol, using a semi-structured interview schedule that allowed for flexibility in questioning. The interviews did not follow a strict set of questions. An open-ended, non-structured interview schedule was employed for the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), allowing for greater freedom to ask follow-up questions or skip specific questions as needed. The study included male and female respondents aged 20 to 50. It took place in the Rohingya camp located in Ukhia Upazila and its surrounding areas. The Ukhia refugee camp is known for hosting registered refugee camps and houses the largest population of Rohingyas. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics²⁹, approximately 300,000 host individuals and 700,000 Rohingyas reside in Ukhia. Data from Rohingyas were specifically collected from camps 10 and 11, while information from service providers was gathered at these camps' Camp-In-Charge (CIC) office. Additionally, data from the host community were collected in the West and East Balukhali villages, located in Palongkhali Union, the nearest locality to the camp. Before the study, the researcher made several visits to the area with three research assistants who were trained in the study's methodologies and concepts. After developing the data collection instruments, the researcher and three research assistants conducted the data collection during the first two weeks of August 2023. Ultimately, the recorded data were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively.

3. Results

In this section, we present the empirical data gathered from the host community members, Rohingya refugees, and service providers in the Rohingya camps concerning the security issues related to the influx of refugees. We also referenced secondary sources when necessary. Both empirical and non-empirical data are explained below.

The Economic Security Challenge

Local residents say that the security situation in the local market has worsened since the arrival of the Rohingya refugees. The influx of this large population has increased the prices of essential daily goods. The prices in the area have allegedly risen around fivefold. For example, local people used to buy various types of fish, such as Catla, Rohu, and Mrigal, for about 300-350 BDT (approximately 4 dollars) per kilogram; however, these prices have now climbed to around 500-600 BDT (about 7 dollars).

Additionally, the costs of more expensive fish like Hilsa, shrimp, and pomfret have doubled. The prices of beef, chicken, and other common meats have also tripled. Routine grocery items such as milk powder, chili powder, sugar, salt, garlic, onion, and turmeric have become more expensive, as the population has doubled while supplies remain limited. Every household in the host community is struggling with the rising cost of living, exacerbated by the influx of one million Rohingya individuals, which is putting intense pressure on the supply chain and prices. This surge in prices has impacted both ordinary Rohingyas and the host residents, although traders and producers have benefited from the situation. Humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, distribute relief items to the Rohingya refugees; however, many sell excess supplies in what is known as the "Rohingya market," despite such sales being prohibited and illegal.

Locals are strictly prohibited from selling relief items collected from the Rohingya community in their shops. The police, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), and military personnel routinely

²⁹ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics-BSS (2020). *Bangladesh Statistics*. Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, Bangladesh, pp. 8-11. <https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/a1d32f13_8553_44f1>

inspect local establishments to ensure compliance with this ban. Additionally, locals are not allowed to set up shops or establish permanent settlements near the Rohingya camps due to alleged security concerns, while Rohingyas are permitted to build their shops and infrastructure. This blatant double standard is seen as a discriminatory attitude by the security personnel. The research team has identified a “Rohingya market” adjacent to the camp, where Rohingyas freely buy and sell goods, including relief items. Many structures and shops created by the Rohingyas operate illegally, lacking proper licenses. They do not pay taxes to the government because they lack legal documentation. Locals claim that security forces and law enforcement agencies refrain from enforcing rules against the Rohingyas, fearing backlash from international media and journalists. Rohingya individuals deny accusations that their presence creates insecurity in local markets. Initially, they did exert some pressure on local markets by purchasing necessary items, but now they primarily rely on a relief scheme, turning to local shops only for a limited range of items like green vegetables, fish, and meat.

Members of the host community in Cox’s Bazar have expressed concerns about the deteriorating labor market, with wages plummeting by nearly 50% since the influx of Rohingya refugees. The arrival of Rohingyas has led to increased competition, as they often accept lower pay for work in the area. Although Rohingyas are officially prohibited from working outside the camps, many secretly venture out to find short-term jobs in nearby towns like Ukhia, Teknaf, and Cox’s Bazar. A significant portion of the local population comprises day laborers who primarily work in agriculture. However, the government’s appropriation of 60% of the cultivable land and 40% of the hills and reserved forests for camps and offices has left many poor local laborers without employment³⁰. In stark contrast, Rohingya workers have been observed offering their labor in hotels, motels, restaurants, shops, vehicles, and boats in Cox’s Bazar City and Saint Martin Island³¹. During data collection, several Rohingya mobile vendors were seen at Cox’s Bazar Sea Beach and Saint Martin Island, having escaped from the camps, many of whom are not officially registered. This situation has negatively impacted on the livelihoods and earnings of local residents. The incidence of poverty in the post-influx period has been recorded as significantly higher in Ukhia and Teknaf compared to the national average of 24%³². In discussions, a Rohingya leader countered the claims of Rohingya workers in the cities, although he did acknowledge that such instances do occur. *“It is impossible to work outside the camp because we are prohibited from doing so, a policy strictly enforced by the military, the Border Guard of Bangladesh (BGB), and the police. While it’s true that some individuals may find ways to work in the city by escaping from the camp, the situation is complex.”*

Residents in the area have reported that various sources of income tied to the land and rivers have faced delays since the arrival of refugees. Historically, the community depended on forests and hills for gathering wood and leaves. Rivers provided crucial resources for fishing, which constituted a significant income source, as fish were often sold at the market. Fishing was one of the primary livelihoods, accounting for approximately 28% of local employment through activities such as shrimp farming, dried fish processing, and fish breeding³³.

³⁰ Brac, *supra* note 1 at 1

³¹ Almost 200 Rohingyas caught fleeing Bangladeshi camps by boat. *Dhaka Tribune*, 17 December 2019, Accessed on May 25, 2025. <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/world/south-asia/2019/12/17/myanmar-seizes-boat-carrying-173-rohingya>>

³² Making the Rohingya settle down. *The Financial Express*, 16 August 2021, Accessed on May 25, 2025. <<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/making-rohingya-settle-down-1629129716>>

³³ Responding to the Rohingya emergency in Bangladesh. *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, Media Action Asia, 15 September 2020, Accessed on May 25, 2025. <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where-we-work/asia/bangladesh/rohingya-lifeline>>

However, in August 2017, the government implemented a fishing ban, leaving around 30,000 to 35,000 fishermen unemployed and significantly impacting their annual income. Before the ban, local fishermen earned between 40,000 and 90,000 takas (\$470 - \$1,058) per year, but their earnings dropped sharply afterward. Many host families live in poverty and depend on rice farming, with rice serving as their main food source. Numerous families managed to produce surplus rice to sell to meet their living expenses. Some households also engaged in banana cultivation to improve their finances. Additionally, many locals raised livestock such as chickens, cows, and goats, selling these animals to support their livelihoods.

Unfortunately, following the influx, agricultural activities have been limited due to insufficient available land. Daily wage laborers, who once worked in the fields, harvested rice paddies, and sold their labor to wealthier landowners, have suffered significant losses. Farming activities in the camp area have nearly stopped. The expansion of camps into hills and fields has forced local farmers to halt their farming and cultivation practices. Additionally, a large portion of land has become unusable due to contamination and pollution, especially from human waste and refusal from the camps. The lack of a multipurpose drainage system around the camp has led to garbage, dirt, and debris polluting the vacant land. On average, 2 to 3 acres of land are affected by waste from the camp, although some Camp in Charge (CiC) officials have disputed these figures³⁴.

Initially, some arable land was allocated for the Rohingya when they first arrived and began living in the yards and open areas of the host community. However, this land was later repurposed for the construction of the Rohingya camp. Residents have voiced complaints about the Rohingya allegedly encroaching on their land, although no concrete evidence supporting these claims has been collected. Discussions with government officials reveal that numerous applications regarding the locals' allegations of land grabbing are still awaiting review. An NGO officer dismissed the accusations against the Rohingya, stating that, *"Rohingyas cannot occupy others' land because they live in the camps. However, most of the camp is constructed on land belonging to the host community, as well as private and reserved forests, which the Rohingya also acknowledged."*

The author discovered that the offices of the CIC, NGOs, and international organizations occupy land that belongs to the local host community. According to residents, the government had promised to recruit at least two members from each host family for camp jobs in exchange for the land during its establishment. However, this commitment was not honored, and locals were not hired as promised. Many frustrated members of the host community attempted to dismantle government offices to reclaim their land. In response, government officials urged them to be patient, but they continue to wait for a resolution. The CIC office did respond to these accusations by stating that they have employed several locals. Additionally, many NGOs have also hired members of the host community. During discussions with both male and female host workers inside the camp, they denied receiving any assistance from the CIC offices.

The Social Security Challenge

Multiple stakeholders from the host community have reported that various social security challenges have emerged and worsened following the recent inflow, although some issues existed prior. Notably, incidents of theft and robbery have surged in the camp area during the post-inflow period. Both the Camp-in-Charge (CiC) office and Rohingya representatives have stated that certain local and Rohingya youth have formed alliances to engage in these activities at night, taking advantage of the inadequate security within the camp. Numerous reports of

³⁴ Sattar, *supra note* 13 at 3

such incidents have surfaced in the Ukha and Teknaf Upazilas³⁵. Law enforcement and CiC officials have confirmed these observations, noting the documentation of several theft and robbery cases involving accusations against both Rohingya individuals and local residents. The police have pointed out that while many robberies have occurred in recent years across various villages, the perpetrators have often remained unidentified. Local residents speculate that the involvement of both host and Rohingya youth in these crimes is contributing to a growing sense of intimidation among community members.

The host community reported frequent incidents of stolen mobile phones, household items, cows, goats, and chickens. In the past, people grazed their cows, buffalo, and goats on large stretches of barren land, but now they must constantly check to ensure their animals remain safe from theft. While the Rohingya community denied the allegations against them, claiming they have little opportunity to steal since they are confined to the camp, the Camp in Charge (CIC) acknowledged that they had received a few complaints regarding the Rohingyas. Multiple sources informed the author that some Rohingya youth and children have engaged in stealing domestic animals and valuable items from local residents. However, such incidents do not occur daily, and only a small number of Rohingyas may be involved in these activities.

Local residents noted that some Rohingyas frequently visit their homes seeking assistance and food, including curries, vegetables, and dry goods, seemingly to gather information about household belongings for potential theft later on. The hosts believe that certain Rohingya women typically carry out these acts during the day when they can visit local families. When a theft occurs, the perpetrator often retreats into the camp, making it nearly impossible to trace them afterward. Currently, there is no punishment for such offenses, and both the CIC and other authorities appear hesitant to address the issue. Nevertheless, the Rohingya community rejected the accusations but admitted that some individuals may indeed be involved in these activities with local residents. As a result, the hosts feel that the responsibility primarily lies with them. Both communities have urged the CIC, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), and other authorities to strengthen their presence at night and act against the culprits.

The host community has noticed a significant change in the behavior of youths following the influx of Rohingya migrants. This shift is attributed to the breakdown of the social structure and a decline in moral values among young people. Many local youths have engaged in various activities with the Rohingyas since their arrival, such as supplying gas cylinders, providing various goods, and operating small shops. Conversely, some have become involved in the illegal drug trade, including the sale of Yaba tablets. Although Yaba, which originated in Myanmar, is not new to Bangladesh, its availability and accessibility have surged with the arrival of the Rohingya, allowing local youths to seize the opportunity to become both drug dealers and users³⁶. Various agencies in the camp area have confirmed that the supply of Yaba tablets has increased in the post-influx period, with numerous Rohingya gangs participating in this trade. Local youths often befriend these gangs and become involved in drug use as well. Some locals reportedly remain in the camp while consuming drugs, as local and Rohingya youths supply Yaba tablets to the host community. Several senior citizens in the area have expressed concern about this troubling development and stated, *"Ninety percent (90%) of young people have become schizophrenic and fixated on obtaining drugs, as well as Rohingya women. They have abandoned their long-cherished culture and traditions."*

³⁵ Uttom, S. & Rozario, R., R. (2019, May 09). Struggling Rohingya seduced by crime at refugee camps. *Union of Catholic Asian News*, Accessed on May 25, 2025. <<https://www.ucanews.com/news/>>

³⁶ Crimes on the rise in Cox's Bazar camps. *Dhaka Tribune*, 01 September 2018, Accessed on May 25, 2025. <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2018/09/01/>>

Many members of the host community have voiced concerns that some local youths are becoming involved in drug trafficking to major cities, like Dhaka and Chittagong. This has resulted in a significant intracultural shift among the youth in the host area, which local parents and elders find difficult to accept. In interviews, several residents noted, *"They (the youth) no longer follow the rules, regulations, and customs of society as they once did before the arrival of the Rohingya."* Some members of the host community believe local youths are attracted to young Rohingya girls, leading to romantic relationships and even marriage. An NGO worker stated, *"Since I began working in the camp, I haven't encountered any cases like this, though I've heard rumors."* Local police reported they have documented several intercultural marriages in the area involving both host community members and Rohingya individuals. They attribute this trend to the interactions between the two ethnic communities.

Ahmed³⁷ highlighted that many outsiders come into refugee camps to marry Rohingya women and subsequently take them to Chittagong and Dhaka, where they are often forced into prostitution. Local residents reported that several intercultural marriages between the Rohingya and the host communities occur in secrecy. Additionally, some previously married individuals from the local population marry Rohingya women, as this process is simple and does not require any documentation or government registration. Some Rohingya women engage in transactional relationships for money and may even marry foreigners to migrate to developed countries. In some instances, local intermediaries facilitate the trafficking of Rohingya women seeking migration. As a result, numerous Rohingya women have been trafficked from the camps and sold abroad³⁸. These circumstances have had significant repercussions for both the host and Rohingya families. Local residents express concerns that if protective measures are not implemented, marriages between Rohingya and Bengalis may increase in the future. The host community acknowledges that these inter-ethnic marriages can lead to disturbances, instability, and domestic violence within both Rohingya and local families. There are instances where married men have divorced their wives due to relationships with Rohingya women and girls. A local interviewee recounted a story about a Rohingya-Bengali marriage and its repercussions, stating, *"A married man, who has two children, became involved with a Rohingya woman and married her without the consent of his first wife. This situation led to significant domestic strife, and now he must support both wives."*

Most Rohingya individuals contest the local claims regarding Rohingya women's involvement in prostitution and seduction, arguing that if such occurrences do exist, they are exceedingly rare. Rohingya people are unable to leave the camps without government permission. Moreover, while there may be cases of marriages between hosts and Rohingya women, these unions are based solely on individual choices rather than community consensus.

Movement and Environmental Security Challenge

The host community expressed that the presence of the Rohingya camps has significantly affected their lives in various ways. Movement for both the host community members and the Rohingyas has become increasingly restricted, with neither group able to move freely. All individuals are now required to carry identity cards while outside, which has created a sense of discomfort among the local population. Since the influx of Rohingya refugees, local residents have reported a rise in accidents and fatalities, marking the highest number in the past 15

³⁷ Ahmed, K. (2019). Rohingya women and girls are trafficked to Malaysia for marriage. *Al Jazeera*, 2019. Accessed on May 20, 2025. <<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/rohingya-women-girls-trafficked-malaysia-marriage-190507212543893.html>>

³⁸ Ahmed, *supra note* 37 at 11

years³⁹. Additionally, local roads have suffered damage due to the heavy trucks and lorries transporting food and supplies for the Rohingyas. Rohingya individuals also drive various vehicles to facilitate the transfer of materials and goods.

The major challenges stem from environmental issues, as nature has lost its equilibrium due to deforestation, pollution, and increased population density during post-inflow periods. The temperature in the camp area has risen in comparison to nearby Upazilas, leading both hosts and Rohingyas to experience significant heat and climate change impacts. During the summer, dust blankets the entire region, contributing to various respiratory illnesses among both locals and Rohingyas. The consequences of deforestation and pollution also include the loss of biodiversity, forested land, and endangered wildlife. A local resident remarked, "*A thousand acres of forestland cleared for refugee camps. Every year, the Rohingya and host people suffer and die because of landslides, floods, and cyclones.*" A CIC officer explained, "*In the last three years, around 50-60 events of monsoon-triggered landslides, floods, and cyclones took place in the camp where more than 20 Rohingyas died.*"

The local communities argued that deforestation and the clearance of forest lands have resulted in a significant loss of their nature-based resources and livelihoods. A CiC officer reported that development agencies are implementing various projects aimed at rapid reforestation and introducing alternative cooking technologies, such as LPG cylinders, cookstoves, biomass briquettes, and biogas. In December 2022, the majority of refugee camps had transitioned to using LPG gas cylinders⁴⁰. While the extensive exploitation of natural resources has ceased, environmental harmony and ecological balance remain elusive in the camp area. Furthermore, the shortage of groundwater has become a critical issue for the community, exacerbated by the influx of population. Thousands of shallow tube wells have been constructed at various slopes within the camp, leading to excessive withdrawal from the shallow aquifer and resulting in drying groundwater supplies. Many tube wells have already ceased to function, intensifying the groundwater crisis, especially during the summer and winter seasons. Water service providers are exploring the possibility of accessing deeper water levels, although this initiative has not yet received approval⁴¹.

Groundwater contamination has emerged as a significant concern for experts in the field, primarily due to issues such as leakage, seepage, and overflow. The presence of thousands of non-functional latrines and tube wells has led to widespread water contamination. Experts from the Environmental Department of Bangladesh have reported that 70% of the groundwater in the camp area is polluted. The influx of Rohingya refugees has resulted in critical impacts, including groundwater depletion and contamination⁴². Many local hosts and Rohingya individuals have noted a decline in water levels and the dysfunction of numerous tub wells. One Rohingya woman articulated the challenge faced by her community, stating, "*We must bring water from half a kilometer away, as all the tube wells around our house are unused and non-functional.*"

Both the host community and members of the Rohingya population have reported that surface water in the camp area is contaminated. This contamination is primarily caused by camp waste and open defecation practices among both host and refugee children. Additionally, sedimentation in the river stream contributes to the deteriorating quality of surface water. The

³⁹ Gebrehiwet, K., Gebreyesus, H. & Teweldemedhin, M. (2020). The Social Health Impact of Eritrean Refugees on the Host Communities: The Case of May-ayni Refugee Camp, Northern Ethiopia." *BMC Research Notes*, vol. 13.182, pp. 3-5. DOI: 10.1186/s13104-020-05036-y

⁴⁰ Chowdhury, T., Chowdhury, H., Miskat, I. M., & Chowdhury, P., Sait, M.S., Thirugnanasambandam, M., & Saidur, R. (2020). Developing and evaluating a stand-alone hybrid energy system for the Rohingya refugee community in Bangladesh.

⁴¹ DoE, *supra note* 11 at 3

⁴² DoE, *supra note* 11 at 3

poor waste management practices in the camp area have significant negative effects on the environment, as there is no cohesive solid and liquid waste management or drainage system in place. Consequently, waste is being discharged into the host community's surface water and land.

Experts have pointed out that landslides pose a serious and potentially hazardous natural threat to both the host and Rohingya populations. The construction of camps has led to the removal of vegetation and alterations to the terrain, compromising their natural state. The weakened soil structure has increased susceptibility to erosion, making topsoil and loose soils particularly vulnerable to being carried away during the rainy season and strong winds. Erosion has already obstructed pathways, and hazardous hill-cutting poses a risk of landslides within the camp at any moment. During the rainy season, soil minerals are washed away and accumulate in the mud, further contributing to slides in the camp area⁴³.

Asian elephants are increasingly facing critical endangerment as a result of this influx. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature⁴⁴, 40 elephants have become trapped on the western side of the Rohingya camp near the Myanmar border. The repercussions on the ecosystem are profound, particularly concerning wildlife, vegetation, and marine and freshwater ecosystems.

Rohingya Terrorist Groups and National Security Challenge

The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) apprehended Ataulah, the chief of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), along with six other individuals, and presented them before the Senior Judicial Magistrate Court of Narayanganj. They have filed a request for a 10-day remand in two separate cases: one concerning illegal entry and another related to criminal activities. RAB also took into custody three women and a child in connection with the six arrests. According to the first information report lodged at Siddhirganj police station, the detainees had convened in the region to conduct clandestine meetings aimed at orchestrating subversive activities and serious crimes. Over the years, hundreds of Rohingyas have been killed by ARSA members following the mass exodus in 2017. The group has been implicated in a range of criminal activities, including murder, smuggling, abduction, trafficking, and extortion within the camps⁴⁵.

The activities of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) garnered significant attention following the assassination of Rohingya rights activist and leader Mohib Ullah at the Kutupalong camp. On November 23, 2022, ARSA's commander-in-chief, Ataulah, was named the principal suspect in the murder of a DGFI officer near the Tumbru border in Bandarban's Naikkhangchhari, a case that also implicated 65 others. The incident, which occurred on November 14, resulted in the death of Bangladesh Air Force Squadron Leader Rizwan Rushdee, who was serving with the DGFI, while Rab official Sohel Barua sustained injuries during a confrontation with drug smugglers⁴⁶.

The Defense Ministry of Bangladesh prepared a report and submitted it to the parliamentary standing committee in 2023. The report showed that at least ten terrorist and robber gangs are

⁴³ DoE, *supra note* 11 at 3

⁴⁴ The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (2020). *Annual Report 2019*, en, Gland, Switzerland, 38-41 <<https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/49096>>

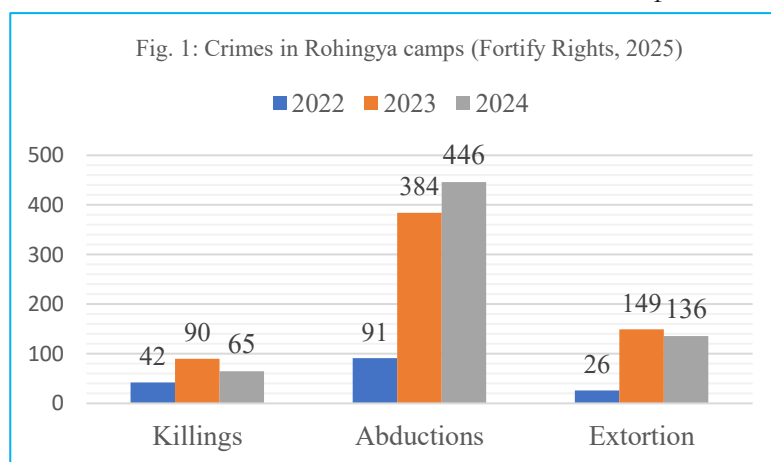
⁴⁵ ARSA chief, 10 others held, placed on remand. *The Daily Star*, March 18, 2025. Accessed on May 28, 2025. <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/arsa-chief-10-others-held-placed-remand-3851896>>

⁴⁶ Tayeb, *supra note* 20 at 4

actively operating within the Rohingya camps. Among these, ARSA operates in Ukhiya, Balukhali, Palongkhali, and Whykong, while other groups, such as the RSO and Master Munna gangs are active in Ukhiya and Palongkhali. The Islami Mahaj and Jabu dacoit gangs operate in Whykong, and various robber gangs, including the Chakma, Nabi Hussain, Putia, Salman Shah, and Khaleq gangs, are operational in the Nayapara camp⁴⁷. The following table 2 shows the Rohingya and local terrorists’ groups surrounding the refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Originality	Terrorist groups	Activity Area
Myanmar	ARSA	Ukhiya (Balukhali, Palongkhali & Whykong)
Myanmar	RSO	Ukhiya (Palongkhali)
Myanmar	Master Munna gang	Ukhiya (Palongkhali)
Myanmar	Islamic Mahaj	Ukhiya (Whykong)
Bangladesh	Jabu dacoit gangs	Ukhiya (Whykong)
Bangladesh	Chakma Robbers	Teknaf (Nayapara)
Myanmar	Nabi Hussain	Teknaf (Nayapara)
Bangladesh	Putia gang	Teknaf (Nayapara)
Myanmar	Salman Shah gang	Teknaf (Nayapara)
Myanmar	Khaleq gang	Teknaf (Nayapara)

Fortify Rights⁴⁸ published a report on the Rohingya crisis in 2025. The report shows that the number of thefts and robberies saw a decline from 77 incidents in 2021 to 75 in 2022. Similarly, shootings decreased significantly from 51 to 18, kidnappings fell from 173 to 86, internal feuds declined from 11 to just one, and drug-related incidents dropped from 268 to 249. Other crimes also witnessed a decrease, from 567 to 553. However, Rohingya refugees have endured years of violence perpetrated by militant groups. The fatalities attributed to camp-based militants rose from 22 in 2021 to 42 in 2022, then spiked to 90 in 2023, and reached at least



65 in 2024. In 2022, there were 91 abductions in the camps by Rohingya militants and criminal organizations; this number surged to 384 in 2023 and 446 in 2024. Extortion incidents also saw a significant rise, increasing from just 26 in 2022 to 149 in 2023, followed by 136 in 2024 (for further details, see Figure 1). John Quinley, Director of Fortify Rights,

⁴⁷ Arsa, 9 other armed groups active in the Rohingya camps (2023, Feb. 15). *The Daily Star*, Accessed on May 28, 2025. <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/arsa-9-other-armed-groups-active-rohingya-camps-3248906>>

⁴⁸ Fortify Rights. (2025). *I May Be Killed Any Moment”: Killings, Abductions, Torture, and Other Serious Violations by Rohingya Militant Groups in Bangladesh*. <[https://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/I%20May%20Be%20Killed%20Any%20Moment%20-%20Fortify%20Rights%20Report%20\(ENG\).pdf](https://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/I%20May%20Be%20Killed%20Any%20Moment%20-%20Fortify%20Rights%20Report%20(ENG).pdf)>

remarked: "*Rohingya armed groups are wreaking havoc in Bangladesh and Myanmar with near complete impunity*" (2025, p. 5). He further stated, "*War crimes are usually committed within the immediate theater of armed conflict, but in this case, crimes in Bangladesh are directly connected to the war in Myanmar. Bangladesh's interim government should cooperate with international justice mechanisms to bring perpetrators to justice.*"⁴⁹"

During the study, members of the host community reported a notable increase in criminal activity attributed to Rohingya criminals and extremist groups compared to the past. Local residents expressed feelings of fear and anxiety, as rival Rohingya factions frequently engage in conflicts both within and outside the camp. The Camp-in-Charge (CiC) and security forces share similar concerns, noting a rise in tensions among these rival groups. A police inspector commented, "*Rohingya criminal and extremist factions become active in the evenings after office hours, leading to several violent incidents among themselves.*"

The police officer emphasized that extremist groups operate both within and around the camp, aiming to instill panic among the mass of refugees and the local hosts. Reports from Rohingya individuals indicate that those who oppose the interests of these extremist groups are often forcibly taken away and punished according to their interpretation of Islamic law. Both the Rohingya and the hosts are feeling increasingly anxious due to the actions of these criminal groups⁵⁰. One local host described their situation, saying, "*Whenever we step outside for work, we worry about our families since our homes are surrounded by Rohingya camps.*"

He acknowledged that it may not be accurate to claim all Rohingyas are involved in illegal activities that disrupt the lives of host families. Nevertheless, incidents of crime in the area have surged significantly since the arrival of the Rohingya. Tensions between the local population and the Rohingya have also escalated, sometimes leading to disputes over minor issues. Conflicts between the two ethnic groups have been known to arise, often affecting children. A CIC officer noted, "*Tension between the Rohingya and the hosts has increased, leading to greater intolerance.*"

Local hosts expressed concern that the Rohingya community is united, and they feel that the camp administration occasionally favors the migrants. A Rohingya man living in the camp corroborated this perspective, stating, "*Criminal activity, drug trafficking, and internal conflicts have risen within the camp.*" However, he overlooked the involvement of women and girls in drug-related activities and prostitution.

Bangladesh-Myanmar border security challenge

The Bangladesh-Myanmar border is consistently plagued by insecurity, attracting criminals and drug traffickers. Smugglers exploit this area to transport drugs, weapons, and illicit goods from Myanmar. The border's vulnerability became particularly evident during the mass influx of Rohingya refugees in 2017, when it served as a passage for Rohingya criminals and terrorist groups to move into Myanmar and Arakan. Even ordinary Rohingya families have resorted to using this border for informal entry into Bangladesh. The situation worsened following the outbreak of civil war in Myanmar, which intensified the risks for the Bangladeshi border

⁴⁹ Fortify Rights, *supra note* 48 at 14

⁵⁰ Czimmek, S. & Islam, A. (2019, Sep.). Rohingya militants are active in Bangladeshi refugee camps. *Deutsche Welle (DW)*, Accessed on May 30, 2025 <<https://www.dw.com/en/rohingya-militants-active-in-bangladeshi-refugee-camps/a-50490888>>

community. Numerous incidents have seen bullets and mortar shells stray into Bangladeshi territory, injuring several families and villagers⁵¹.

On February 9, 2024, an unexploded mortar shell landed in Bangladesh, with the Myanmar military subsequently firing into Bangladeshi territory after the shell was rendered inactive by the Bangladesh military. This escalation rendered the border extremely unsafe, forcing local residents to seek refuge in safer areas. The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and the military found themselves in a precarious situation due to the ongoing conflict in Myanmar and the resulting cross-border fire. In light of these events, former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged security forces to exercise utmost patience. Additionally, former Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud summoned the Myanmar ambassador to Dhaka to protest the military activities occurring along the border, which have caused significant alarm among the Bangladeshi population⁵².

In February 2024, gunfire from Burma's military helicopters caused bullets and mortar shells to hit a village near the Bangladeshi border, resulting in the deaths of at least four people and injuring around ten others. In response to the violence along the border, all schools and colleges in the affected area were closed. Additionally, the Rohingya camp has become increasingly unsafe amidst this turmoil. Although a barbed wire fence surrounds all 34 camps in Ukha, some Rohingyas have resorted to cutting the wire to move discreetly and engage in drug trafficking, facing various dangers from the situation in Burma.

Due to security concerns, Bangladesh has suspended all maritime and communication access to Saint Martin Island, a prime tourist destination during the winter, and Cox's Bazar from February to March 2024. Thousands of villagers from the Ghumdhum, Tomru, and Rohomoter Bil areas have been relocated to safe zones, leaving their communities desolate and residents in panic over the threat of bullets and mortar shells. The Bangladeshi authorities have sealed off three border entries: Ghumdhum Union in Naikhangchori, Bandarban; Tumru (Bandarban); and Rohomoter Bil in Ukhiya, along with Thaingkhali in Teknaf, due to the ongoing security issues. It has also been reported that approximately 400,000 Rohingyas are awaiting entry into Bangladesh to escape the civil war in Myanmar's Rakhine state⁵³. The country has adopted a strict policy of zero tolerance regarding the admission of any Rohingya individuals. Additionally, the Coast Guard of Bangladesh (CGB) has intensified patrols along the Naf River to prevent any potential crossings into the country. According to the latest updates, the Arakan Army has successfully taken control of Rakhine state, defeating the Junta Army. Along with the tight security measures at the border, an additional 180,000 fresh Rohingya refugees entered Bangladesh in March 2025 to escape from the Arakan Army's torture and violence⁵⁴.

Rohingya individuals are reportedly participating in the conflict in Myanmar, crossing the border from the Cox's Bazar camp. The participating groups are primarily composed of ARSA

⁵¹ Moniruzzaman, A. (2022, Sep. 21). *Why should Bangladesh pay for Myanmar's internal conflict?* *The Daily Star*, Accessed on May 30, 2025 <<https://www.thedailystar.net/star-multimedia/views-multimedia/news/why-should-bangladesh-pay-myanmars-internal-conflict-3124776>>

⁵² Myanmar junta enforces mandatory military service for young people. (2024, Feb. 11). *The Reuters*, Accessed on May 30, 2025. <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-junta-enforces-mandatory-military-service-young-people-2024-02-11/>>

⁵³ Head, J. (2017, Oct. 11). Rohingya crisis: finding out the truth about Arsa militants. *BBC*, Accessed on June 2, 2025 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41521268>>

⁵⁴ Millions of new Rohingyas in Bangladesh, where is the concern? Translated the title from Bengali. (2025, May 09). *British Broadcasting Corporation*, Accessed on December 20, 2025 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSYP9q7EW98>>

members led by Nobi Hossen. On February 6, 2024, Bangladeshi authorities apprehended 23 Rohingya individuals armed with weapons at the Ukhia border; they possessed identification cards from the Rohingya camp⁵⁵. These individuals were returning from Myanmar, where they had seized arms from members of the Myanmar Border Guard (BGP). There has been significant unrest among the Rohingya in reaction to the situation in Myanmar, particularly after learning about the successes of the Arakan Army (AA) against the Myanmar military in Rakhine State. Motivated by this, many Rohingya sought to join the Arakan Army.

Witnesses have indicated that the primary objective of these Rohingya groups was to retrieve weapons abandoned by the Myanmar Border Guard (BGP) and to gain control over the local drug trade. Rohingya fighters have considerable freedom of movement across the two Bangladeshi borders, allowing them to operate relatively easily. During clashes along the Dekubunia border in Myanmar, some Rohingya crossed into Bangladesh through the Nolbunia border (Thaingkhali river) and opened fire on Bangladeshi villagers when they were obstructed from entering⁵⁶.

The overarching Rohingya population in the camp is also experiencing anxiety due to the ongoing conflict in Myanmar. Many feel unsafe within the camps, as there are insufficient facilities and security measures in place. Among the various Rohingya extremist groups, there exists a marked hostility toward one another in the context of the Myanmar conflict. Some factions are allied with the Myanmar military government, while others support the Arakan Army. The Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), categorized as an extremist group, has been actively fighting for the Arakan Army and their territorial rights, while ARSA has aligned itself with the Myanmar government, creating opposing positions within the conflict⁵⁷.

Numerous Myanmar soldiers have sought refuge in Bangladesh to escape the conflict with the Arakan Army. As of February 2024, approximately 328 members of the Myanmar Border Police (BGP), the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and the Tatmadaw (military) have crossed into Bangladesh for their safety⁵⁸. Following the Geneva Conventions, Bangladesh has provided them with disarmament, shelter, and healthcare. However, after receiving a request from the Myanmar authorities, the Bangladesh government returned all of them to Myanmar.

Camp Terrorist groups to nationalist Politics

In the Rohingya refugee camps, at least 15-20 terrorist groups are active inside and outside the camp. Many of them participated in the Myanmar civil war and collected huge amounts of weapons. They frequently cross the border and returning to the camps⁵⁹. They have already committed several criminal and terrorist incidents inside and surrounding the camp. The Arsa chief was arrested with his ten allies in Dhaka, Narayanganj. The Rohingya terrorist groups have already been intimidated by Bangladeshi nationalist politics. The Arsa chief had planned to miscreants in Dhaka and the nearest area. Therefore, the Rohingya terrorist and militant

⁵⁵ Khan, E. A. (2024, Feb 4). Analysis: Time to stabilise Rakhine for good. *The Daily Star*, Accessed on May 30, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/analysis-time-stabilise-rakhine-good-3536446>

⁵⁶ Shuvo, M. & Islam, S. (2024, Feb. 5). Tensions spill over Tumbru border. *The Daily Star*, Accessed on May 30, 2025 <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/tensions-spill-over-tumbru-border-3536286>>

⁵⁷ Goshal, D. & McPherson, P. (2024, Nov. 26). In the world's largest refugee camps, Rohingya mobilize to fight in Myanmar. *Reuters*, Accessed on May 31, 2025 <<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/worlds-largest-refugee-camps-rohingya-mobilise-fight-myanmar-2024-11-25/>>

⁵⁸ 288 Myanmar security personnel sent back from Bangladesh. (2024, Apr. 25). *The Daily Star*, Accessed on June 2, 2025 <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/288-myanmar-security-personnel-sent-back-bangladesh-3594981>>

⁵⁹ Fortify Rights, *supra notes* 48 at 14

groups have become part of Bangladeshi politics, and in the future, they might be a significant partner in submerging the political opponents⁶⁰.

The appeasement of Islamist movements and parties has long been a feature of Bangladeshi politics, a strategy employed by both the Awami League and the BNP. The Rohingya crisis presents an opportunity for Bangladeshi political parties, but it also raises concerns about the potential recruitment of Rohingyas by extremist groups in Bangladesh. Rahman⁶¹ highlights the militancy risk associated with refugees, noting that “*The Rohingya camps in Cox’s Bazar District are fertile grounds for recruitment by Islamic militants.*” Isolated from Myanmar and marginalized within Bangladesh, the stateless Rohingyas are vulnerable and desperate, making them susceptible to militant influences in their pursuit of interests. A risk assessment conducted by USAID in 2012 similarly cautioned that the plight of both Rohingya and Bihari refugee communities in Bangladesh, who are stripped of citizenship rights and face persecution, could render them more open to recruitment by extremist factions⁶².

Lintner⁶³ and Idris⁶⁴ assert that the existing Rohingya camps (Those camps of refugees who fled to Bangladesh before 2017) were operated by Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami (HuJI). He identified links between militant organizations in Bangladesh and those in Myanmar. Moreover, Fair and Oldmixon⁶⁵ contended that groups affiliated with Islamic politics in Bangladesh have actively recruited Rohingya refugees in the past and are presently continuing this practice amid the ongoing influx. They warn that “*As the Rohingya crisis continues to deepen, Bangladesh will become increasingly attractive to a range of Islamist militant groups seeking to recruit the hapless victims of the Burmese government*” (p.5).

Felix-Joehnk⁶⁶ argued that radical Islamist movements are benefiting from the crisis, raising concerns about the potential recruitment of Rohingya refugees by extremists and jihadists. Additionally, there are worries that the Rohingya crisis could incite militancy in other countries within the region.

4. Conclusion

The empirical findings and the content analysis of the paper primarily highlight the security challenges faced by Bangladesh, particularly in light of the socioeconomic, environmental, and political changes that have occurred in the camp areas following the Rohingya exodus. These changes have affected both the Rohingya and the host communities, which are grappling with various adverse issues, including drug-related problems, crime, and extremist activities both within and outside the camps. There is a consensus among national and international communities that the influx of Rohingya refugees has put a strain on limited natural resources, local infrastructure, public services, and the local economy, as well as contributing to mass

⁶⁰ Idris, I. (2017). Rohingya refugee crisis: impact on Bangladeshi politics. *GSDRC, University of Birmingham*, K4D Helpdesk report, pp.4-10, Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies <<https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/233-Rohingya-Refugee-Crisis-Impact-on-Bangladeshi-Politics.pdf>>

⁶¹ Rahman, U. (2010). The Rohingya refugee: A security dilemma for Bangladesh. *Journal of Immigrants and Refugee Studies*. Vol. 8:2, pp.233-239, DOI: 10.1080/15562941003792135

⁶² Idris, *supra note* 59 at 17

⁶³ Lintner, B. (2017, Sep. 27). The world will soon have a new terror hub in Myanmar if the Rohingya crisis isn’t tackled well. *Quartz India*, Accessed on June 2, 2025 <<https://qz.com/1088213/the-world-will-soon-have-a-new-terror-hub-in-myanmar-if-the-rohingya-crisis-isnt-tackled-well/>>

⁶⁴ Idris, *supra note* 59 at 17

⁶⁵ Fair, C. & Oldmixon, S. (2015). Think Again: Islamism and Militancy in Bangladesh. *The National Interest*, 13 August 2015, Accessed on June 2, 2025 <<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/think-again-islamism-militancy-bangladesh-13567>>

⁶⁶ Felix-Joehnk, T. (2017, Oct. 6). How the Rohingya crisis is changing Bangladesh. *New York Times*, Accessed on June 2, 2025 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/06/opinion/rohingya-bangladesh-myanmar.html>>

movements of people. These factors have created significant barriers to fostering inclusive relationships between the Rohingya and their hosts. Additionally, the presence of Rohingya terrorist groups both inside and outside the camps, along with their ability to move freely to Myanmar, poses a threat to national security in Bangladesh. The involvement of Rohingyas in the Myanmar Civil War on opposing sides can further impact the stability and security of the refugee camps. Furthermore, competition among factions and group conflicts within the camps have already resulted in numerous incidents, leading to injuries and fatalities.

The ownership of heavy arms by Rohingyas poses a significant risk to both the camps and the host communities, potentially compromising national security. Numerous national and international media outlets, as well as organizations, have highlighted the likelihood of Rohingyas becoming involved in nationalist politics. Bangladesh's political landscape is often characterized by hostility, and any political party may seek to recruit Rohingyas to undermine or target their opponents. Additionally, since the Rohingyas are predominantly Muslim, they may become targets for recruitment by extremist political parties, both within Bangladesh and abroad. If Rohingya groups align themselves with extremist factions in Bangladesh or with international militant organizations, the security landscape of the country could face severe repercussions.

In light of these concerns, it is imperative for Bangladesh, in collaboration with international partners, to develop comprehensive policies and initiatives aimed at safeguard its socioeconomic and environmental security. The camp authorities, along with the Bangladeshi government, must remain vigilant regarding Rohingya terrorist activities and enhance surveillance both within and beyond the camps to address any criminal or terrorist threats. The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) should exercise heightened vigilance regarding the movement of Rohingya groups toward Myanmar and their potential access to weapons. Furthermore, it is crucial for Bangladeshi political parties, especially Islamic ones, to commit to excluding any Rohingya from their ranks. A national census is necessary to effectively combat the threats of Rohingya terrorism and militancy both inside the camps and throughout Bangladesh.