



The alliance between the military and the Buddhist Bin Laden Ashin Wirathu has taken the near terminal shape of ethnic cleansing of the largest ethnic minority—the Muslims.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

government has a constitutional ban on using the 'R' word (they call the Rohingyas Bengali or Bengali Muslims, or these days, simply Muslims), it recognised the Rohingyas as citizens when they signed repatriation agreements with Bangladesh back in 1978–79. I hope the Bangladeshi government will release these documents for public awareness soon.

General Hlaing's plan of systematic ethnic cleansing has resulted in over half a million Rohingyas fleeing their homeland and seeking refuge in Bangladesh—the eighth most populous country in the world with a population density of 1,115.62 people per square kilometre. Anyway, the hybrid democracy of Myanmar allows the military to control 25 percent of parliamentary seats as well as the defence, interior, and border affairs ministries. The morbid constitution and the monks have certainly made General Hlaing arguably the most powerful man in Myanmar—so much so that even China and India appear unwilling to stand in his way.

For the General, all the perks coming from Suu Kyi's West, including Israel, were more tempting than the legacy of Chinese mastery over the Burmese military. The mighty General enjoyed a red carpet tour in Europe last year after being invited to attend a meeting of European military heads. Despite his soldiers' track record of crimes against humanity, he visited arms factories despite there being an EU arms embargo on Myanmar.

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This spot-awareness helped General Hlaing to

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PHOTO: REUTERS

distance himself from China when he came to power as the gladiator superior. This made Narendra Modi exercise the mantra chanted by India's diplomatic guru—Kuatulya in his treatise "Arthashastra"—that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." India rolled out the red carpet for the Myanmar military chief, with an eye firmly on China, in July 2017. Henceforth, the General became the gladiator to vow for. But I still wonder how long this deep friendship with the General will last. After all, India's Kaladan or upward road link projects in Rakhine province is neither going to resolve India's strategic concerns nor hinder China's magnum opus, OBOR.

India's silence, until it started heeding Bangladesh's concerns very recently, became annoying for any general Bangladeshi. Delhi's response in favour of Naypyidaw's failed terrorism logic gave rise to uneasy vibes across the polity in both Bangladesh and India. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and general Bangladeshis opened the gate for all the Rohingyas fleeing for their lives. Unfortunately, until Dhaka's High Commissioner to Delhi, Syed Muazzem Ali, spoke to the South Block Mandarins, India did not seem to fully comprehend what this crisis meant for Bangladesh and the ruling party (and its politics in particular). And kudos to Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary, Shahidul Haque, for speaking out at the World Economic Forum in New Delhi last week. As *India Today* reported, the Foreign Secretary argued that Bangladesh needs

to balance "sovereignty" and "economic integration": "We can't forget what the people want and before joining BRI [Belt and Road Initiative] we had several discussions with civil society, and it was clear what we need is connectivity."

Probably New Delhi for a while habitually forgot that Dhaka offered fathomless bounties compared to what the Burmese generals could offer. Bangladesh is the biggest security guarantor to India in regards to stability in its northeast and the Burmese are too busy with beauty parades at the moment. The public sentiment in Bangladesh against India's initial response will likely prompt India to re-calibrate its stance on the issue. A permanent solution for the Rohingya crisis requires more effort than operations in the name of humanitarianism.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has taken bold initiatives to make the global theatre understand that Bangladesh is undergoing a deep crisis and the UN Security Council has made it abundantly clear that the persecution of the Rohingyas will create fertile ground for the recruitment of extremists. Bangladesh has been able to move the UN. UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphatically told the Security Council meeting on September 28, 2017 that the Rohingya "humanitarian situation was not only a breeding ground for radicalisation, it also put vulnerable people—including young children—at risk of criminal elements including trafficking". The