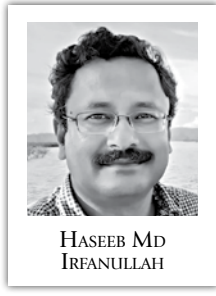


FOUR YEARS OF ROHINGYA REFUGEE CRISIS

# Five changes we need in the fifth year of the Rohingya crisis



**O**VER the last four years, the Rohingya refugee crisis has changed the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf Peninsula on many levels. It is not only that 3,200 hectares of forest area got converted into 34 camps to shelter about a million

the ongoing refugee crisis sped up forest destruction drastically since August 2017. Inani National Park and Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary have lost significant tree cover over the last 30 years. A satellite image-based study published in November 2020 predicted that a further 5,100 hectares of forest may be transformed by 2027 due to the crisis. Based on past losses, ongoing damages and future predictions, it would be ideal to opt for landscape restoration as a nature-based solution for the region. This will not only provide economic improvement, food security, disaster risk reduction, and biodiversity benefits to Cox's Bazar, but will also offer long-term adaptation to climate change.

Second, such long-term planning—more importantly, immediate support to the Rohingya—requires money, and lots of it. As per the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), during 2018-2020, at the beginning of each calendar year, the government of Bangladesh and the UN agencies requested from the donors, on average, USD 980 million as Rohingya humanitarian assistance. These appeals are called Joint Response Plans (JRPs), against which 68 percent funds were received per year, on average. In the first eight months of 2021, 34 percent funds have been received against the USD 943 million required. Since 2017, Bangladesh has received USD 3.38 billion, of which 22 percent were not part of the JRPs. Until now, we have been seeing a stable flow of funds, which is at risk of shrinking due to the pandemic's impact on global economy and long-term and new humanitarian crises occurring around the world. Bangladesh and its humanitarian partners urgently need to strategise to cope with such decline in funding and have that be reflected in the current and 2022 JRPs. This could be done by identifying and exploring unconventional sources for funds, reducing expenses by changing implementation modality, and generating resources internally.

Third, we need to engage adult and able Rohingyas in income-generating activities within the camps, so that they can generate



Preparing for long-term crisis management gives the wrong impression to concerned parties that Bangladesh is not only expecting, but is also accepting and preparing for a long delay in resolution. PHOTO: REUTERS

a part of the funds required to support them. Mainstreaming them into Bangladeshi society is not possible since Bangladesh hasn't signed the 1951 Refugee Convention yet and officially identifies Rohingyas as "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals", and not as "refugees". We need to invest in improving Rohingyas' livelihood skills to produce goods (e.g. grow vegetables, plant nurseries, and create handicrafts) and offer services (e.g. as part of the workforce in different sectors), and subsequently by linking the products to in- and off-camp markets. While the Rohingyas do get involved in different occasional livelihood activities within the camps, taking a holistic approach to this problem and linking them to markets are currently missing from these livelihood efforts. Through this approach, they could add value to their presence in Bangladesh, gain dignity, reduce unemployment-related concerns (like domestic violence and organised crimes), and become prepared for returning to Myanmar. Such a shift is needed as soon as possible by

revisiting the approaches and activities in the 2021 JRP, while remaining vigilant against the pandemic, and continuing with it through to the 2022 JRP.

Fourth, in terms of refugee crisis management, we also need a shift from the present dependency on the INGOs to Bangladeshi NGOs. As per the 2021 JRP, nine UN agencies, 56 INGOs, and 69 Bangladeshi NGOs are working in Cox's Bazar. In 2018, these numbers were 12 UN agencies, 69 INGOs, and 58 Bangladeshi NGOs. Movements of Bangladeshi professionals from Bangladeshi NGOs to INGOs or UN agencies were common, which is inevitable in a closed, dynamic situation like a humanitarian crisis. This, and the increasing involvement of Bangladeshi NGOs in the past four years, indicate significant improvement of Bangladeshi professionals' capacity. The expertise and values INGOs and UN agencies have been adding to the crisis management should have effectively been transferred to Bangladeshi NGOs by now, in

terms of high project management standards, quality delivery of output, accountability and transparency, responsiveness, and innovation. It is, therefore, high time to facilitate a faster replacement of the INGOs by Bangladeshi NGOs for the forthcoming 2022 JRP.

Fifth, an online search through Google Scholar shows that, between January 1, 2018 and August 21, 2021, 140 academic journal articles were published on the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh. While 93 articles were published in the first three years of the crisis (2018-2020), 47 were published in the first eight months of 2021. This means that researchers in this field have been publishing their work 2.3 times faster in recent months. The research mostly highlights Covid-19, mental and other health issues, crisis resolution, security and legal aspects, and disaster-related and environmental concerns. The Bangladeshi government and humanitarian agencies manage the camps based on large databases on the Rohingya, planned interventions, and changing situations. Different agencies also conduct assessments and studies such as the World Food Programme's (WFP) 2019-2020 Plantation Assessment Report, International Rescue Committee's (IRC) analysis on Gender-Based Violence among the refugees, UNHCR's assessment on piloting of pressure cookers to increase the efficiency of LPG use, and BRAC's study on the impacts of digital platforms being used by the Rohingya. These knowledge products, both by humanitarian agencies and academic researchers, should be considered in designing interventions and planning for the 2022 JRP. In this way, refugee crisis management can be transformed from being a data-driven action into being a knowledge-guided venture.

Uncertainty is the only certain thing when it comes to the Rohingya refugee crisis. We need to accept this as a fact, make changes in our approaches to take effective action, and get ready for yet another uncertain year.

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Rohingyas, but also that at least 700 thousand tons of fuelwood have been collected from the surrounding areas. Since August 25, 2017, while funds for Rohingya refugees positively supported Cox's Bazar's economy, there was also a gradual increase of tensions between the host and refugee communities. Despite many positive stories coming out of the refugee camps and the host community, the risk of organised crimes, like human and drug trafficking, remains high.

As we enter the fifth year of the Rohingya crisis, the government of Bangladesh, UN agencies, international NGOs (INGOs), and local and national Bangladeshi NGOs need to consider making five changes.

First, long-term planning regarding this crisis is difficult, since Rohingya repatriation—the ultimate and only solution, as far as Bangladesh is concerned—is uncertain. After repeated attempts until 2019, repatriation still did not occur. Since March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has made repatriation elusive. And, since February 2021, the coup and the state of emergency in Myanmar have made any resolution of this crisis nearly impossible for the foreseeable future. Preparing for long-term crisis management also gives the wrong impression to concerned parties—Myanmar, the Rohingya, humanitarian agencies, international actors, donors, and Bangladeshis—that Bangladesh is not only expecting, but is also accepting and preparing for a long delay in resolution.

But a certain extent of long-term planning is necessary—for the refugee camps as well as for the whole region. For example, although

## The democratic struggle in Myanmar must recognise the rights of the Rohingya

THOMAS ARCARO and MOHAMMAD AZIZUL HOQUE

**Y**ESTERDAY, Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar and those in different parts of the world observed Rohingya Genocide Remembrance Day for the fourth year. In late August 2017, Myanmar's military forces, together with extremist anti-Rohingya civilians, committed a deliberate deadly crackdown on the Rohingya in Rakhine state, which drove away nearly 900,000 people. Thousands were tortured, hundreds murdered, houses were burned, and women and girls were raped. Understanding how this genocide happened is crucial, and addressing the underlying issues which gave way to this horrible event is equally important.

After the Holocaust in Europe, the cry was, "Never again". Yet, genocides continue in modern society. Myanmar is the obvious example, but so are Rwanda, Bosnia, East Timor, Cambodia—the list goes on and the genocides continue.

On the Rohingya issue, we want to make a strong and explicit call to all those who are fighting for democracy in Myanmar right now, and all of those who have given their lives or are now putting their lives on the line to fight the military leaders still controlling the nation. The message is very simple: none of us is free unless all of us are free. The sentiment comes originally from poet Emma Lazarus, but the restatement by Martin Luther King Jr—who argued, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"—is equally on point.

In our view, the only successful outcome of the democracy struggle in Myanmar right now is for the leaders of this struggle to recognise the fact that all in Myanmar must be given full citizenship rights by any newly



What does it mean to have justice for all? It means that all marginalised groups must be recognised and treated with dignity. PHOTO: AFP

formed government. That means every ethnic and religious group, including the Rohingya, must be afforded full rights as citizens. And, in the case of the Rohingya, the right to safe and dignified repatriation of all refugees back to their original homes, and with appropriate reparations allowing them to rebuild the life they had before the genocide, must be mandatory.

What does it mean to have justice for all? It means that all marginalised groups must be recognised and treated with dignity. Beyond the religious and ethnic groups, which must be granted full rights, those from other marginalised minorities must also be included. "Othering" is a phenomenon whereby one group sees another group as being somehow

different. When these differences are accepted, and there is no sense of enmity between the groups, we arrive at "normal othering". "Toxic othering", however, is when there is an unequal power distribution between two groups, and the one with more power asserts its dominance on and begins to treat the other group in an inferior or unequal way. Through this, it is possible to identify the various instances of toxic othering that take place not only in Myanmar, but all around the world.

The image of the Hydra is often used to illustrate all of the various forces of privilege that create marginalisation and are the products of toxic othering. These privileging forces include sexism, racism, paternalism, hetero/cis normativity, classism, ableism,

ageism, and even anthropocentrism.

It is beyond the scope of this short article to unpack each of these marginalising forces, but we maintain that the fuel for all of these marginalising forces is the phenomena of toxic othering—when one group sees themselves as superior to another and uses that superiority to marginalise the other group, even to the point of committing genocide. The journey from toxic othering to genocide is not inevitable, but it has happened all too frequently.

The discrimination and hostility that the Rohingya face in Myanmar can be traced, beyond the country's notoriously brutal military, to the general population that is receptive to an often-virulent form of Buddhist nationalism. These nationalists see the Rohingya as a threat to national sovereignty and the future of Myanmar as a Buddhist-majority nation. Political analysts think that events outside Myanmar also lent credibility to dire warnings of a Muslim takeover and the consequent tide of Islamophobia in the West. Abuse of social media (notably Facebook) helped accelerate the spread of hostile narratives, hate speech and prejudice. Either the military or cunning nationalist politicians, both past and present, involved Buddhist monks to manipulate the public sentiment. The alleged threat posed to the persistence of Buddhism as the religion of the majority of the population began to seem real. A hostile group from Rakhine often promotes the supremacy of Buddhism, and can be Islamophobic, ethnocentric and chauvinistic in its preaching.

By examining the words from Martin Luther King, Jr, we have to take seriously the injustice done to people who are marginalised by each of these privileging forces, keeping in mind

that there is a very aggressive intersectionality (i.e. overlapping) among most of these privileging forces. Given the image of the Hydra, it is impossible to tame one head without addressing the necessity of taming all of the heads. That is, to address and tackle the fundamental phenomena of toxic othering.

The premise of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is that all humans are deserving of dignity. It begins, "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world..."

What we are trying to establish is no different. Understanding and taming the Hydra means working towards achieving dignity for all humans—regardless of the various marginalising social statuses which have been created through history to represent different groups of people.

The leaders of the resistance movement in Myanmar show promising signs of recognising what we have pointed out above. Myanmar is in a position to make world history by demonstrating an understanding that a new order in any society must address toxic othering norms, policies, and laws from the past. The bringing about of any social change is neither quick nor easy. But times of transition like this are opportunities that leaders can embrace to accelerate positive social change towards a world where justice prevails and lives of dignity are secured for all humans.

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**QUOTABLE Quote**

**DINA NAYERI**  
(born 1979)  
Iranian novelist

*It is the obligation of every person born in a safer room to open the door when someone in danger knocks.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Years gone by
- 5 Hits
- 10 Conk out
- 12 Mystical deck
- 13 Modify
- 14 Spare
- 15 Back muscle
- 16 Music booster
- 18 Batter's goal
- 19 Reason for glasses
- 21 Shades
- 22 Independence
- Day dazzlers
- 24 Movie souvenir
- 25 Independence
- Day dazzlers
- 29 Short skirt
- 30 Whoever
- 32 Picnic pest
- 33 Fabric color
- 34 Jazz horn
- 35 City on the Nile
- 37 Was vocal
- 39 Bugs bugs him
- 40 Thrifty one
- 41 Run-down
- 42 In need of directions

**DOWN**

- 1 Sacred song
- 2 Sooths
- 3 Kind of cable box
- 4 Kicker's aid
- 5 Flight part
- 6 Crayon makeup
- 7 Ygraine's son
- 8 British party
- 9 ERA and RBI
- 11 Grassy expanse
- 17 Move to the side
- 20 "Gloria —" (hymn)
- 21 Patriot Patrick
- 23 Female in a pride
- 25 Closing number
- 26 Not too late
- 27 Balkan region
- 28 Medusa's hair
- 29 Spiked clubs
- 31 Use, as force
- 33 "Finding Nemo" fish
- 36 Spectrum end
- 38 Bud

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**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

G	O	T	M	E	C	A	L	E	B
O	C	H	E	R	A	L	I	V	E
D	U	E	T	O	S	A	F	E	S
E	L	F	D	I	S	S	E	N	T
E	A	R	E	L	I	S	T	S	
P	R	I	M	L	U	S	T	S	
S	E	A	T	S	A	O			
S	N	O	U	T	T	O	S	S	
S	A	D	R	A	D	S	P	A	
P	I	Z	A	R	R	O	H	A	W
E	L	O	P	E	G	L	O	R	Y
N	O	N	E	T	M	O	R	S	E
T	R	E	S	S	A	S	T	E	R

**BEETLE BAILEY** BY MORT WALKER

**BABY BLUES** BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT