

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

THE SOLUTION OF ROHINGYA CRISIS

Not only Repatriation but Think Also about Alternatives

Experts suggested thinking about other alternatives instead of considering repatriation as the only solution to the Rohingya crisis. Along with this, they also urged the government to take the effective initiative to highlight the present situation and future risks of the Rohingya crisis to the intellectuals and thinkers of different countries. On 13 June 2019 the daily Samakal and COAST Trust organized a roundtable discussion titled 'Human Dignity of Rohingya: Bangladesh Perspectives'. Speakers' opinion and suggestions are mentioned in brief below:



Mustafiz Shafi

Editor in Charge, Samakal



The Rohingya problem has become a complex social challenge for us. Government level initiative is not enough to solve this problem. Everyone will

have to work together. Bangladesh has created a humanitarian image globally by providing shelter to the Rohingya. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina received the title of 'Mother of Humanity'. Now if these Rohingya cannot be given humanitarian assistance and dignity, then the proper responsibility is not done. We have to think in terms of our ability too. We cannot feed all of them for the whole life, keeping them idle. For this, we have to take multi-dimensional initiatives. Pressure must be put on Myanmar. We have to keep the international community with us. But this is a complex problem. We do not think that, in reality, this problem will be solved suddenly. In this case, today's Roundtable discussion can be useful as policy-based assistance. As a responsible newspaper, Samakal does not just finish its responsibilities by only publishing news, it also plays a role in social issues. This event has been organized considering that point of view.

Sheuli Sharma

Representative, Jago Nari Unnayan Sangstha



The host communities have been adversely affected now due to the Rohingya influx. It is important to look at how to increase

Moderator

Mustafiz Shafi
Editor in Charge, Samakal

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury
Executive Director, COAST Trust

Discussants

Syed Abul Maksud
Researcher and Columnist

Mohammad Abul Kalam, NDC
The commissioner of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC)

Steven Corliss
Representative of UNHCR in Bangladesh

Barrister Manzoor Hassan
Professor, Center for Peace and Justice Brac University

Shireen Huq
Women Rights Activist

Asif Munier
Migration Expert

Gowhar Naim Wara
Disaster Management Expert

Julfikar Ali Manik
Advisor, News section
Boishakhi TV and Stringer, New York Times

Abu Morshed Chowdhury
President, Cox's Bazar Chambers of
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Saikat Biswas
Representative
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Sheuli Sharma
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Md. Mujibul Haque Munir

Assistant Director, COAST Trust.



In today's discussion, we will mainly search for answers of three questions such as:

1. From the Bangladeshi perspective, how do we

continue to ensure human dignity (i.e life-saving needs met, skills and education-based opportunities) for the Rohingya, as well as provide adequate support to host communities? 2. The scale and scope of the Rohingya crisis require the full support of the international community, a. How do we keep the pressure on Myanmar to create the conditions for sustainable return? b. How can we ensure international support is maintained and, to the extent possible, strengthened? and 3. Two years on from the large influx, what do we see as the best way forward toward solutions, that take into consideration the challenges and possible openings?

harmony among the Rohingya and host communities. The leader of the Rohingya community is known as 'Majhi'. Usually, men are selected as 'Majhi'. We have made some women 'Majhi'. Such initiatives have been taken to enable women to raise their voices. Rohingya women are very desperate about their future, so there are many risks for them, especially there is a high risk of trafficking.

Syed Abul Maksud

Researcher and Columnist



At the outset, thanks to the Samakal and COAST Trust for organizing a discussion on such an important issue. There is a common misconception among the people of Bangladesh that government officials do not fulfill their responsibilities properly. They realize their responsibilities in a dillydally way. This is an overall misconception. While working in different places, I see that many officers are performing their duties with great enthusiasm. They are very sensitive to their duties. Especially, in the Rohingya camps, the description of the role of government officials I have heard so far is appreciable. Myanmar's army has carried out violence against Rohingya in Rakhine, it is one of the rare hellish barbarianism in the history of humanity. The crime of these Rohingyas was their religion, language, and ethnic identity. You can notice that the Rohingyas coming from Myanmar are Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. But there is no Buddhist. So, religion is a factor here. There was no other crime. Tortures that have been committed to them in response to this crime, is a terrible crime against humanity. If the Rohingyas are criminals, then they could have been tried under the existing law of Myanmar. Even there was no objection if they had been sentenced to death with due process. But they (the Myanmar government) did not do that. Rather, their atrocities have forced the Rohingyas to flee from their homes. At this moment, Aung San Suu Kyi is the most hated person in the world. Only I am not saying that the world is saying rather. Many of her past honors have been taken away. Those who honored her, they did it. The government of Bangladesh did not teach them to do so. As far as the criticism is concerned, the government of Bangladesh has established a bright image for Bangladesh in the world with its urgent humanitarian response to the Rohingyas. We have to maintain the sympathy that the people of Bangladesh have shown and the generosity displayed by the Prime Minister by opening the border. Maintaining this images is our national duty. Bangladesh is now recognized as a humanitarian country. Of course, thanks to the present government for this.

Mohammad Abul Kalam, NDC

The commissioner of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC)



There are a lot of differences between the actual reality and the common public perception of the Rohingya crisis. Therefore, the negative connotation of Rohingyas must be rejected. According to my experience of being associated with this crisis, Rohingyas are very normal, religious, respectful to law.

But they are victims of the systematic negative campaigns and humanitarian disaster by the Myanmar rulers. When we talk about them, we must consider the situation and this must be based on information. Many Rohingya families came here, had lost all the men of their family, they had been killed, only women members are alive. There are many children whose parents and guardians have not survived. Rohingya camps are now the tragic symbol in the history of humanity. The population of Ukhiya is 250 thousand, around 7.5 million Rohingyas came and took refuge here. As a result, the demographics of the area have been changed in recent times. It's important to understand how dangerous this pressure is, and what kind of premonition it is giving for the future. It is not right that the Rohingyas are involved with crimes. For example, Yaba drug had been trafficked in the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf areas, and the main smugglers were all Bangladeshi. Now some Rohingyas are working as their carrier. That's why Rohingyas cannot be left unemployed. If there is no work, then the risk of getting involved in criminal activities will be increased.

Steven Corliss

The representative of UNHCR in Bangladesh



Today's discussion is about human dignity. In order to uphold their human dignity, the Prime Minister gave shelter to the Rohingyas coming from Myanmar to the soil of this country. For this role, she is called the 'Mother of Humanity'. Very few countries in the world have given shelter to so many people. It is a matter of pride for the Bangladeshi nation. To ensure human dignity means considering Rohingyas as usual human being like me and you. They are also the fathers, the brothers, the sister or friends of some or anyone. They also have dreams and hopes in their lives. We should consider that their human identity should not be described in any other stereotypical identity. Bangladesh gave them that protection. At the same time, Bangladesh also ensured their proper human dignity. Life in camps is not an ideal situation, but Rohingyas have got a new life here. Here they can be assembled, can discuss themselves. They are also volunteering for their community. Many Rohingya volunteers are working for their community. Rohingya volunteers are trying to reach

out to the doorsteps of their helpless Rohingya families with services, cooperating with them to take advance preparation before the natural disaster, and also are taking arrangement to protect children from the risk of separation from the families during the disaster. They are working continuously to prevent family-based violence. The Rohingya population is taking responsibility for their lives as far as possible. Despite many adversities, they are building their society. They are aware of a new dimension of human dignity, which was not possible in Myanmar. Violence and discrimination towards Rohingyas began in Myanmar and the solution has to be found that same place. UNHCR is committed to fulfilling its mission of voluntary return of Rohingya to Myanmar.

Barrister Manzoor Hassan

Professor, Center for Peace and Justice Brac University



Incidents like the Rohingya influx in Bangladesh are not the first of its kind in the world. A large number of migrants are already there in many countries. These countries have their own experience in dealing with these situations. We can learn from those experiences. The large part of Rohingya people

is young. If we are not able to properly manage them, it can be a cause of great anxiety. There is a Bangla proverb which says, an idle brain is the devil's workshop. So, their employment should be considered. The Rohingyas should get the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. Problems of Rohingya and host communities must be heard. Opportunity to talk can create an opportunity to solve a crisis. So, providing the opportunity of raising voices is important.

Shireen Huq

Women Rights Activist



Myanmar does not have a willingness in the repatriation of Rohingya. They have been able to force them to be displaced. Bangladesh has played a questionable role in the issue of Myanmar. Their airplanes have trespassed our airspace. Bangladesh might be afraid of the stronger

military power of Myanmar. That's why our diplomatic efforts should have been greater. Bangladesh should have not gone for bilateral diplomacy with Myanmar regarding the Rohingya crisis. Multilateral activities at the international level could have been more effective. Still, we are not running out of time. Here the key is in China's hands. So, Bangladesh's all-party delegation visit to China can be arranged. There are Chinese interests in the sea. China will have to use the 'Principal of Responsibility'. India is considered as Bangladesh's utmost friend, but it is also not supporting Bangladesh in the Rohingya issue. This proves

what kind of a friend India is for us! The future of Rohingya women and children is very critical, they have to be given opportunities for education. The education centers that are being run for Rohingya children are established with a very short-term consideration. In the current situation, long-term education centers should be introduced so that the children of all ages can get a proper education. Rohingya youths need to be skilled with technical knowledge. Girls can be work as health workers, they should be trained on health protection and should be involved with productive works so that they do not cling to traffickers and militants. It can be arranged by planting ten trees by each Rohingya family. When they return, those trees will be considered as part of their contribution to Bangladesh.

Asif Munier

Migration Expert



Initiatives have been taken to rehabilitate Rohingyas to Bhasanchar. But to rehabilitate all Rohingya, 10-15 such Bhasanchar islands will be needed. Whether Bangladesh has that ability? - it is a big question now. In such a situation, it is necessary to think about how the Rohingya issue can be tackled

with the own resources of Bangladesh, as well as diplomatic initiatives that must be in place to repatriate them also to other countries. The campaign should be strengthened on the success story created by providing shelters to the Rohingya. Social changes have been taken place at the local level during the last two years due to the Rohingya influx. Changes in language and behavior have come. Bangladeshi and Rohingyas are now in a confronting situation. It's normal. The common perception that, Rohingyas are getting more benefits- has to be addressed. Efforts are needed to change the mentality of the host communities. The overall impact on Bangladesh must also be identified. Foreigners are coming with new technologies, but where are these technologies going? Is there any initiative to transfer these technologies to local humanitarian workers? The people who are managing Rohingyas, are Bangladeshi. It is necessary to have a research center on these. Chattagram University and other higher education institutions have to be utilized. The government will have to take a multi-year plan to get an overall response.

Nayeem Gowhar Wahra

Disaster Management Expert



Much negative news has been published against Rohingyas. But the way the Rohingyas, including women and others, have adapted in a hostile environment, is unbelievable. It is not possible to repatriate all Rohingyas, this is the reality. Now long-term

planning is needed for them. The government will have to take steps to involve the civil society in the 'Track two Diplomacy' or alternative diplomatic activities so that Rohingyas can be repatriated in a third country using the opportunity of rehabilitation and labour migration. Emphasize should be given on the rehabilitation of Rohingyas in third countries. Canada expressed its interest to take some children, but why did we refuse that offer? Can we not sit with civil society intellectuals of India and China regarding Rohingyas? There should arrangement to use rainwater more instead of groundwater in the Rohingya camps. There should be dried fish instead of pulses in the relief list. Thus, the local dry fish producers can get income.

Julfikar Ali Manik

Advisor, News section, Boishakhi TV and
Stringer, New York Times



I am working as a journalist for 29 years and working on the Rohingya issue for 20 years. About 20 thousand Rohingyas came to Bangladesh in 2004. I worked with that issue then. Many people told me, 'is it an issue to work?' Now why we are so much vocal with the

same Rohingya issue? Then it was not an issue, but it has become a critical issue now. The concern is 15 years old. We all slept during that time. We wake up only when there is an issue, we sleep until an issue emerges! Here's the result. Everyone, including diplomats, civil societies, journalists are responsible for this. The reality is, Myanmar will never take Rohingyas back. Now the matter of concern is how Bangladesh will deal with this crisis. What will happen to our people due to Rohingyas? If Cox's Bazar becomes a 'Zone of Conflict' in the future, then what will be our excuse for the next generation? Therefore, it is not only the responsibility of the government, but all the concerned people also have the responsibility to tackle this crisis. In many cases, we have given refuge to the Rohingyas for religious reasons, not from the view of humanity. Whether they would provide shelter if they were not Muslims or Hindus? Now those who are talking about the human rights of Rohingyas, responsibilities of these 1 million people will have to be shared among them. In other words, it will be wise to take Rohingyas in the third country.

Abu Morshed Chowdhury

President, Cox's Bazar Chambers of Commerce and Industry



The historical number of Rohingya influx occurred in 2017. We gave shelter to 1 million Rohingyas due to humanity. It has multidimensional in the societies of the host communities. Rehabilitation of all Rohingya is not very easy. The 1992 repatriation agreement was not

sustainable. The bilateral agreement was weak. So, we want sustainable repatriation. The Rohingyas should be allowed to contribute to the local market considering it as a productive force. Thus, they can act as a force to keep Cox's Bazar economy moving forward. They have to be provided skill development training, the initiative should be there to utilize them as human resources. They have to be developed until they're back. It is important to look at how this disaster can be utilized as an economic opportunity.

Saikat Biswas

Representative, Inter-Sectoral Coordination Group



Handling Rohingyas is a huge task. After the genocide in Myanmar during 2017, 40 thousand Rohingyas came to Bangladesh in a single day. People from the host community jumped to save lives of Rohingyas. The development agency, the local administration tried. In the first two weeks, there

was messy management. After that, it came under a disciplined management. A total of 149 NGOs are working there. We're coordinating, UN agencies are also there. After the crisis began, assistance was immediately sought from the world. Later, for the assistance of Rohingya, last year, as part of the 'Joint Response Plan', we applied for the US \$ 951 million. We got \$ 660 million. This year, 920 million US dollars have been requested. So far, 22% of the request has been received. More funds will come in the future too. For this, the efforts to promote the issue to donors should be continued.

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