

To solve the Rohingya crisis, we must address its root causes



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The Rohingya crisis continues to mystify everyone with its uncertainties. In 2017, close to a million Rohingya people took refuge in Bangladesh over a period of only one month after a most brutal genocide and violent exodus in recent history. The influx of refugees continued in October-December 2024 due to the rise in armed conflicts between various armed groups and the military junta, as well as the impacts of the long-running brutal civil war inside Myanmar. Amid this, the Rohingya in Cox's Bazar refugee camps still hope to return to their homes in northern Rakhine—their old heartland in Myanmar.

The renewed violence has worsened the already precarious situation in Cox's Bazar camps. Last year alone, according to one source, armed groups such as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), and the Arakan Army (AA) recruited an estimated 5,000 men from the camps in Cox's Bazar to fight against the Myanmar military. The radicalisation inside the camps, the increase in criminal gang activities, the targeted killing of camp leaders by opposing militant groups, and the continued cycle of violence have led to a significant deterioration of safety among the Rohingya refugees. To add to this, the renewed fighting between these armed rebel groups and the Myanmar junta has further pushed back any potential repatriation plan due to the lack of peace and stability inside Myanmar.

Given this situation, can we ever find a viable solution to the Rohingya crisis? Is there any pathway to resolve the crisis with accountability and justice for all? And who will find it?

To do this, we need to look back and understand Rohingya history. The armed struggles inside Myanmar and the demand

for Rohingya autonomy and rights clearly establish that the crisis is not just a current humanitarian issue but also a political one, long rooted in Arakan's history. In recent weeks, the AA has taken full control of 14 out of 17 townships, including Maungdaw near Teknaf, from the Myanmar military junta. Armed fighting still continues to capture the remaining government-held territories in Rakhine. In the process, many coerced Rohingya conscripts to the Myanmar Army have been killed or captured, further entangling the displaced people in a war they did not initiate. Any resolution of the crisis must understand and address both the political and humanitarian aspects.

Many people tend to think that the Rohingya crisis is a 21st-century issue. On the contrary, it encapsulates centuries of historical marginalisation, ethnic conflict, and geopolitical intricacies. The Rohingya have a 200-year history, starting from the violent occupation of the Arakan dynasty in 1784, which gradually evolved during the pre- and post-colonial periods in Burma. Their identity has been under sustained attack by the military and the Buddhist civilian majority through genocidal campaigns aimed at erasing their shared history and culture over the years. The 1974 constitution and the census that preceded it marked the clearest breaking point when "Rohingya" was replaced with "Indian or Pakistani" and later by "Bengali" among "non-indigenous or foreign races." This was followed by the adoption of the discriminatory Citizenship Act of 1982. The decades of brutal oppression that followed forced many Rohingya to flee the country over the past 40 years. Today, four out of every five Rohingya live as refugees in countries across the region and around the world. Those still inside Myanmar are

in camps in Buthidaung and Maungdaw or under military surveillance.

The magnitude and duration of this crisis require a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes, an assessment of humanitarian interventions, and an examination of avenues for justice and reconciliation. Myanmar, Bangladesh, and the regional and international communities must address the root causes of the Myanmar crisis,

undermines the rule of law and the rights of the people recognised by international bodies and conventions for refugee populations. International sanctions and other measures by Canada, the US, the EU, and others against the Myanmar military junta have failed to deliver the intended outcomes.

Many international rights groups, including Amnesty International, have long demanded that the top generals in the

meeting held in Bangkok in December 2024, attended by foreign ministers and senior officials from Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, China, Laos, and Cambodia to review the current situation in Myanmar, leading to a global conference on the Rohingya later this year. As evident from occasional dialogues and visits by army officials, Bangladesh's interim government is focused on repatriation as the primary solution, including creating a "safe zone" for the Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine state under UN supervision. This approach will be doomed without due attention to the absence of rights, including citizenship rights and the need for return with dignity and honor. The Bangladesh government is also trying to maintain informal contacts with the AA for potential support and resolution of the crisis, which should be encouraged and quietly expanded.

While the repatriation of refugees is urgently needed to reduce the long-endured burden on Bangladesh, the government should work more closely with countries having significant influence on Myanmar—for instance, India, China, Korea, Singapore, and Japan—to apply pressure to ensure accountability and to provide local autonomy for the Rohingya in the Rakhine state, aimed at creating conditions for their return with dignity and rights. The US government should also support efforts to hold Myanmar's military leaders accountable through the ICC. The second Trump administration has an opportunity to reflect on its past policies and take bold steps towards a more just and lasting solution. The Rohingya crisis and displacement should be of concern due to the strategic security interests of the US in the Southeast Asia region.

What is required now is to keep the global focus alive on the Rohingya crisis to find a durable solution. The international community must also increase humanitarian aid and assistance to support the refugees and improve living conditions and rights in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. The Rohingya people have been waiting and watching the indifference and inaction of the world for years. They are hoping for an early, safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation.



The world seems to have forgotten the Rohingya people and their persistent suffering in Myanmar.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

including the long-standing discrimination and statelessness faced by the Rohingya. Any measures short of that would not be sufficient to resolve the crisis and facilitate the return of the Rohingya to their homeland.

The world seems to have forgotten the Rohingya people and their crisis. The terrible genocide and ethnic cleansing happened in 2017, coincidentally the year US President Donald Trump took office for the first time. It is now the ninth year of this conflict, resulting from long-running battles between the Myanmar military and the anti-regime AA and other armed groups. The Myanmar military's continued violence grossly

Myanmar army be investigated for their roles in the genocides committed against the Rohingya and the people of Myanmar. The recent International Criminal Court (ICC) ruling for an arrest warrant for General Min Aung Hlaing, based on the historic case brought by The Gambia, seems to have had no traction at all. If the international community, including the US, is serious about resolving the Rohingya crisis, it should move beyond statements and sanctions. Myanmar generals must be held accountable for the Rohingya genocide, but who will make that call?

The regional implications of the crisis are already evident from the recent emergency

Can pluralism replace secularism in Bangladesh?



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The proposal to replace secularism with pluralism in Bangladesh's constitution has sparked significant debate, touching on issues of governance, social harmony, and the state's commitment to equality. While pluralism as a concept offers a promising framework for fostering inclusivity and mutual respect in a diverse society, the practical implications of this shift warrant careful scrutiny. Without clear and enforceable measures, such a transition could jeopardise the country's religious harmony and undermine the principles of equality that have long been embedded in its constitutional framework.

Pluralism, by definition, emphasises the recognition and celebration of diversity, promoting coexistence among different religious, cultural and ethnic communities. In a country like Bangladesh, where multiple religions and cultures coexist, the adoption of pluralism could theoretically enhance social cohesion and inclusivity. It acknowledges the diversity of the nation and seeks to create a society where all groups feel respected and represented. Unlike secularism, which often connotes a strict separation of religion and state functions, pluralism actively embraces the presence of diverse beliefs and traditions within the public sphere. This could pave the way for policies and practices that reflect the multicultural realities of Bangladesh, strengthening the social fabric and fostering a sense of belonging among all citizens.

However, this vision of pluralism faces significant challenges in the context of Bangladesh. One issue is the constitutional recognition of Islam as the state religion. While this provision reflects the demographic reality of Bangladesh, where the majority of the population identifies as Muslim, it creates an inherent contradiction with the principles of pluralism. Pluralism requires

equal respect and treatment for all religions, yet the designation of a state religion can be perceived as privileging one faith over others. This tension risks alienating religious minorities and undermining the very inclusivity that pluralism seeks to promote.

Bangladesh's historical context further complicates the matter. The principle of secularism was enshrined in the country's constitution in the aftermath of the Liberation War, reflecting a commitment to religious equality

safeguards and robust enforcement mechanisms, pluralism could become a vague idea rather than a practical reality. Ambiguity might allow the majority group to dominate the narrative, marginalising minorities under the guise of promoting diversity. For instance, policies or practices that ostensibly celebrate cultural diversity could end up favouring the majority religion or culture, perpetuating existing inequalities. Such outcomes would not only undermine the principles of pluralism, but also exacerbate social tensions and distrust among different communities.

Education and awareness are crucial to addressing these challenges. Schools and educational institutions should play a central role in promoting pluralistic values, challenging prejudices, and fostering empathy among students from an early age. By emphasising the importance of coexistence and

including independent institutions to investigate and address grievances. Moreover, the judiciary and law enforcement agencies must be trained to uphold these principles impartially, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their background, can access justice and feel protected by the state.

Equitable representation is another critical aspect of pluralism. To truly reflect the diversity of Bangladesh, minorities must be adequately represented in political institutions, public services, and decision-making processes. This includes not only ensuring their presence but also creating an environment where their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed. Such representation can help bridge divides, foster trust, and promote policies that benefit all communities. However, achieving this requires a sustained commitment to affirmative action and other measures

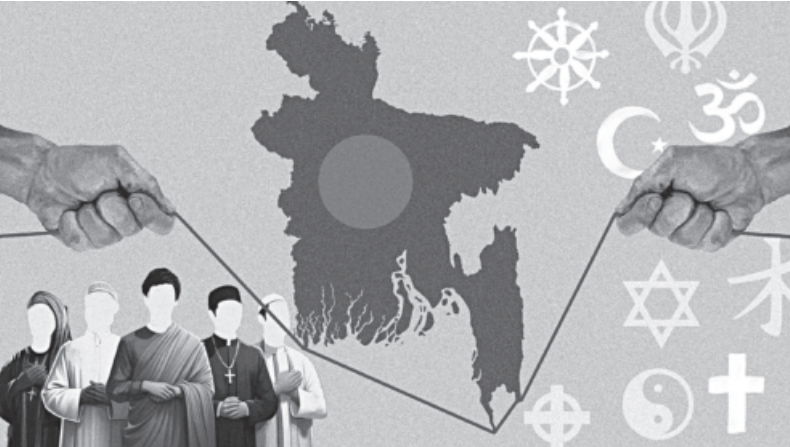
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that address structural inequalities.

The success of pluralism also hinges on the protection of religious freedom, which entails not only the right to practise and propagate one's religion but also the freedom

to celebrate cultural traditions and beliefs without fear of discrimination or persecution. Bangladesh's commitment to international human rights standards provides a framework for upholding these principles, but their implementation requires political will and societal support. Public awareness campaigns, community dialogues, and other initiatives can help build consensus around the importance of religious freedom and its role in fostering a harmonious society.

Despite its potential benefits, replacing secularism with pluralism poses significant risks if not accompanied by clear and enforceable measures. Having a state religion, in particular, presents a paradox. Without addressing this issue, the transition risks becoming a symbolic gesture, rather than a transformative change.




VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

and freedom. This ethos was seen as a rejection of the communalism that had plagued the region during the Partition. Over the years, secularism has been regarded by many as a cornerstone of Bangladesh's national identity, symbolising the aspiration to rise above religious divisions and ensure equal rights for all citizens. Replacing secularism with pluralism could therefore be perceived as a departure from this foundational principle, potentially alienating segments of society who view secularism as integral to the nation's identity.

Another significant challenge lies in the risk of misinterpreting or selectively implementing pluralism. Without clear constitutional

mutual respect, education can lay the foundation for a more inclusive society. However, achieving this goal will require significant reforms in the education system, including the development of curricula that reflect the country's diversity and promote critical thinking about issues of identity and equality.

A strong legal framework is also essential for ensuring that pluralism translates into tangible protection for all citizens. Anti-discrimination laws must be strengthened to address inequalities and prevent hate speech, violence or other forms of bias based on religion, ethnicity or culture. These laws must be complemented by mechanisms for their effective enforcement,



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1068249	Supply of Uniforms & Liveries for Technical Staff under Grid North-1, DPDC.	17-Feb-2025 12:00 Noon	
1068893	Procurement of Uniforms & liveries for Technical staff under Grid North-2, DPDC	18-Feb-2025 12:00 Noon	
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