

When we call it a genocide, it does not necessarily only mean “mass killing”, which is what the word translates into in Bangla. The internationally accepted definition of genocide is “intention to destroy”, and this has four criteria—national, racial, ethnic, and religious. If a community is denied their rights on these grounds—the right to vote, to education, etc—then it is intent to destroy. The intent to destroy can also be seen in the fact that what they chose to self-identify as is not being accepted. We have been observing from the 1960s how this community has had their rights stripped, such that they hardly have any in 2017. In fact, it is now being claimed by the highest quarters that



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the Rohingya are not original residents of Myanmar and thus have to leave. If all these issues are taken into consideration, then we can come to the conclusion that a genocide/ethnic cleansing is taking place. The judgment by the People's Tribunal on Myanmar, which came out on September 22, 2017 in Malaysia, is clearly accusing Myanmar of perpetrating genocide.

We see politicisation of the identity of the Rohingyas. The Myanmar government does not acknowledge the Rohingya as citizens and, in Bangladesh, their ethnicity is downplayed in favour of their religious identity. Do you find this problematic?

They are being politicised to play up the negative perceptions that are used to stereotype the Muslim community worldwide. The

Myanmar government is trying to steer the discourse such that the world takes a stance against them [Rohingyas]. Even if I claim for the sake of debate that the Rohingyas are indeed Bangalis—even though they speak a different language from us—then why can't they become the 136th ethnic community in Myanmar? The Rakhines are recognised in Bangladesh, then why are the Rohingyas not over there?

People raise a question about them: did they [Rohingya] arrive in Myanmar before or after 1784? They themselves claim that they have been living there for generations since British rule. The bigger question however is this: were they born in Arakan or not? If they [Rohingya] were born and raised there, are they being afforded rights according to international standards? The fact is whatever rights they did have are slowly being stripped away. We saw Rohingya participation even in the 2010 Myanmar elections, but this was not allowed during the last one.

How are Myanmar's internal policies promoting genocide?

The world had placed its trust on Aung San Suu Kyi as a Nobel Peace Prize Winner, but it was the military, supported by collaborators, who had an upper hand in causing this genocide. We are observing the names of several right-wing groups regarding this conflict. Myanmar's democracy is dependent on the military that holds one-third of all [Parliament] positions. This cannot exactly be called a democracy.

Accordingly, Aung San Suu Kyi probably agreed to give them space because she thought that this is at least some progress, compared to what the situation was before. Suu Kyi cannot be the President because her husband and her children are foreign nationals. Even though she is the figurehead of the state, she is still at war with the military. The military is refusing to let go of its power, especially since it is connected to commercial interests. If the military wants to pressurise Aung San Suu Kyi, then they can do so by using the Rohingya issue since a consensus about it has already developed among the majority over the years.

It is important to note that the conflict started after Kofi Annan's commission published a report on the Rohingya. Suu Kyi was very positive about Annan's findings and had even agreed to implement the recommendations. Questions still remain about how the majority of the population will react to her decision regarding Annan's report. The military played their hand such that Aung San Suu Kyi is put under pressure, and at the same time, generate support for themselves among the voters.

Kofi Annan's commission has faced both support and criticism. How important an



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instrument is the commission's report? Will the Myanmar government be able to implement the recommendations and how useful are they to the Rohingyas?

There were three individuals in Kofi Annan's Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, two of whom were Myanmar nationals—one a Muslim, and the other a Buddhist residing in Arakan. The commission is being led by a person from Lebanon. Although the three have stated that they will provide recommendations based on the country's existing laws, we must question the report since the laws themselves are not up to international standards. If a country's laws state that a certain community cannot reside there, then the legislation naturally goes against international standards, and their legitimacy must be questioned. The country should have been asked to amend the laws to reflect international standards.

Although the commission's report never mentioned the word “Rohingya”, using the term Arakan Muslims instead, it nevertheless stated that the community is denied citizenship and outlined how to remedy that. The commission has its weak points for sure, but as a base, it states clearly that the Rohingyas are residents of Myanmar and require full rights as such. Our Prime Minister too has urged that the report gets implemented.

How do you evaluate the diplomatic effort

being undertaken by Bangladesh? What else can we do?

If Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's speech is any indication, we are going in a positive direction. There is initiative, there is a roadmap, and the international actors have been roused into criticising the situation. The sufferings of eight lakh people have been brought to the forefront. It is not, however, enough to be satisfied with. Improvements can be made in three areas. Firstly, the UN must enhance its diplomatic influence—the Prime Minister has requested a UN fact-finding mission to go to Myanmar, and this needs to be realised. At the same time, the UN is talking about the creation of safe zones. This needs to be figured out, and if required, an international convention must be arranged to discuss it. These are the efforts that can be made inside the UN.

Outside the UN, diplomatic efforts need to be intensified. Two high-level delegations should be sent to China and India, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself if possible, to create a visible presence. At the same time, talks must be arranged with the ASEAN countries. They are also affected by the crisis and two or three of them are speaking in favour of Bangladesh. Bangladesh should enable whatever initiatives are already being undertaken. When everyone is working towards the same goal, Myanmar will be pressurised.