



EDITOR'S NOTE

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD RAKIBUL HASAN

At the time of writing this, over five lakh refugees from the Rakhine State in Myanmar have crossed over to Bangladesh—fleeing the worst forms of persecution including murder, torture, rape and arson, perpetrated by the Myanmar government and its military forces. In all evidence, the atrocities that are being committed in Myanmar against the Rohingyas is a clear case of ethnic cleansing and genocide. And though, the UN and most nations of the world have recognised this as such, caught in the midst of international politics and interests, there is a stark gap in actually addressing the crimes against humanity against the Rohingyas. The UN Security Council has failed—for no small effort of China and Russia—to pass any effective resolution to put a stop to these atrocities.

Bangladesh has so far done a commendable job by providing them shelter, and aided by national and international organisations and the goodwill of the local population, meet their immediate needs—especially so, because it had to act within its own limitations. We have addressed the immediate concerns, and now it is time to take a long-term view of the crisis and find solutions to questions that have so far remain unresolved. We have witnessed successive influx of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh since 1978. But unfortunately, the responses have always been ad hoc—that of forestalling and acting only under pressure on the part of Myanmar, and of trying to cope with the immediate needs on the part of Bangladesh.

We feel the relevant questions of repatriation, providing healthcare and other basic amenities, and their status as refugees, can only go so far. The history of persecution of the Rohingya community spans decades, and is tied to issues of Myanmar's fledgling democracy, dominated by the military, growing populist xenophobia, and economic and

political interests. International geopolitics has further complicated the situation. Here, given the genocidal nature of the crimes and the systematic deprivation of citizenship rights, the international community has a role to play, rising above their narrow interests. The Myanmar government must be made to stop the persecution of this community, without any excuse of terrorism or claiming that the Rohingya are not historically citizens of what is today Myanmar. Bangladesh has a role to play to recognise their rights as refugees and to ensure that no group here can exploit the crisis.

In this special issue of *Star Weekend*, we tried to cover the persecution of the Rohingyas from various aspects. Written by renowned scholars with expertise in different fields, the articles argue for a more nuanced understanding of the crisis and suggest possible ways forward. They seek to cover the issue from historical, economic and political perspectives as well as look at the gaps in the way we have dealt with Rohingya refugees thus far. From details of camp life, food security, implications on the host communities to larger issues of citizenship, identity and belonging, these writers have brought in their years of experience working in the refugee camps or as researchers to this special issue.

We express our heartfelt gratitude to all of them for their invaluable contributions which will surely help us to understand the issue in a larger context and to find a long term solution to the horrific plight of this persecuted community. We would like to make special mention of Dr Meghna Guhathakurta of Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB), whose invaluable input made this issue possible.

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PHOTO: STAR FILE

Locating the Rohingya in time and space

On the Rohingya, history, identity and belonging

IFTEKHAR IQBAL

Clarifying on its nomenclature, the Annan Commission Report on the Rakhine (Arakan) State, notes that "In line with the request of the State Counsellor [Aung San Suu Kyi], the Commission uses neither the term 'Bengali' nor 'Rohingya', who are referred to as 'Muslims' or 'the Muslim community in Rakhine'".