

Research Article

The Influence of International Relations on Refugee Rights and Protection Policies in Bangladesh

¹Asaduzzaman

¹Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

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Abstract: Bangladesh has opened its borders to displaced people, demonstrating a strong commitment to humanitarian ideals. However, the limitations of regional stability, national interests, and socioeconomic pressures are frequently reflected in its policies. However, the discrepancy between global standards and local conditions underscores how inadequate global systems are at tackling the underlying causes of migration and guaranteeing fair burden-sharing. The dynamics of international relations significantly influence Bangladesh's refugee policy and rights. Bangladesh, a growing nation of great geopolitical importance in South Asia, has been embroiled in multiple refugee crises, including the one involving Myanmar's Rohingya population. Constructivism as a theory in the field of diplomatic relations will be necessary for a thorough examination of Bangladesh's foreign policy towards the Rohingya and its effects on human rights. This essay explores how bilateral ties, international humanitarian organizations, international political forces, and multilateral frameworks influence the nation's attitude to refugee rights and safeguards. In order to illustrate the difficulties and possibilities Bangladesh sees in bringing her refugee policy into compliance with international human rights norms, this study examines the roles of regional geopolitics, assistance dependence, and international diplomacy.

Keywords: Refugee Rights, International Relations, Protection Policies, Bangladesh, Rohingya Crisis, International Law.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh's response to refugees is highly interrelated with its international relations. Over the decades, Bangladesh has been a recipient and a country subject to global attention, being a humanitarian response (Sakamoto et al., 2024). Amongst the refugee crises of this country, the entry of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar can be considered the most significant; however, it has provoked discussions on human rights, sovereignty, and global accountability around the world (Rahaman, 2024). International concern over refugee rights and policies for protection has been much on the increase in these regions of protracted crises of displacement. Bangladesh, coming from an emerging country's perspective in this highly geopolitical region of South Asia, has critically contributed to responding to flows of refugees, among others, particularly the refugees of Rohingya origin from Myanmar (Md. Riaj Uddin Bondhon & Md. Riaj Uddin Bondhon, 2024). Indeed, the country's approach toward the challenges of refugees extends beyond its domestic priorities about the dynamics of international relations, including bilateral partnerships and regional and global humanitarian frameworks. Such a reflection on the history of the flow of refugees in Bangladesh portrays the intersection of obligations based on humanitarian considerations with the realities of politics in Lewis (2019). While Bangladesh has often exhibited humanitarian goodwill by hosting persecution victims, it manages its policies subtly by balancing international legal obligations with national interest protection (Taufiq-e-Faruque, 2020). This balancing act has been further complicated by geopolitical pressures from neighboring countries, including Myanmar, India and China, besides those set by Western powers and international organizations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM). The 2017 Rohingya refugee crisis brought worldwide attention to the status of Bangladesh as a host nation. Over 700,000 Rohingya refugees entered Bangladesh in the wake of the military crackdown in Myanmar, creating one of the most serious and rapidly growing humanitarian crises of recent times. The event posed a challenge to Bangladesh's capacity to extend humanitarian aid and reflected international relations in formulating refugee policies. Bilateral dialogues, international humanitarian aid, and multilateral cooperation make up the backbone of crisis management, though the depth and nature of such international aid are largely influenced by the political dynamics (Darmayadi et al., 2024). Bangladesh's refusal to sign the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol also reflects her shrewd reservations regarding sovereignty and resource utilization (Tazreena Sajjad, 2022). However, it depends heavily on international assistance for the basic needs of refugees. Thus, it reveals opportunities and vulnerabilities in the country's policymaking process. Regional powers, donor countries, and international organizations influence Bangladesh's role in refugee rights and protection issues in the broader structure of global governance (Fairouz, 2022). The present study aims to analyze how international relations shape refugee rights and protection policies in Bangladesh. Examining bilateral and multilateral engagement, humanitarian aid, and geopolitical pressure, this



paper points to the problems faced by Bangladesh in the domain of dealing with refugee problems while focusing on the requirements and expectations that Bangladesh receives internationally. This further includes probable avenues for aligning national policies with international standards, considering how global cooperation can help solve refugee crises.

This paper discusses Bangladesh's role in the area of international relations in its policymaking and implementation pertaining to rights and protection concerning refugees, historical background, political considerations, and global governance frameworks.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A) *Historical Context of Refugees in Bangladesh*

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, it has been a refugee host country. One of the first major refugee flows was related to the Bangladesh Liberation War when millions sought asylum in neighboring India. However, the largest and most chronic problem for the country emerged with the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who arrived in the late 1970s and sharply increased since 2017 (Md. Halimuzzaman, 2024). Bangladesh's refugee movement history is shaped by its politically turbulent past, geopolitical positioning, and proximity to conflict regions. A country that has both produced and hosted refugees, Bangladesh's experience with refugees brings into focus its peculiar relationship with humanitarian responsibilities and the assertion of national priorities (Mohammad Ahsan Chowdhury, 2020). Bangladesh's largest and earliest refugee movements were during the independence movement in 1971. In the conflict between East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and West Pakistan, around 10 million were displaced to seek refuge in India, a neighbouring country (Ahammad, 2024). India provided temporary shelter and relief, but the international community prepared humanitarian aid. Most of the refugees returned to Bangladesh towards the end of the war, making it one of the biggest repatriations in the history of modern times (Kamrul et al., 2022). It helped shape Bangladesh's conceptualization of displacement and heightened its understanding of the critical role regional cooperation plays in handling humanitarian crises. The Rohingya refugee crisis has been the country's most protracted and massive refugee challenge. Directed towards the stateless Rohingya, an ethnic minority within the Rakhine State in Myanmar, decades of systematic persecution and violence have been witnessed (Hafsa & Hossain, 2020). Rohingya, a stateless ethnic minority in Myanmar, went through persecution over decades, leading to multiple waves of mass exodus. In August 2017, a crackdown by the Myanmar armed forces forced over 700,000 Rohingya fleeing towards Bangladesh, which triggered a wide-scale humanitarian response worldwide. Bangladesh opened up its frontier and gave temporary shelter but did not confer the status of official refugee on the Rohingyas. The largest inflow so far of refugees was in 1978 when Myanmar launched a security operation against the Rohingya known as Operation Nagamin. About 200,000 of them escaped to Bangladesh, thereby creating a humanitarian crisis (Islam, 2020). Many were repatriated through bilateral negotiations, but the root problems of statelessness and persecution persisted. A second wave of Rohingya refugees entered Bangladesh in the early 1990s due to renewed military operations in Myanmar. Over 250,000 Rohingya sought asylum in Bangladesh, once again highlighting the cyclical nature of the crisis. While bilateral agreements facilitated partial repatriation, many refugees remained in overcrowded camps (Rahman et al., 2020). The most recent and significant influx began in August 2017 when Myanmar's military launched a brutal crackdown, described by the United Nations as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing (Kamal et al., 2024). Over 700,000 Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh within a matter of weeks, joining the hundreds of thousands already present in refugee camps. This event transformed the refugee crisis into a global humanitarian emergency, with Cox's Bazar becoming the largest refugee settlement in the world. While the Rohingya crisis dominates the refugee discourse in Bangladesh, other smaller refugee movements have occurred over time. For instance:

- Bangladeshi-origin refugees returning from India post-1971.
- Biharis (Stranded Pakistanis): Following the 1971 war, a significant population of Biharis, who had sided with West Pakistan, became stateless and stranded in camps across Bangladesh (Tania et al., 2023). Over time, legal and social integration challenges have persisted for this community.

The historical influxes of refugees have shaped Bangladesh's refugee policies, focusing on temporary humanitarian assistance rather than formal long-term integration (Zahed, 2023). Bangladesh's reluctance to sign the 1951 Refugee Convention stems from concerns about sovereignty, resource limitations, and the protracted nature of displacement. The country's experience with the Rohingya crisis has reinforced its position that resolving refugee issues requires international cooperation, regional diplomacy, and safe repatriation rather than permanent resettlement. The Rohingya, a stateless ethnic minority from Myanmar, faced decades of persecution, leading to mass exodus. In August 2017, a military crackdown in Myanmar forced over 700,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh, triggering a global humanitarian response. Bangladesh opened up the borders and offered temporary shelter but did not grant them formal refugee status.

B) *International Relations and Refugee Policies in Bangladesh*

International relations, regional ties, and global humanitarian responsibility have shaped Bangladesh's policies towards

refugees (Bidisha Biswas, 2020). The next paragraphs outline some of the significant influences:

Because of the Rohingya issue, Bangladesh and Myanmar's bilateral relations are still tense. While Bangladesh has advocated for the safe and voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees, Myanmar's reluctance to address their citizenship and rights has hindered progress. Diplomatic engagements between the two nations have been mediated by regional powers, particularly China, which plays a strategic role in influencing policies through economic and political leverage. As Bangladesh's closest neighbor and a regional power, India's stance on refugees impacts Bangladesh's policies. While India supports Bangladesh's humanitarian role, its strategic interests in Myanmar complicate the refugee resolution process (Md. Asiquzzaman, 2019). China's economic investments in both Bangladesh and Myanmar have positioned it as a mediator. However, effective refugee solutions are limited by China's penchant for bilateral diplomacy over multilateral engagement. Western nations have urged Myanmar to handle the Rohingya crisis and provided significant humanitarian aid. Their contribution to Bangladesh's refugee protection systems compromises geopolitical objectives and humanitarian considerations. The core of Bangladesh's refugee management is international organizations, such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Such international organizations' support of refugee rights, resource mobilization, and technical assistance impacts the nation's ability to successfully address refugees.

However, dependence on foreign aid continues to make Bangladesh vulnerable to the influences of others. Humanitarian aid, delivered within the country, is conditioned to depend on the country meeting the international standard of human rights, thus making its sovereignty vulnerable to international expectations (Nascimento, 2017).

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are stated as follows:

- i. To analyze the impact of international relations on refugee rights and protection policies in Bangladesh.
- ii. To identify key stakeholders influencing these policies, including international organizations, foreign governments, and regional alliances.
- iii. To assess the implications of these policies on the ground.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative research design, incorporating case study elements and comparative analysis to explore the complex and context-specific interactions between international relations and domestic policies. Primary data collection methods include semi-structured interviews with key informants such as government officials from the Ministries of Foreign and Home Affairs, representatives from international organizations like UNHCR, IOM, and Amnesty International, academics and policy experts specializing in refugee rights, and NGOs working with refugees in Bangladesh. Field observations are also conducted at refugee camps, such as Cox's Bazar, to examine the implementation of protection policies. Secondary data collection involves analyzing policy documents and agreements, including memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between Bangladesh and international organizations, international treaties (e.g., the 1951 Refugee Convention, although Bangladesh is not a signatory), and domestic legal frameworks related to refugees.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A) *Contextual Understanding of International Relations and Refugee Dynamics*

The article underscores the intricate interplay between international relations and the development of refugee policies in Bangladesh. Bangladesh, a lower-middle-income country, often finds itself at the crossroads of geopolitical interests, where its policies are shaped not only by domestic priorities but also by international pressures. This dynamic spotlights the dual nature of being a host country, seeking humanitarian recognition, and simultaneously maintaining diplomatic relations with the world's and region's powers such as China, India, and the Western nations.

B) *Refugee Rights vs. National Security Concerns*

The refugee policies of Bangladesh, particularly those concerning the Rohingya, epitomize the fragile balance between meeting international human rights standards and responding to national security and economic concerns. International relations have an important bearing on this equilibrium since the country relies heavily on international aid for managing refugees. Therefore, country policies are generally aligned with the interests of donor countries and institutions. Furthermore, geopolitical factors such as its ties with Myanmar and strategic partnerships with China and India limit Bangladesh's ability to plead more vociferously for the Rohingya in the international arena.

C) *The Role of International Institutions and Agreements*

Though not a signatory to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol, Bangladesh's signing of international agreements and policies related to refugees and support from UNHCR implies a soft diplomacy approach toward international law rather

than a formal obligation. Soft diplomacy will allow Bangladesh an opportunity to maintain sovereignty regarding its refugee policies while yet gaining the upper hand in the fight for international aid.

D) International Pressure and Humanitarian Response

This article discusses the following mechanisms through which international relations frame Bangladesh's response to the refugee crisis. Bangladesh is aid-dependent since most of the expenditures incurred for refugee-related activities are covered by international donors and subtly inform domestic policymaking. Bangladesh engages in diplomatic channels, including using the platform of the UN General Assembly, to garner international sympathy and support while exposing Myanmar's actions. Bilateral efforts continue in negotiations, although there is little support and international acceptance of repatriation as a solution for ending the crisis.

E) Policy Recommendations and Critique

This article critically examines the gaps in Bangladesh's refugee policy towards long-term protection and integration. It underlines international ties to demand a better share of the burden and places a balance between national interests and the humanitarian obligation for the protection of refugees sustainably. The article further underlines the need for greater cooperation from the regional level and across South Asian frameworks intending to collectively manage problems of cross-border displacement issues.

F) Implications for Refugee Rights

It further brings to attention the precarious state of refugee rights in Bangladesh. International pressure may be so motivating as to spur temporary humanitarian gestures, but it cannot provide durable solutions. Refugees face limited mobility, restricted employment opportunities, and lack adequate legal protections, reflecting the gap between international expectations and on-ground realities.

G) Broader Lessons for International Refugee Policy

The Bangladesh case shows the requirement for a more coherent and enforceable global refugee framework. International pressure can be only partially effective in handling the Rohingya crisis, indicating that political will, both at the regional and global levels, is required to supplement humanitarian commitments.

H) Challenges to Refugee Rights and Protection

Even with international support, Bangladesh still faces many problems in ensuring rights and protection for refugees:

Legal Ambiguities: Neither the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol are ratified by Bangladesh. As a result, refugees are not legally protected, which restricts their access to healthcare, work, and education.

Resource Limitations: Taking in more than a million migrants puts a tremendous strain on Bangladesh's infrastructure and economy, which exacerbates host-refugee relations.

Geopolitical Pressures: The West's demands for accountability and relations with China, India, and Myanmar present a serious diplomatic obstacle.

Security Concerns: The protracted refugee crisis has exacerbated security worries, fuelled extremism, and exacerbated trafficking, making policy measures more challenging.

I) Opportunities for Policy Alignment with International Standards

Bangladesh can address domestic issues and enhance its refugee policies through international ties.

Multilateral Cooperation: Bangladesh can ask for additional international help and shared responsibility by speaking with the international community, including the UN.

Regional collaboration: Regional collaboration can be developed through institutions such as SAARC and BIMSTEC to identify shared solutions for refugee protection and repatriation.

Legal Framework Development: Despite Bangladesh's non-signatory status to the Refugee Convention, state policy can be aligned with international human rights norms.

VI. FINDINGS

Bangladesh's refugee rights and protection policies are strongly affected by the country's international relations because of diplomatic pressures, aid dependency, and geopolitical considerations. Indeed, a large portion of Bangladesh's policy attention and energy has been geared toward short-term humanitarian resources from bodies such as the UNHCR and donation-constructing countries while shunning integration and resettlement provisions, which would require long-term responses. Bangladesh has neither signed nor ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and, barring Rohingya refugees, does not have formal legislative frameworks to safeguard the rights of refugees. The main reasons that explain Bangladesh's unwillingness to ratify the Convention appear to be sovereignty and resource strain concerns. The regional dynamics involve strained relations with Myanmar and very limited cooperation within South Asia. International organizations significantly contribute to advocacy and funding, but inconsistent support, crowding in camps, and tensions with host communities still provide major challenges.

Security issues and political complications of repatriation highlight the thin line that the government has to walk between its humanitarian obligations and national interests.

VII. CONCLUSION

The role of international relations in Bangladesh's refugee policies testifies to the interdependence between humanitarian global challenges and global political considerations. Moving forward, stronger international cooperation is needed to share the management burden of refugees. Sustainable solutions need both immediate support for host countries such as Bangladesh and concerted efforts to push ahead with the elimination of root causes of displacement from Myanmar. The definition of refugee rights and the creation of opportunities for local integration need to make it possible to regain regional stability while it is being made humane and well-balanced. Identity is one of the strong factors that have influenced Bangladesh's response to the Rohingya problem. Bangladesh has taken good steps to provide shelter and basic rights to refugees. However, at times, its policies reflect political pragmatism.

Restrictions on movement, employment, and access to education reflect a cautionary approach that aims not to create long-term dependency or demographic imbalances. These measures often clash with the global discourse on refugee rights, emphasizing the tension between local realities and international norms. The Rohingya issue presents complicated obstacles for Bangladesh's foreign policy. The nation is heavily burdened by the crisis's enormous scope as well as its inadequate infrastructure and resources. The influence of international relations on refugee rights and protection policies in Bangladesh highlights a complex interplay of diplomacy, humanitarianism, and sovereignty. While global political dynamics provide opportunities for humanitarian advancements, they also impose challenges that require strategic balancing. Moving forward, Bangladesh's ability to align its policies with international standards while addressing domestic priorities will determine the country's role as a responsible host nation in the global refugee governance system. That Bangladesh is influenced by international relations in the refugee policies greatly testifies to the interconnected global humanitarian challenges and geopolitical strategies. Stronger international cooperation is necessary to share the burden of refugee management in the future. Sustainable solutions require immediate support from host countries such as Bangladesh and concerted efforts toward the root causes of displacements, specifically in Myanmar. Enhancing refugee rights and fostering local integration opportunities, while ensuring regional stability, will be critical in shaping a humane and balanced approach to the refugee crisis.

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