**CHAPTER : TRACING THE ROHINGYA CRISIS IN MYANMAR**

Myanmar is a multi- religious country with the majority of 88 percent population followers of Theravada Buddhism (Bamar, Rakhine, Shan, Mon, Karen people and Chinese ethnic group), approximately 6.2 percent minority ethnic groups such as the Chin, Kachin and Kren following Christianity and other ethnic groups. Myanmar, according to a 2014 census, has a population of more than 52 million people and is officially a Buddhist state with 135 distinct ethnic groups and the Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority group numbering approximately 1.1 million from Myanmar's Rakhine state, just south of Bangladesh, but are officially not recognized as lawful citizens. The government claims they were brought to Rakhine from Bangladesh during the time when Myanmar was a British colony, and are living in Myanmar illegally while the Rohingya’s claim that they have been in the region for over a century, with some claim to have been in the region from as early as the eighth century.[[1]](#footnote-1) They have been subjected to denial of citizenship since 1982 and being Muslim and perceived to be from Bangladesh represent a foreign cultural and social invasion, threatening the Buddhist identity.

Arakan or Rakhine, the north-western province of the Union of Burma has an area of approximately 20,000 sq. miles. It is a narrow mountainous strip of land with 360 miles coastal belt from the Bay of Bengal and separated from Burma by the north-south Arakan Yoma mountain range. Bounded by Bay of Bengal on the west, Chin Hills on the north-east, it shares a 176 miles border with the People's Republic of Bangladesh, of which 48 miles runs along the river Naf. Arakan has seven rivers - the Naf, the Mayu, the Kaladan, the Lemro, the Ann, the Taungup and the Sandoway. The four major navigable rivers are the Naf, Mayu, Kaladan and Lemro and all are situated in the Northern Arakan, which are tidal and easily navigable all the year round.

Akyab is the capital of Arakan since 1826 AD and is situated on the seacoast at the mouth of the Kaladan River. Arakan is inhabited by two major ethnic races, the Rohingyas who are Muslims and the Rakhines (Maghs) who are Buddhists. The Rohingyas are mostly concentrated in the riparian plains of Naf, Mayu and Kaladan. Arakan is the only Muslim majority province among the 14 provinces of Burma and home to almost half of the total 7 million Muslim population of Burma.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Rakhine state of Myanmar, shares a porous hill tracts border along the Naf River. The Rohingya community, followers of Sufi variant of Sunni Muslims, differ religiously, linguistically and culturally from the majority Rakhine Buddhists which underpins the rift between the two communities in the State. Frequent rife has rendered the community homeless, forcing them to seek shelter in neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and significantly Bangladesh. Since 2012 the intrastate religious conflict acquired a nationalist dimension with army and Buddhist radical groups (like Ma Ba Tha) involvement.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Tracing the Roots in History**

M.A. Tahir Ba Tha, in his paper *A Short History of Rohingya and Kamans of Burma*, has gone to great lengths tracing the roots to the early Arabs and the origins of the Burmans which are summarised as below:[[4]](#footnote-4)

(a) The Arab Muslims arrived from the eight century onwards. Quoting from *Hanifa O Kaiyapuri*, written by Shah Barid Khan in the 16th century, of the arrival of Mohammad Hanif son of Hazarat Ali to Arakan and marrying the cannibal queen Kayapuri after defeating her and living in the Mayu ranges and the peaks of Hanifa Tonki and Kayapuri Tonki evidencing their history.

(b) He further relies on historical literary works claiming that the indigenous name of Arakan was Rohang - “17th century Arakan court poet Sayed Shah Alawal referred to Rohang and Rohingyas in his two popular ballads: Saiful Mulk Badiuzzamal and Sikander Nama. Also Arakan court poets Qazi Daulat in his book Lorchandrani O Satimaina 1622-30 A. D, and Mardan in his book Nasib Nama 1631-38 A.D, Arakan was mentioned as Roshango country.”

(c) The Tibeto-Burman invasion of 957 A.D. resulted in the Indo-Mongoloid stock now known as Rakhine Maghs who are descendants of the mixture of Tibeto-Burmans (Mongolians) and Vesali Hindus (Ayrians). Burmese civilisation and Buddhism took roots in the 11th and 12th century AD, with Arakanese Buddhists calling themselves Rakhine and their country Rakhinepyi.

(d) Though Islamic culture began with the arrival of Arabs in Arakan, it gained prominence with the arrival of Gauri Pathans as quoted from U Kyi's *The Essential History of Burma* that "Rakhine Maghs became Muslims after embracing Islam in 15th century. For hundred years, from 1430 to 1530 A. D. Arakan was under the suzerainty of Muslim Bengal."

(e) During the 17th century, the Maghs would invade Bengal towards Dacca and Murshidabad, taking prisoners as slaves to Arakan. Adoption of Muslim influence by way of customs, culture, Islamic tradition, inscription on coins and proliferation of mosques confirmed it’s presence and consolidation.

(f) The Mughal invasion in 1666 A.D. by Shayista Khan, the Subedar of Bengal, and the capture of Chittagong, ruled by the Magh Arkans, resulted in the Rakhine Maghs of North Arakan fleeing to the South and Muslims migrating to North Arakan

(f) Under different periods of history, Arakan had been an independent sovereign monarchy ruled by Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. Bengal became Muslim in 1203 AD and Islamic influence grew in Arakan from 1430 AD and lasting for more than 350 years until it was invaded and occupied by Burmans in 1784 A.D.

(g) The British occupied Arakan in 1824 AD, annexing it to former British India and when Burma was separated in 1937, Arakan was made a part of British Burma becoming a province of independent Burma in 1948.

(h) The term Rohingya is claimed to be derived from the word Rohai or Roshangee, denoting the Muslims inhabiting the old Arakan (Rohan/Roshang/ Roang), which could probably be a corruption of the Arabic term Raham (blessing) and transition to Rahmi-Rahmia-Rahingya to Rohingya, which denotes honest, dutiful, pitiful or kind hearted to others. Another historical definition of Rohingya is derived from the Magh language "Rwa-haung-gya-kyia" referring to the Pathan army of General Wali Khan and General Sandi Khan, who came to restore the throne to Narameikhia. The term has likely evolved over time - as Rwahingyia - Rohingya-which signifying as brave as tiger.

(i) The region, separated from Burma by the mountain range, is considered a continuation of the Chittagong plains which was under Arakan control and thus, historically was seen as separate. The claims of historical Muslim roots in Arakan or ‘Rohang’ and majority status in the territory as a result of geographical contiguity, alongwith a distinct language and culture, spurs a quest for it’s unique identity.

(j) The uniting aspects of ancient heritage, a rich culture and distinct language of the Rohingya populations in North Arakan within well-defined geographical boundaries demarcated their "Traditional Homeland" and over time provided a refuge when under physical attacks elsewhere in Arakan and Burma. The Rohingyas were once in absolute majority in the whole of Arakan, but have shrunk progressively. However, they still dominate the area between the river Naf and river Kaladan, the longest river in Arakan and also claim areas inhabited by Muslims or within their sphere of influence before the pogram of 1942 in their Traditional Homeland.

(j) Arakan is claimed as two nations within one geographic entity, with two different peoples inhabitation from ancient period – a Muslim North and Buddhist South or a Rohingya homeland of North Arakan and Rakhine homeland of South Arakan.

**Conflicting Narratives**. A paper titled The Rohingya Origin Story: Two Narratives, One Conflict has summarised the conflicting narratives of the origins of the Rohingyas as follows:[[5]](#footnote-5)

(a) The Rohingya version of their historical narrative claims that ethnic Rohingyas have lived in Rakhine (the most western part of Myanmar) for centuries, even before Islam arrived in the region at the end of the 8th Century. The Rohingya language and culture was dominant in Rakhine during its rule by the Muslim Mrauk U Dynasty from the 15th to the 18th centuries, which ended with the conquest of Rakhine by the Burmese Empire in 1785. The Rohingya stayed in Rakhine after the collapse of the Maruk U Dynasty and became British subjects when Rakhine became a British colony in 1826. During WWII, many Rohingya joined the British Army and fought the Japanese in a guerrilla war. The Rohingya contend that the British promised them an independent state after the war, which was not honoured retaining the Muslim parts of Rakhine within Myanmar.

(b) The narrative of the Rakhine and Bamar Peoples, on the other hand claims that the Rakhine people are an ethnic minority who live in the Rakhine state and are different from the Rohingya. The Bamar, also Buddhist, are the ethnicity majority in Myanmar’s population. Both these peoples contend that Islam had only a small presence in Rakhine during the Maruk U Dynasty’s rule, which was Buddhist, not Muslim. They contended that the Rohingya are not native to Rakhine but are Bengali migrants, or “Chittagonians,” who arrived in 1826 after the British conquest of Rakhine. The small number of Muslims who lived in Rakhine before British colonialization are not the ancestors of the modern Rohingya, benefitting from British colonialization and used the World War II to consolidate themselves in Myanmar.

(c) Most scholars agree that the Rohingya are an amalgamation of peoples, from native Muslim Rakhines who lived in Myanmar for many centuries, to Bengali immigrants who arrived in Rakhine in the 19th century. Islam had a strong influence in the Rakhine state before its colonialization by Britain, particularly during the Mrauk U Dynasty though debate rages as to whether the Mrauk U Dynasty was actually Islamic or not. Non-Muslim rulers in Southeast Asia to seeking Islamic titles due to the perceived prestige, but not to actually be followers of Islam, was common practice.

(d) Regardless, there is evidence that some semblance of the Rohingya community existed in Myanmar before British colonialization. Large-scale migration from Bengal to Rakhine occurred during the British occupation of Myanmar from 1826 to 1948. The native workforce of Myanmar being insufficient, the British, encouraged Bengali migration to Myanmar resulting in a “flood” of migrants into Rakhine attracted by higher wages and facilitated by an absent border between Bengal and Myanmar. The British termed these immigrants either “Mahomedan” or “Chittagonian,” and they became an important part of the colonial workforce and bureaucracy.

(e) During World War II, both the Japanese and the British sought to take advantage of underlining sectarianism to further their war efforts with the Japanese recruiting Buddhist Rakhine into the “Patriot Arakan Force,” while the British recruited the Rohingya into “Force V.”

(f) Violence between the two communities ensued even after the end of World War II as initial attempts by the Muslims in Rakhine to carve their own state, and later to join East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), failed. Rakhine became part of an independent Myanmar in 1948 and the term “Rohingya” gained prominence.

The Pro-Rohingya advocates cite “A Comparative Vocabulary of the Languages Spoken in the Burma Empire” by Scottish physician Francis Buchanan in 1799 as proof of the term “Rooinga” being in use in the area well before the British consolidated their rule: “The first dialect spoken in the Burman empire derived from the language of the Hindu nation that is spoken by the Mohammedans, who have long settled in Arakan, and who call themselves Rooinga, or natives of Arakan.”[[6]](#footnote-6) It is argued that since colonial records did refer to the term, it is likely that it derives from the word “Rohang”, which was the Bengali name given to Arakan at the time and Rohingya would, thus, mean “Arakanese.” They have been defined by Benedict Rogers as “Muslims of Bengali ethnic origin”[[7]](#footnote-7) and that the “Rohingya” comprise ethnic and social diversity making the existence of a “single identity” difficult to pinpoint.[[8]](#footnote-8) Both sides of the narrative can claim a high degree of authenticity. Evidence of Muslims living in Rakhine state (at the time under the Arakan kingdom) since the 9th century may exist but a significant number of Muslims from across the Bay of Bengal (at the time a part of India, now Bangladesh) immigrated to British Burma with the colonialists in the 20th century. Pre-colonial borders of Arakan were a diffuse area between Burmese and Bengalis regions. The area upto Chittagong, in modern Bangladesh, was ruled by Bengali and Rakhine rulers in different eras making them possibly mixed descendants of three groups:[[9]](#footnote-9)

(a) Already in Arakan before the region became culturally ‘Burmanized’ from the 10th to 14th centuries (they are also probably ancestors of present day Rakhine).

(b) Slaves taken by Rakhine kings and Portuguese mercenaries from Bengal in the 16th and 17th centuries and workers who migrated from Bengal during the colonial period.

(c) Those who migrated from Bangladesh after independence.

**The Conflict Taking Roots - Union Citizenship Act Of 1948**. During the British colonial rule (from 1824-1948) and there was significant migration between today’s Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh. At the time of independence in 1945, the Union Citizenship Act, detailed the ethnicities “indigenous” to Myanmar and the Rohingya were not considered to be one of the country’s 135 official ethnic groups. The Rohingya carved a place for themselves, including some serving in parliament and other high offices. The new Citizenship Act was promulgated which restricted Section 11 (iv) of Constitution to any person "from ancestors who for two generation at least all made any of the territories included within the Union of Burma their permanent home and whose parents and himself were born in any such territories." In order to prevent the continued immigration of Indians into Burma, all residents in Burma were required to apply for registration within one year of the law and were given identity cards. Many Rohingyas registered enabling their participation in the democratic process between 1948 to 1962. Chapter II, Section 10 and 11 of the 1947 Constitution of Union of Burma stated that:

(a) **10**. There shall be but one citizenship throughout the Union; that is say, there shall be no citizenship of the unit as district from the citizenship of the Union.

(b) **11**.

(i) Every person, both of whose parents belong or belonged to any of the indigenous races of Burma;

(ii) Every person born in any of the territories included within the Union, at least one of whose grandparents belonged to any of the indigenous races of Burma;

(iii) Every person born in any of the territories included with the Union of parents both of whom are, if they had been alive at the commencement of this constitution would have been, citizens of the Union;

(iv) Every person who was born in any of the territories which at the time of his birth was included within His Britannic Majesty's dominions and who has resided in any of the territories included within the Union for a period of not less than 8 years in the ten years immediately preceding the 1st January 1942 and who intends to reside permanently therein and who signifies his election of Citizenship of the Union in a manner and within the time prescribed by law, shall be Citizen of the Union.

'Indigenous race' is a term applied to a people distinct culture and civilisation who had been residing within the territory of Union before 1823, the year of British occupation of Arakan.

**Initial Conflict and Brief Rapprochement**. The communal riots of 1942, led by ultra - conservative Rakhine Buddhists, resulted in the destruction of Rohingya settlements in Akyab and Myebon in Kyauckpyu District, resulting in forced migration of approximately 80,000 Rohingyas to what would become East Pakistan (later Bangladesh). Muslims took up arms and fought a separatist rebellion until the 1960s, with remnants continuing until the 1990s. Prime Mininster U Nu, on winning the elections in 1960, declared setting up a special "Mayu Frontier Administration" (MFA) in the provinces of Maungdaw, Buthidaung and western portion of Rathedaung under direct control of Central Govt which took effect from March 31, 1961. The Rohingya were recognised as an indigenous race of Burma and a special police force known as "Mayu ye” was raised with recruits from local Rohingya Muslims leading to the surrender of militants in July and November 1961.[[10]](#footnote-10) The former Prime Ministers of Burma, U Nu and U Ba Swe acknowledged that "the Rohingyas are people of Arakan who profess the Islamic faith. The Rohingyas are equal in every way with other minority races like the Shan, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon and Rakhine, They have lived in Burma for ages, according to historical facts. There is historical evidence that they have lived faithfully and harmoniously with other races of the Union".[[11]](#footnote-11) Historical, cultural and civilizational evidence would suggest that:

(a) The Rohingyas arrived and settled in the Arakan predating many other people and races inhabiting Arakan and Burma.

(b) The Rohingyas are nationals of Arakan and constitute one of the many indigenous races of Burma like the Shan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni etc. now inhabiting Arakan and other parts of Burma.

Their ethnicity was included in the 1961 census but reversed following the 1962 military coup, when the government—driven by Bamar-supremacist ideology (paywall)—gave fewer official documentation to the Rohingya and refused to fully recognize new generations of the Rohingya population.[[12]](#footnote-12) The 1974 drive for national registration cards excluded the Rohingya, who were only allowed to obtain foreign registration cards. Myanmar’s citizenship criterion is based on the ‘*taingyintha*’, or “national races”, concept and is defined as those ethnic groups that were settled in Myanmar in 1823, a year before the first Anglo-Burmese war in which the British conquered Arakan (as Rakhine was officially known until 1989) and other regions of the country and one of the criterion for full citizenship in the 1982 Citizenship Law was belonging to one of the national races.[[13]](#footnote-13) The inflection point of exclusion of the Rohingya is reflected in para 3, Chapter II Citizenship wherein “Nationals such as the Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Burman, Mon, Rakhine or Shan and ethnic groups as have settled in any of the territories included within the State as their permanent home from a period anterior to 1185 B.E., 1823 A.D. are Burma citizens” and para 4 “The Council of State may decide whether any ethnic group is national or not.” [[14]](#footnote-14) In 1989, the country was renamed Myanmar.

**A Continuing History of Violence and Evictions**. Numerous alleged eviction campaigns including the ‘King Dragon’ operation of 24 April - 25 July 1978 resulted in more than 250,000 Rohingyas fleeing into Bangladesh and approximately 2,68,000 during the 1991-92 campaign known as Pay Saya.[[15]](#footnote-15) Md. Saiful Islam, of the Department of International Relations (IR), Faculty of Social Science, South Asian University, New Delhi, India quoted the ASEAN Parliaments for Human Rights report on the magnitude of the crisis which says that “more over 100,000 Rohingya refugees are now living in Malaysia, and several hundred thousand are in Bangladesh, Thailand, and other ASEAN countries combined.”[[16]](#footnote-16) The rape of a Buddhist woman, in 2012, allegedly by Muslim men, led to massive religious violence against the Rohingya, forcing 140,000 of them into camps for internally displaced people.[[17]](#footnote-17) The attack on the Myanmar border police In October 2016, resultant security crackdown on Rohingya, led to 87,000 Rohingya moving to Bangladesh for refuge. The last military crackdown started on August 25, 2017, when an armed Rohingya group attacked military posts in Rakhine State. The unprecedented crackdown has sent more than 480,000 Rohingya to flee Myanmar into refugee camps in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar.[[18]](#footnote-18) The Rohingyas mass migration from Myanmar has been primarily to Bangladesh, hosting 950,000 registered refugees as reported by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. These refugees are in camps, suffering from rampant outbreak of disease, lack of access to uncontaminated water and susceptible to risks of human trafficking and exploitation.[[19]](#footnote-19) Malaysia has reported approximately 150,000 refugees who are registered, but do not have any legal status or work entitlements without access to medical and education. Thailand has been the hub of human smuggling, arriving by boat and onwards to Malaysia and Indonesia. Indonesia treats them as illegal immigrants and the numbers are small.

**Entrenched Islamophobia – Driving Violence**. The historical legacy of the Mughal military campaign under Aurangzeb of the mid-17th century to Dhaka, Chittagong and Arakan territories[[20]](#footnote-20) and the Rikhane Muslim efforts during World War II and thereafter to secede have created an indelible mark on the psyche of the nation which is reflected in the statement of Sr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing that the “Army was pursuing its patriotic duty to preserve Myanmar’s borders and prevent Rohingya insurgents carving out their own territory in northern Rakhine State. We will never let such a terrible occurrence happen again.”[[21]](#footnote-21) The Rohingya Muslims face an entrenched Islamophobia in a predominantly Buddhist society and state and are seen threating to Buddhist faith and culture creating the route to Myanmar’s Islamization.[[22]](#footnote-22) Referring to Schissler, Walton and Phyu Thi’s “listening project”, Jasmine Chia brings out that the narrative of a ‘Rohingya’ Muslim identity in Rakhine state has resulted in and perpetuates a deep sense of a Muslim takeover and anti-Muslim propaganda has become part of regular nationalist discourse with fear of Muslims turning the country Islamic as the main reason for their dislike of Muslims, resulting in outbreaks of communal violence.[[23]](#footnote-23) Outbreaks of violence has affected non-Rohingya Muslims across Myanmar, with some extremist monks intensifying Islamophobic rhetoric, claiming Myanmar’s dominant Buddhist faith being under threat from Muslims (pointing to Afghanistan and Indonesia as examples) and were crucial in passing “race and religion” laws that targeted Muslims and attempted to stem their population growth.[[24]](#footnote-24) The deep seated fears attenuated by ARSA’s growing presence in Rakhine and surrounding areas are evidenced in statement of Maung Thway Chun, the editor of a newsweekly for hardline Buddhist nationalists, to Joe Freeman, a journalist based in Rangoon: “[W]e don’t want Muslims to swallow our country … They will not finish with attacking just Rakhine. They will also invade Chin State or Irrawaddy region. Then this country will be a Muslim country. It is such a shame for us that the land we inherited from our former generations will be lost in our time.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

**A Conflict of identities**. Carlos argues, quoting anthropologists and historians such as Edmund Leach, F K Lehman and Victor Lieberman, that ethnicity in Burma or Myanmar has been evolving and fluid and it was only during the British era that classification and segregation on linguistic basis resulted in deep divisions, exacerbated by ethnic Bamar chauvinism, ethno-nationalist insurgencies and military dictatorships perpetuating an exclusionary notion of Myanmar nationhood and anti-Muslim propaganda.[[26]](#footnote-26) K M. Atikur Rahman, Research Fellow, Dept. of Political Science, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh highlights the political involvement of the State in Buddhist violence against the Rohingya and the direct involvement. He refers to the argument of Azar and Burton (1986) that the move to violence begins with the denial of separate identities, the absence of security for minorities and clear absence of effective participation for these minorities.[[27]](#footnote-27) A cycle of violence results from emergence of nationalistic groups and repression being contested by minorities with an endeavour at internationalisation of their cause to garner support and pressurise the State. Deprivation or mismatch in resource allocation results in breakdown of social structures, seeking third party intervention. Economics factors are another major reasons for the rise of intercommunal, interethnic and interreligious conflicts in the Rakhine state.[[28]](#footnote-28) The economic boycott of Muslims by the ‘969 movement’, building of ‘Sayar-Dagar-Setsanye’ (a patron-supporter relationship) between Buddhist monasteries and regional administrative leaders”[[29]](#footnote-29) have led to violence as a result of a political, social, and economic system-manifested in law, policy, and practice designed to discriminate against this ethnic and religious minority.[[30]](#footnote-30) The conflict between denial of the identity and forceful assertion to reclaim it, manifests in violence on both sides of the divide. However, the idea of nationhood built upon ethnic races can only serve to widen the chasm. The Rohingya identity has been contested as a political construct of the 1950s to carve an autonomous region in northern Rakhine or amalgamate within then East Pakistan. Chris Lewa, director of the Arakan Project, a Thailand-based advocacy group, claims that the identity provides ethnic Muslim group an assertion of its ties to the land that was once under the control of the Arakan Kingdom.[[31]](#footnote-31) Mr. M.A. Gaffar, Member of Parliament (MP) from Akyab West Constituency and Parliamentary Secretary from 1947 to 1962, during a Press Conference held on April 21, 1960 in Rangoon contested the identification of Rohingyas as Bangladeshis stating:[[32]](#footnote-32)

“Though Rohingyas resemble a little with the people of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), their literature, names and tittles, dresses, languages, customs and cultures are as difference as the sky and the earth. Therefore, to regard Rohingyas as Chittagonians is a grievous hurt to Rohingyas and a matter of tragedy and a great blow to Rohingya and far from actual history.”

**What’s In a Name**. The 2014 UN-backed governmental national census, first in thirty years, initially allowed Muslim minority groups to identify as Rohingya, but reversed to Bengali identity due to threats of boycott by Buddhist nationalists – ‘Ma-Ba-Tha monks’.[[33]](#footnote-33) The 2014 exercise of citizenship verification in Myebon township, which entailed proving three generations having resided in Rakhine, resulted in an abysmal outcome with only 97 out of 3000 being accorded recognition as ‘Bengali’ and not ‘Rohingya’ on their national identification cards and that too without any rights as citizens.[[34]](#footnote-34) The government’s move banning the term ‘Rohingya’ and referring to them as “Bengalis”, during the 2014 census, has been criticised and seen as a deliberate concerted effort to generate a perception of Rohingya as outsiders and illegal immigrants, justifying disenfranchisement and implying that they belong in Bangladesh with other Bengali Muslims.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Derek Mitchell, U.S. ambassador to Burma from 2012 to 2016, points out to the flaws of the solution, making it unacceptable - “Activists and leaders in the [Rohingya] community are very protective of that name. They see it as protective of their identity and dignity after so many basic rights have been taken from them in recent years. The name has also been essential to their international campaign for attention,”[[36]](#footnote-36) For the Burmese government, the term Rohingya entails defacto acknowledgment and amalgamation of Rakhine’s Muslims and Rohingya ethnic group, implying that under the 1982 citizenship law which stripped the Rohingya of their citizenship, they would be allowed an autonomous area within the country generating fear of a Rohingya autonomous area along the border with Bangladesh at the expense of Rakhine territory and seen as a possible staging area for terrorism by groups like ARSA.[[37]](#footnote-37) The Western world and humanitarian groups sees the world’s most persecuted minority, while Myanmar’s establishment and majority people perceive a foreign group with a separatist agenda, fuelled by Islam, and funded from overseas. The conflicting narrative over the identity is underscored in Derek Mitchell’s statement “We in the international community see the Rohingya as innocent people who just want to call themselves a name and who are uniquely abused for it. And, of course, it’s true they are largely innocent and uniquely abused. But to people in Myanmar, the name suggests something much more…So when the Rakhine and others in Myanmar look at what’s going on with the name Rohingya, the desire for recognition as an accepted ethnicity, now this militant activity in their name, and calls by some for international intervention, including a safe zone, they see that as a separatist agenda by other means” The politicisation of the term ‘Rohingya’ and sensitivities attached to it is reflected in Pope Francis’ avoidance to the term while in Myanmar and only referring to it while in Bangladesh during end November 2017.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Pressure from Buddhist nationalists resulted in revoking the Rohingya’s right to vote in the 2015 constitutional referendum, with President Thein Sein cancelling the temporary identity cards (White card holders were allowed to vote in Myanmar’s 2008 constitutional referendum and 2010 general elections).[[39]](#footnote-39) The 2015 election in Myanmar, often hailed as the first free and fair election ushering in a democracy, excluded the Rohingyas seeking to oust them from the collective memory of Burma. Denial of civil and political rights alongwith several other restrictions including free movement, marriage, education and other basic human rights has festered deep divisions and alienation. The situation was further aggravated by the 2016 attack which was claimed by insurgent group called Harakah al-Yakin (HAY), now known as the ARSA.[[40]](#footnote-40) The attacks on border and military posts by the armed group ARSA in August 2017, there has been a strong military crackdown against the Rohingya in Rakhine state: a substantial number of Rohingya villages destroyed; close to half a million people Rohingya fleeing into Bangladesh and tens of thousands internally displaced within Myanmar.[[41]](#footnote-41)

**Chapter Summation**

The chapter has sought to provide the overall perspective of the Rohingyas, who are a Muslim ethnic minority group numbering approximately 1.1 million from Myanmar's Rakhine state (known as Arakan till 1989), just south of Bangladesh, but are officially not recognized as lawful citizens. The genesis of the conflict lies in government claims that they were brought to Rakhine from Bangladesh during the time when Myanmar was a British colony, and are living in Myanmar illegally.

The Rohingya historical narrative claims having lived in Rakhine for centuries since the arrival of Islam with Mohammad Hanif, son of Hazarat Ali. The Tibeto-Burman invasion of 957 AD resulted in the Indo-Mongoloid Rakhine Maghs, with Burmese civilisation and Buddhism taking roots in the 11th and 12th century AD. The region, separated from Burma by the mountain range, is considered a continuation of the Chittagong plains under Arakan control and thus, historically was seen as separate having Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims rulers at various times in history. The claims of historical Muslim roots in Arakan and majority status in the territory as a result of geographical contiguity, alongwith a distinct language and culture, spurs a quest for it’s unique identity. The conflicting narrative of the Rakhine and Bamar Peoples, the Buddhist ethnicity majority, contend that Islam had only a small presence in Rakhine and the Rohingya are not native to Rakhine but are Bengali migrants, or “Chittagonians,” who arrived in 1826 after the British conquest of Rakhine. The inhabitants, over different eras, are possibly mixed descendants of three groups – those already in Arakan before the region became culturally ‘Burmanized’ from the 10th to 14th centuries, slaves taken by Rakhine kings and Portuguese mercenaries from Bengal in the 16th and 17th centuries and workers who migrated from Bengal during the colonial period; and those who migrated from Bangladesh after independence. Both sides of the narrative can claim a high degree of authenticity, and it is evident that ethnic roots with territorial claims lie at the heart of the conflict.

The chapter then traces the souring of memory in the modern era to the events of World War II, when both the Japanese and the British sought to exploit sectarianism, with the Japanese recruiting Buddhist Rakhine while the British recruited the Rohingya. The Rohingya contend that the British promised them an independent state after the war, which was not honoured. Violence after the end of the war resulted from attempts by Muslims in Rakhine to carve their own state, and later to join East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The roots of exclusion, post-independence, are chronologically traced when the Union Citizenship Act of 1948, detailed the ethnicities “indigenous” to Myanmar and the Rohingya were not considered to be one of the country’s 135 official ethnic groups and which restricted citizenship to person having to prove residency of ancestors of two generation. Communal riots of 1942, led by ultra - conservative Rakhine Buddhists, resulted in forced migration of approximately 80,000 Rohingyas to East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) and Muslims took up arms and fought a separatist rebellion until the 1960s. In 1961, briefly, the new government recognised Rohingya as an indigenous race but reversed it following the 1962 military coup. The 1974 drive for national registration cards excluded the Rohingya, who were only allowed to obtain foreign registration cards. Myanmar’s citizenship criterion based on the ‘taingyintha’, or “national races”, concept (those ethnic groups that were settled in Myanmar in 1823, a year before the first Anglo-Burmese war in which the British conquered Arakan). A criterion for full citizenship in the 1982 Citizenship Law was belonging to one of the national races, and thus became the inflection point of exclusion of the Rohingya.

The chapter then traces numerous alleged eviction campaigns, which include 250,000 Rohingyas fleeing into Bangladesh during April – July 1978 and approximately 2,68,000 during the 1991-92 campaign. 2012 witnessed displacement of almost 140,000 people following the rape of a Buddhist woman by Muslim men. An attack on the Myanmar border police in October 2016, led to 87,000 Rohingya moving to Bangladesh for refuge and the August 2017 crackdown, in retaliation to attacks on military camps, resulted in 480,000 Rohingya to flee Myanmar into Bangladesh, taking the registered refugees to almost a million.

The chapter sought to link the historical legacy to the prevailing Islamophobia and clashes over the Rohingya identity. It traces the mid-17th century Mughal military campaign under Aurangzeb to Arakan territories and the Rikhane Muslim efforts during World War II, and thereafter, to secede as having left an indelible mark on the psyche of the nation and being the driving force behind the strife. Entrenched Islamophobia in a predominantly Buddhist society and state exists and the Rohingya are viewed as a threat to Buddhist faith and culture, seeking Myanmar’s Islamization. The Rohingya identity has been contested as a political construct of the 1950s to carve an autonomous region in northern Rakhine or amalgamate within then East Pakistan. The government’s move to ban the term ‘Rohingya’, referring to them as “Bengalis” implying they belong in Bangladesh, during the 2014 census, treated them as illegal immigrants, justifying their disenfranchisement which resulted from revoking their right to vote in the 2015 election. The name Rohingya, and desire for recognition as an accepted ethnicity, backed by militant activity and calls for international intervention, is seen as a separatist agenda by other means. A wide chasm exists in the viewpoints of the western world and humanitarian groups seeing them as the world’s most persecuted minority, while Myanmar’s establishment and people perceiving them a foreign group with a separatist agenda, fuelled by Islam, and funded from overseas. Reconciling such a charged and polarised narrative will prove to be a challenge and it brings Bangladesh and Myanmar on opposing sides in conflict with each other. Having traced the genesis of the crisis, the next step will be to identify various dimensions of India’s national security interests and concerns which can get impacted by the crisis, if unmitigated.

**CHAPTER : UNDERSTANDING INDIA’S NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS**

This chapter will give the overall perspective of India’s national security dimensions. There is no documented National Security Strategy to be referred to and needs to rely on an understanding of various government articulations. The paper is not seeking to create a comprehensive national security strategy, which pervades the entire spectrum of politico-economic-social and environmental dimensions. Instead, the paper will focus on those dimensions of national security which are impacted by the emerging crisis. Of particular concern is the role of China, besides the interplay between India-Bangladesh-Myanmar, the main protagonists.

In order to understand the magnitude of the unfolding crisis and its fallout on India and the South Asia, an overall perspective of India’s national security and national interests impacted need comprehension. The seventh-largest country in the world by area, the second-most populous country with over 1.3 billion people, and the most populous democracy in the world, India is a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic governed under a parliamentary system consisting of 29 states and 7 union territories. It has been acknowledged for its pluralistic, multilingual, and multi-ethnic society. India has been home to the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation and a region of historic trade routes and vast empires. Four religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism - originated here, whereas Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam arrived in the 1st millennium CE and also shaped the region's diverse culture. Gradually annexed by and brought under the administration of the British East India Company from the early 18th century and administered directly by the United Kingdom after the Indian Rebellion of 1857, India became an independent nation in 1947 after a struggle for independence that was marked by non-violent resistance led by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation. The National Vision of the Republic of India with reference to core values and international standing can be articulated as under: -

(a) Reinforce as a secure, stable, secular and democratic nation based on the ideals of justice, equality, freedom and opportunity whilst intensifying inclusive economic growth, providing dignity to each Indian, upholding the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution, realising the potential of each Indian and every national, state and parasternal organisation in the country.

(b) Foster nationhood that will preserve our unity whilst driving all Indians towards embracing our core national values of peace, purity, brotherhood, harmony, tolerance and knowledge, with our people better educated, healthier and more prosperous than at any time in our long history.

(c) Fortify India’s rightful place in the polycentric international order with the strengthening of our land and maritime borders, escalating economic might with a strong and resolute voice in international fora, steering global conversation in favour of the comity of nations and humanity.

**National Interests**

India’s national interests are those ‘key areas of national endeavour’ wherein securing of competitive advantage is considered essential for survival, growth and achievement of national aims and the ultimate realisation of national aspirations and vision. India’s diverse federation, with cultural, political and ideological factors results in internal security situation being equal, if not more, critical to external factors, calling for innovative processes to address them. A careful look at **India’s national interests** show that the **Rohingya crisis, and its fallout, impacts virtually the entire spectrum of interests manifesting** as follows:-

(a) Maintenance of territorial integrity, **internal stability** and ensuring a strong and resilient India.

(b) Prosperity and **strong economy** for ensuring social security, food security, education, employment generation and poverty elimination.

(c) Strengthen positive and **mutually beneficial relations with neighbours** through a **foreign policy based on enlightened national interest**.

(d) Ensure energy security as an engine for growth in the industrial, manufacturing and trade sectors; **security of Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs)**.

(e) Remain **alert to opportunities and challenges that arise as the result of transformation in the regional and global political and security environment in order to ensure lasting peace and security** for our nation.

(f) Inclusive growth for all sections of society towards **social cohesion, national integration and religious tolerance**.

(g) Promoting universal **values of democracy and human rights**.

India stands as a giant in the comity of nations comprising South Asia (which does not include China), as her physical size as well as her geo-material and geo-demographic base exceed capacities of all her smaller neighbours. India is strategically located next to the most important waterways of the world. India’s increasing sense of responsibility and capability in effectively addressing transnational issues is the most pertinent development. Traditional and continuous focus on international organizations, institutions and causes has been a cornerstone of Indian foreign policy objectives. Whether through the non-proliferation and disarmament regimes, such as NAM and SAARC or through UN reform in general, **India has sought to lead the developing nations into a position of power through unity**. India believes that **peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit are preconditions for India to meet its core national security objectives**. The ever-increasing geo strategic interests and influence of India and the number of players and nations operating in the area results in **conflicting interest and with inherent contradictions and conflicts**.

An internal scan reveals that a resurgent, politically stable and economically booming India co-exists with an India struggling to break the poverty barriers and has a long way to transit from developing to a developed country. The internal taxonomy gets influenced by various **factors related to security and law and order such as insurgencies in J&K and NE India**, Left Wing Extremism in the heart of India, **internal strife in Darjeeling (West Bengal) and the Assam due to illegal immigration** and numerous Non-state actors operating within India to include SIMI, IM etc. On the external front, the two key strands which define the taxonomy are **political instability in India’s immediate neighbourhood** and the presence of various nuclear powers in the region.

**Location and Geo Strategic Position**. India lies to the North of the equator between 6° 44' and 35° 30' North latitude and 68° 7' and 97° 25' East longitude. Bounded by the seas on all sides except the North, where the Himalayas make the country virtually inaccessible from the North, have given the country the title of a subcontinent.

(a) **Immediate Neighbourhood**. India shares land borders with Pakistan to the West, the People’s Republic of China, Nepal and Bhutan to the North East and Myanmar and Bangladesh to the East. In addition, Andaman and Nicobar Islands share a maritime border with Thailand and Indonesia. India is in the vicinity of Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The **region of South Asia is rife with problems of large populations which are generally poor, low levels of human development** and increasing instances of natural disasters. On the other hand, **terrorism and internal security is a challenge that afflicts almost all nations of South Asia** especially Pakistan, **Bangladesh and Myanmar**. Hence, the region poses significant challenges to India, some emanating from within and some from outside the country.

(b) **Indian Ocean**. India’s traditionally land-oriented strategic vision has expanded in the past two decades to place greater weight on its maritime environment, and the Indian Ocean is now looked on as part of the inner ring of India’s security environment. It is also the pathway to international trade, especially to secure energy supplies, as well as a **potential arena for competition with a rising China**, and a setting for security cooperation with the United States.

**National Security Threats**

**Security of Frontiers**. A peaceful security environment, allowing it to concentrate on economic growth, social justice, scientific and technological development are an imperative.

(a) India has 7600 km of seacoast and shares 15200 kilometres of land frontier with six nations - Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, **Bangladesh and Myanmar**.

(b) Disputes over the state of Jammu and Kashmir have led to hostilities between India and Pakistan and have led to four major wars with Pakistan.

(c) The 2000 km long border with China have witnessed considerable friction and the boundary has not been formalised.

**Porous Borders**. The land borders India shares with it’s neighbours have extremely inhospitable terrain, making the task of guarding them an onerous task, particularly is support is either not forthcoming or ambivalent. These are often exploited by insurgent groups, operating from foreign soil. While terrorism emanating from Pakistan is actively abetted, terrorist presence in Bangladesh and Myanmar does not have State support but flourishes due to their limitations to crackdown. Thus, seeking cooperation in jointly tackling the scrounge becomes an essential component of security vital national security interests.

**Regional Threats to National Security**. Ties with countries having a stake in IOR need to be bolstered keeping Indian national interest paramount. A growing India cannot afford to lose out to proactive Chinese maritime policies. The growing might of the Chinese Navy and and Chinese soft power engagement with military assistance to IOR nations will unhinge Indian interests. Additional threats that impinge on security are:-

(a) **China-Pak Collusion**. The long-standing cooperation between the two countries, especially in the fields of military equipment, support in international for a and blind eye to terrorist activities; has vastly increased external and internal threat to India. A collusive two-front war would be one of the greatest military threats to India.

(b) **Islamic Fundamentalism**. Rise of fundamentalist movement like ISIS, Al Qaeda, Taliban etc are threats in terms of **radicalization of India’s huge Muslim population** as well as **support to insurgent groups** in Kashmir and across the country.

(c) **Illegal Immigration**. **Illegal immigrants from Bangladesh** and Nepal are causes of **social unrest, drain on economy and likely breeding grounds of crime and fundamentalism**.

(d) **Drugs & Smuggling**. Movement of **drugs etc from Myanmar, Nepal, and Bangladesh is a threat to India’s economic and social fabric**. These routes are also **exploited by insurgents for smuggling of weapons**.

(e) **Inadequate integration with South East (SE) Asia**. India’s Look East policy has not translated into much tangible action. Further failure to act may result in isolation from SE Asian nations and failure of the policy.

56. **Ethnic Fault lines**. During the recorded history of 3000 years, India has never been a 'cohesive unit' except for brief periods during Ashoka, Mughal and British eras. The Indian **caste system** had blighted India, which did not allow formation of 'One India' for centuries and **inequalities** have been rampant and conspicuous among all segments of Indian population. The **levels of Human development Indices (HDI) have been abysmally low**. There is still some way before the disparate elements loosen their disintegrating facts and become integrated elements of the pluri-lndian social system and multi-cultural nationhood. The Constitution of India has indeed been a powerful medium of national integration through the democratic process.

179. **Religious Divide**. India is a cauldron of several major religions including Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity. **Religious plurality** is maintained by a **secular and religiously tolerant constitution** and broad religious representation in various aspects of society including the government. However, at times, **sporadic and sometimes serious acts of religious communal violence** tend to occur as the root causes of religious violence often run deep in history, religious activities, and politics of the nation.

182. **National Cohesion and Regionalism.** Being a very large country, regionalism is a major challenge for India. **Growing regionalism**, has the **potential to wreak havoc in the peripheral regions** of the country like Kashmir and the **North East** and needs to be addressed on priority. India is home to over 450 languages, but no common language is spoken across its length and breadth. The Constitution of India recognises 22 official languages of India. Regionalism, at times, for political ends can be exploited as a divisive tool, making national interests hostage to regional interests. Tamil interests in South India vis-à-vis Sri Lanka, West Bengal’s interests in East India vis-à-vis water sharing and illegal immigration with Bangladesh are to name a few which impact.

**Refugee Crisis and Security Dilemmas – Historical Context**

**History of Refugees in India**. India has a long history of refugees including from the time of Partition and independence, Tibetan refugees including HH The Dalai Lama, from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and illegal Bangladeshi immigration into the North-eastern regions, which have had massive implications for national security and, thus, the current crisis necessitates deft handling. It may be recollected that the various refugee milestones have left an indelible scar on the collective psyche. The horrors of partition, at the time of independence, and the large-scale killings that unfolded on both sides of the borders, resulted in mass migration of respective communities fleeing to their respective ‘nations’. The settlement of the Hindus and other minorities, who fled Pakistan at the time of **partition left an imprint on the generation which has allowed a deep-rooted animosity** and mistrust to prevail on both sides of the borders. Domestic compulsions have the potential of forcing policy decisions which may not always be in consonance with larger strategic interests and in extreme cases even impel the nation towards hostilities and conflict. The illegal migration of Bangladeshi Muslims into the restive north-eastern region of India was the primary causes of an ‘anti-foreigner’ targeting insurgency and the birth of the ULFA insurgent movement. The continued presence of illegal migrants, at times encouraged and shielded by political elements for ‘narrow vote-bank gains’, have been a source of polarisation resulting from demographic imbalances.In fact, the recent efforts of the State government to identify non-citizens and create the National Registry of Citizens (NRC) has been the centre of heated secular versus non-secular debate, exposing the fragility of the social fabric and it’s vulnerability, even on matters concerning national security. **Historical references** are being highlighted, not with the intent of analysing the events *per se* but with the **purpose of reflecting on domestic ethnic and religious compulsions impacting policy formulation**.

**Indo-Pak War of 1971 and Creation of Bangladesh – A Historical Analogy**. The Rohingya refugee crisis finds numerous historical parallels, underscoring the various dimensions and security implications for India. The ethnic cleansing of Bengalis in then East Pakistan beginning March 26, 1971 with the launch of Operation Searchlight,[[42]](#footnote-42) as the West Pakistan military crackdown on the Eastern wing of the nation to suppress Bengali calls for self-determination rights, caused a massive problem to India, resulted in the 1971 Indo-Pak War and subsequent liberation and independence of Bangladesh. The New York Times, on 06 October 1971, had reported on the developing humanitarian crisis in India as a result of “a reported 30,000 East Pakistani refugees crossing into India daily to join the millions already here, tensions are building in the overcrowded refugee camps and between the refugees and local people. India's relief operation has been under immense strain for months, ever since people began to flee the Pakistani Government's military action aimed at crushing the Bengali independence movement in East Pakistan. Since the military action began in March, according to the Indians, some nine million have come here.”[[43]](#footnote-43) The then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, while addressing an audience at Columbia University's School of International Affairs, stated that the flow of refugees from East Pakistan had resulted in a “terrific, burden” on India and posed “a real threat to our political stability and even our independence” and warned that “the limits of [India's] endurance had been reached.”[[44]](#footnote-44) A paper by Sonia Cordera, based on recently declassified materials from the Indian government archives and on the private papers of the principal secretary to the Indian prime minister, pointed out that humanitarian considerations compelling India to intervene due to atrocities were one of the reasons for the 1971 war, besides other strategic interests.[[45]](#footnote-45) As per the Diplomatic Bluebook of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan for 1971, the large-scale suppression, by the Pakistan Army, of the Awami League led peoples movement demanding expanded autonomy in East Pakistan resulted in approximately 10 million refugees crossing over into India between March and December 3, 1971 causing serious economic, social and political unrest in India which became the direct cause of the war between India and Pakistan.[[46]](#footnote-46) **Ethnic strife and state action exacerbated a humanitarian crisis which resulted in a major war in the sub-continent, including the risk of superpower confrontation**.[[47]](#footnote-47) The reported conditions of refugees in 1971 “Refugees and local people clash over the scarce firewood for cooking: fights have also occurred when refugees strip food from orchards. Refugee pressures have driven some food prices up, while wage rates have dropped, particularly for unskilled field hands, as the refugees have entered the labour market—despite a Government prohibition—and have offered to work for extremely low pay”.[[48]](#footnote-48) The **reported conditions of the Rohingya refugees within Bangladesh are a replication**, and the **historical example of a humanitarian crisis escalating to hostilities provides an ominous indicator of the potentially hazardous outcomes** from policy which fails to balance the precarious sensitivities with geo-political interests. Ascribing to a purely humanitarian moralistic policy could **potentially result in hostilities between Bangladesh and Myanmar, supported by China, creating an unenviable dilemma for India**.

**Indo-China War of 1962 and Tibetan Refugees**. India’s policy on Tibet and the flight of HH Dalai Lama to India has been attributed by John W. Garver as a cause of the Indo-China War of 1962 and the crushing defeat imposed on India by China.[[49]](#footnote-49) The March 1959 Lhasa uprising against Chinese rule and the subsequent repression by the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) led to the Dalai Lama crossing into India, along with thousands of Tibetans on March 31, 1959 and subsequently welcomed by Nehru and given political asylum.[[50]](#footnote-50) Nehru’s move to accommodate the Dalai Lama was a humiliation for Mao Zedong and resulted in India being perceived as a threat to Chinese rule in Tibet due to support to Tibetan rebels, which became the underlying cause of the 1962 conflict.[[51]](#footnote-51) The accommodation of approximately 100,000 Tibetan refugees, alongwith HH The Dalai Lama, created acrimony with China which manifested in the 1962 Indo-China War and the humiliating defeat India had to suffer and the hostilities still prevail.[[52]](#footnote-52)

**Domestic Compulsions and the Sri Lankan Intervention**. The ethnic strife of the Tamil’s of Sri Lanka, in the north and north-eastern part of Sri Lanka, escalated to an armed insurrection against Buddhist Sinhalese discrimination, in the 1980s, and India unwisely associated itself with the Tamil groups due to inflamed Tamil passions in South India.[[53]](#footnote-53) “More than 1.34 lakh Sri Lankan Tamils crossed the Palk Strait to India between 1983 and 1987 during the first inflow. In three more phases, many more refugees entered India” according to a report in India Today.[[54]](#footnote-54) In an article by A.G. Noorani, he highlights how compulsions of domestic politics and of controlling power equations in the region determined the policies with respect to Sri Lanka, resulting in a series of strategic blunders commencing from resort to exploiting the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a tool to pressurise Sri Lanka:[[55]](#footnote-55)

“Mrs Gandhi’s political alliance with AIADMK [All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] in Madras led by MGR resulted in these arrangements. MGR had to advocate the case of India supporting the Sri Lankan Tamils despite its future negative implications for fear that otherwise the DMK [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagham] leader M. Karunanidhi and other Tamil opposition parties would have accused him of betraying fellow Tamils in Sri Lanka in their hour of trauma and crisis.”

India’s Sri Lanka policy has been characterised by inconsistencies resulting from pressures of domestic compulsions. An intervention, resulting in the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) being entangled with the armed groups, their subsequent withdrawal and the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE, inducing a hands off policy during 1990s and 2000s reflects the inconsistencies.[[56]](#footnote-56) Goodwill accrued from support to Sri Lanka during the final stages of the war and post war financial and humanitarian assistance was fritted when India voted in favour of a UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR) resolution, criticising Sri Lanka’s handling of post-insurgency rehabilitation of the Tamils, in March 2012.[[57]](#footnote-57) G. Parthasarathy, a highly respected diplomat and former ambassador to Pakistan, had warned against the resultant vacuum being filled by other powers, particularly China, in the aftermath of a policy undermining Sri Lankan interests by economic measures to pressurise them on matters relating to Tamil rehabilitation and devolution of power.[[58]](#footnote-58) India’s UNHRC votes in 2012 and 2013 can be attributed to the massive protests that took place in Tamil Nadu and to the DMK’s threat of withdrawal from the Congress led ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition.[[59]](#footnote-59) The **foreign policy choice guided by provincial politics**, as argued by a section, was undertaken due to **pressure of the governments Tamil coalition partners** and has **allowed the Chinese to consolidate their influence in the island nation, located along strategic sea lanes of communication**. Thus, **narrow domestic dissent in southern India allowed national interests to be compromised**. Chinese unstinted support against the LTTE and India’s half measure hesitant material support for the war effort allowed China to get a foothold in our strategic neighbourhood. India has **legitimate security interests** in the region and legitimate concerns in the welfare of the Tamil citizens of Sri Lanka and both seem to have been **compromised, guided by narrow policies of ethnic solidarity**. The hesitant policy is once again attributed to balancing domestic compulsions of solidarity with the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. Domestic compulsions arising from affinity and **solidarity, being inflamed, both for and against, in the current Rohingya crisis needs to be guarded against to ensure that strategic interests are not compromised by policy adopted to satiate domestic electoral polity**.

**The Ethical Question**. India’s stance during the unfolding of the crisis does raise a **moral dilemma for a nation aspiring for regional leadership**. Suhasini Haider, in an article in The Hindu, slams the Indian response claiming that though India has offered **humanitarian assistance, it is relatively meagre** as compared to her response to previous disasters such as the Tsunami in 2004, 2008 Cyclone Nargis that hit Myanmar, and the 2015 Nepal earthquake.[[60]](#footnote-60) She disapproved of India’s stance in the **UNGA, where it abstained in the vote calling for an end to military action**. India’s stance, she criticises, is detrimental to it’s interests as it **cedes space to other nations** citing U.K. hosting a meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly with Myanmar’s National Security Adviser and Bangladesh’s Foreign Minister, attended by senior officials from Indonesia, Turkey, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Denmark and the U.S. **India’s ambitions for a permanent seat** at the Security Council too would face criticism based on it’s **ambivalent stance** on the unfolding tragedy. Though India is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, it has long hosted refugees from Tibet, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. She argues that the **stance to deport the Rohingya refugees does not** sit well with it’s **image of a pluralistic multi religious nation and the high moral position** it has often associated itself with. The impact is of **eroding it’s regional and Asian leadership position**.

India is seen as a Nation upholding moral values and proports to follow an ethical foreign policy. India’s stance on the Rohingya issue from a humanitarian perspective will be under intense scrutiny, having implications on its moral position in the international arena. The ethical stand axiomatically works against the interests of the military establishment in Myanmar and has potential of creating a vacuum for China to exploit. A realist foreign policy impacts India’s relationship with Bangladesh as dalliance in measures to pressurise Myanmar to contain the Rohingya problem implies not supporting Bangladesh in her moment of crisis. The pro-India Sheikh Hasina establishment would suffer in domestic politics and pave the way for an anti-India political dispensation led by Begum Khalida Zia. The unfolding crisis, besides a humanitarian issue, seems to be creating a no-win situation for India and potential ramifications which adversely impact national security from a military-diplomatic and economic perspective.

India has to be particularly wary in ensuring its interests are protected and needs to balance geo-strategic interests and domestic concerns in it’s foreign policy to prevent other players leveraging the situation for geopolitical gains, at the cost of India’s interests. An effective approach is needed to ensure helping prevent renewed conflicts in Rakhine, facilitate the safe return of the refugees to Myanmar, and mitigate any potential terror-related activities involving the Rohingya refugees. The moral and ethical dimension creates yet another level of tension in the conflicting narrative. The role that India is plays in finding a solution to the crisis and explores ways to further deepen and expand its engagements needs balancing with its long tradition of dealing with refugees and maintaining a leadership role in the region.

**Chapter Summation**

Having traced the genesis of the crisis, the next step was to identify various dimensions of India’s national security interests and concerns which can get impacted by the crisis, if unmitigated. This chapter gave the overall perspective of India’s national security dimensions. There is no documented National Security Strategy to be referred to and needs to rely on an understanding of various government articulations. The paper is not seeking to create a comprehensive national security strategy, which pervades the entire spectrum of politico-economic-social and environmental dimensions. Instead, the paper will focus on those dimensions of national security which are impacted by the emerging crisis. Of particular concern is the role of China, besides the interplay between India-Bangladesh-Myanmar, the main protagonists.

The threats to various dimensions of national interests and threats likely to be impacted by the ongoing Rohingya crisis, besides preserving territorial sovereignty, were summarised as guarding against exudations of terrorism, fundamentalism and illegal immigration emanating from across the borders, particularly Bangladesh and Myanmar. A mutually beneficial foreign policy is essential to maintain peaceful co-existence in order to achieve core national security objectives. The looming threat of Chinese domination and influence is a critical obstacle to our path of economic growth, which in turn is an imperative for social security and poverty alleviation. Internal stability and social cohesion are faced with an onslaught from regionalism and communal divisions. Resilience against these threats are essential to prevent domestic compulsions holding national interests hostage.

The chapter then traced the history of refugees in India, post-independence, and the impact they have had on national security. These have manifested in the trauma of partition, the ethical dimension of hosting HH The Dalai Lama and Tibetan refugees facing the wrath of Chinese aggression, the 1971 war with Pakistan and the subsequent liberation of Bangladesh as a result of atrocities and large-scale migration of refugees from East Pakistan to India, intervention in Sri Lanka in solidarity with Tamils of South India. Domestic compulsions of ethnic solidarity have held foreign policy hostage at times and resulted in sacrificing national interests, at times to the determent of security considerations. Having traced the imperatives of refugee situations, it then goes on to bring out the conflicting nature of policy direction ie. reconciling the ethical and moralistic dimension, emanating from the Nehruvian tradition vis-à-vis hard realism.

The widening of faultlines, as a result of convergence of external and internal threats, preventing economic growth, needs to be mitigated. Core values of upholding morality and values of democracy conflicting with geo-political realities place an unenviable dilemma for preserving national interests. The impact on various facets including diplomatic, domestic political compulsions, humanitarian, security and geopolitical considerations will need to be balanced and preserved.

The next chapter will take a look at the nature of the relationship which India shares with both Myanmar and Bangladesh and the various dimensions of security and cooperation which need to be preserved from an adverse impact of the fallout of the Rohingya crisis.

**CHAPTER – WHAT’S AT STAKE**

This chapter will now delve into the particular arenas of the relationship with the immediate neighbours which potentially can be impacted by the handling or mishandling of the situation. First, it will explore the impact on Bangladesh itself and identify the areas of cooperation with India which would face ripple shocks, even if they are not disrupted. Thereafter, the nature of the relationship with Myanmar will be studied, highlighting the particular aspects which bear serious consequences in the event of disruption or deterioration of ties.

**Bangladesh**

397. **Bangladesh shares border with India on the west, north, and east, with Myanmar on the southeast and Bay of Bengal at its south.** Bangladesh is ethnically homogeneous with the Bengali ethno-linguistic group comprising 98% of the estimated 156 million population. 90% of Bangladeshis are Muslims and the remainders are mostly Hindus, Christians and Buddhists. Since the nation’s formation in 1971, the government of Bangladesh has undergone many changes. A secular parliamentary form of democracy was established by the 1972 constitution, but it was suspended in late 1974 and replaced in January 1975 by a presidential form of government. The 1972 constitution, as amended, was suspended again in 1981 after a coup d’état. The constitution was reinstated in 1986 and a democracy has been in place since then. Despite serious problems related to a dysfunctional political system, weak governance, and pervasive corruption, **Bangladesh remains one of the few democracies in the Muslim world**. However, democratic institutions and practices remain weak. The nation is going through a **process of positive stabilisation process of democracy** and can richly benefit from India’s support as the world’s largest democracy.

The economy is largely dependent on external assistance, and India being a major donor has substantial leverage. Unprecedented **growth of population has retarded the pace of development** and Bangladesh is yet to find a solution to its economic problems. It results in **illegal migration of population to India** for a better life. The problem of illegal trans-border infiltration from Bangladesh into the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal is a serious issue. According to Home Ministry estimates there are about 12 million Bangladeshi illegal migrants in West Bengal alone. **Water is another major problem**. It is scarce when needed most and abundant to the scale of devastating magnitude when not needed. Water sharing agreements makes it entirely dependent on India, being the upper riparian state and disagreements can impact bilateral relations. Having been formed in the delta of some of the major rivers of the sub-continent, this low-lying land is under the perpetual threat of floods. Peculiar environmental conditions also make it a highly cyclone prone zone, **contributing to it’s weakness**. The question of activities of **Pakistani ISI in Bangladesh and the relative ease with which insurgent groups active in North-East India have operated from Bangladesh and persistence of activities related to terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism remain an enduring threat to Bangladesh from within and to India and the region externally**.

**Contours of Impact of the Rohingya Refugee Crisis on Bangladesh**. The majority of refugees fleeing Myanmar find refuge in Bangladesh. The humanitarian crisis, precipitated by the mass of refugees, necessitates an internal security concern focus for the government, which makes the situation ripe for exploitation and radicalisation with concerns being raised over the infiltration of Islamic extremism amongst the Rohingyas, who have grown increasingly desperate over their plight.[[61]](#footnote-61) Sheikh Hasina’s secular Awami League government in Bangladesh initially proposed joint military operations with Myanmar against the ARSA due to concerns about the long standing relationship between Rohingya political or armed groups and the Jamaat-e-Islami, an ally of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).[[62]](#footnote-62) The pressures of managing the strains of the increased volumes had led to the government even mulling an option, in 2013-14, to relocate the undocumented Myanmar nationals to Thengar Char in the Bay of Bengal, but was been stalled due to outcry of the remote island being prone to flooding during the monsoons and are "uninhabitable".[[63]](#footnote-63) Aparupa Bhattacherjee, in his paper Rohingya Crisis: Policy Options and Analysis, has charted the contours of the rapid influx and the resultant impact on the socio-politico-economic structures of Bangladesh:[[64]](#footnote-64)

(a) **Social Tensions**. Though Bangladesh has hosted Rohingya refugees since 1978, the latest round has generated substantial debate as a result of media coverage. On one level it has **garnered the sympathy of the urban middle classes due to the human stories of atrocities and religious affinity**. Bangladesh has witnessed protest marches by the civil societies such as Gono Jagoron Moncho and religious group like Hefazat-e-Islam on October 6, 2017 in Cox’s Bazar. This is a forebearer of the politicisation of the issue and the likelihood of it assuming an electoral issue during the 2018 elections. On the other hand, **influx of refugees into Bangladesh has been a perpetual problem with continued residency** into second generation. Bangladesh is itself home to a population of approximately 163 million with very low human development indicators, and is **struggling in coping up with the unwanted fresh influx**. The competition with local inhabitants in Chittagong leads to **encroachments and conflict, while t**he **local economy, dependent on tourists, has been impacted** resulting from increase in **petty crime and lack of security**. A fallout of the influx has been a **rise in smuggling and human trafficking**.

(b) **Economic Tensions**. The upsurge of refugees has been a massive burden on the national economy of Bangladesh. The underdeveloped economy is **struggling with the financial burden** and accruing demand-supply gap for basic necessities of food, water and medical supplies. Though the aid from foreign nations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) is partially bridging the gap, the magnitude of the requirements is quite overwhelming. The **decline of the local tourist industry and the surge in pricing and inflation has resulted in substantial economic stress**.

(c) **Demographic Challenge**. Bangladesh is faced with a **youth bulge and high unemployment** with approximately two million in the working age population as per the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistic (BBS).[[65]](#footnote-65) The cauldron of **jobless uneducated youth and refugees** is ripe picking for **recruitment by smuggling, crime and terrorist groups**. Although ARSA and previously HAY have denied any linkages to any international and terrorist groups, but link to Pakistan (the leader Ata Ullah is a Rohingya from Karachi and also been brought up in Saudi Arabia) cannot be ruled out completely. The women refugees are particularly susceptible to **human trafficking and victims of crime**, creating a **severe law and order problem** for the local authorities.

(d) **Environmental Impact**. The influx of refugees and the settlement camps is bringing to the fore **man-animal conflict, encroaching upon elephant trails, agricultural fields and natural habitat**. This further exacerbates the local tensions, sowing seeds of discord and conflict.

(e) **Risk of Conflict**. The risk of unmitigated exodus and resultant stresses within Bangladesh have the potential of escalating tensions. A **historical example of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war and the creation of Bangladesh** highlights the **possibility of a humanitarian crisis escalating to armed conflict** between two neighbours in the event of inactivity or inability to contain the crisis, and must not be overlooked even though outbreak of military hostilities between Myanmar and Bangladesh are not on the horizon.

**Bangladesh’s Cooperation and Scope of Relations with India**. The magnitude and scope of relationships with India take shape from India’s role in the liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan during the 1971 war. The c**lose relationship that ensued is symbiotic of an umbilical nature**. India was the first country to recognize Bangladesh as a separate and independent state and established diplomatic relations with the country immediately after its independence in December 1971. The relationship, as articulated in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), between India and Bangladesh is anchored in history, culture, language and shared values of secularism, democracy, and countless other commonalities between the two countries. It is based on sovereignty, equality, trust, understanding and win-win partnership that goes far beyond a strategic partnership:[[66]](#footnote-66)

(a) **Security & Border Management**. India and Bangladesh share 4096.7 km. of border, which is the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours. The India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) came into force following the exchange of instruments of ratification in June 2015 and implemented by November 30, 2015. A number of agreements related to security cooperation have been signed between both the countries. The Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) signed in 2011 aims to synergize the efforts of both the Border Guarding Forces for checking cross border illegal activities and crimes as well as for maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the India-Bangladesh border. The settlement of the maritime boundary arbitration between India and Bangladesh, as per UNCLOS award of July 7, 2014, has paved the way for the economic development.

(b) **Sharing of River Waters**. India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers. A bilateral Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) is working since June 1972 to maintain liaison between the two countries to maximize benefits from common river systems, including the Ganga Water Treaty of 1996.

(c) **Bilateral Trade and Investment**. The first Trade Agreement between India and Bangladesh was signed in 1972. The India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement was last renewed during the PM’s visit in June 2015 for a period of 5 years with a provision for auto renewal. Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh has grown steadily over the last decade. In the **last five years, total trade between the two countries has grown by more than 17%.** India’s exports to Bangladesh in the period July 2016 – March 2017 stood at US$ 4489.30 million and imports from Bangladesh during FY 2016-17 stood at US$ 672.40 million. Indian Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Bangladesh reached US$ 88.0 million in 2015-16. During PM Sheikh Hasina’s visit in April 2017, 13 agreements worth around US$ 10 billion of mainly Indian investment in power and energy sectors in Bangladesh were signed.

(d) **India’s Economic Assistance to Bangladesh**. India has extended 3 Lines of Credits (LOC) to Bangladesh in the last seven years amounting to US$ 8 billion. This makes **Bangladesh the largest recipient of LOC funds from India till date and grant assistance to Bangladesh for projects under ‘Aid to Bangladesh’**, being provided in addition to LOC.

(e) **Power and Energy Sector Cooperation**. **Cooperation in power sector has become one of the hallmarks of India Bangladesh relations.** Bangladesh is currently importing about 660 MW of power from India with supply of another 500 MW expected to begin shortly. During Bangladesh PM’s visit in April 2017, agreements for generation/ supply/ financing of more than 3600 MW electricity were signed between Indian public /private companies and Bangladesh side. Energy sector cooperation between India and Bangladesh has also seen considerable progress in the last two years.

(f) **Connectivity**. India-Bangladesh is a good example of connectivity through all modes of transport. The movement of goods by road is operationalised through 36 functional Land Customs Stations (LCSs) and 2 Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) along the border. The **Protocol on Inland Water Trade and Transit (PIWTT)** permits **movement of goods over barges/vessels from India through the river systems** of Bangladesh. Coastal Shipping Agreement signed during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh, in June 2015, has also enabled **direct sea movement of containerized/bulk/dry cargo between the two countries**. In February 2017, container ship services have started between Kolkata and Pangaon (which is just around 20 km from Dhaka) under this framework. A **seventh new rail-link** between Agartala and Akhaura is being financed under grant assistance of India. There are **regular bus services** between Kolkata-Dhaka, Shillong-Dhaka and Agartala-Kolkata via Dhaka. A new bus service (Dhaka-Khulna-Kolkata) was launched during PM Sheikh Hasina’s visit in April 2017. The Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal – Motor Vehicle Agreement (BBINMVA) is expected to significantly boost connectivity by road.

**Relations with Myanmar**

Myanmar, is the largest country by geographical area in mainland Southeast Asia. Burma achieved independence from Great Britain as the “Union of Burma” on January 4, 1948. Subsequently, changes to its name took place to the present “Union of Myanmar”. India and Myanmar share long **heritage of historical, cultural, ethnic and religious linkages. Buddhism took roots in Myanmar from India** and Bodh Gaya, the fountainhead of Buddhism, is an important place of pilgrimage for Buddhists from Myanmar and other regions. Myanmar shares a **border of approximately 1600 kilometres** with the Indian states of Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. The 1951 Treaty of Friendship laid the foundation of the relationship, which has developed into one of strategic importance.

**Myanmar’s Cooperation and Scope of Relations with India**. On September 6, 2017 the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held wide-ranging talks with Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and 11 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) were signed on wide ranging issues from strengthening maritime security cooperation to sharing of information on cargo shipping, Election Commissions, fields of health and medicine, IT skills and women police training.[[67]](#footnote-67) During the visit, the Indian Prime Minister welcomed progress on infrastructure linking the two countries. The finished **expansion of the port of Sittwe** on Myanmar's western coast and the **completion of an inland river terminal at Paletwa**, which were launched in 2010, will **facilitate the flow of goods to seven north-eastern Indian states, sandwiched between Bangladesh and Myanmar**, from Sittwe to the Paletwa terminal via a **navigational channel along the Kaladan River** and further along the planned **road connecting Paletwa with the Indian state of Mizoram**.[[68]](#footnote-68) Upgrading infrastructure at the existing trade route Moreh-Tamu, is hand in hand with discussions on a trade zone at Behiang, bordering Chin state. In October 2014, the Shipping Corporation of India launched a bi-weekly service that begins at Chennai and ends at Colombo (following the route Chennai-Krishnapatnam-Yangon-Colombo). While Northeast India along with Calcutta will benefit immensely from increasing trade via the land route, greater sea connectivity would be a boon for Chennai.[[69]](#footnote-69) As per the Ministry of External Affairs, **commercial cooperation and assistance for infrastructure development has been substantial**:[[70]](#footnote-70)

(a) **Commercial Cooperation**. Bilateral trade has been growing steadily to reach US$2178.44 million (2016-17), of which **Indian exports amounted to US$1111.19 million and Indian's imports to US$1067.25 million**. India is the **fifth largest trading partner of Myanmar** but trade remains below potential. India is presently the **tenth largest investor** with an approved investment of US$ 740.64 million by 25 Indian companies (as of 30 Jun 2017). Most of India's investments have been in **oil & gas sector**. Indian companies have evinced interest in investing in Myanmar and major contracts have been won by Indian companies. Besides normal trade, both sides have also taken steps to bolster trade across the land border. **Cooperation in the banking sector** is crucial for investment and trade. Myanmar is an **important partner in energy relations**.

(b) **Infrastructure Development and Assistance**. India has committed to provide **grant-in-aid assistance amounting to almost US$ 1726 million**. These include support for the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project; the Trilateral Highway Project, which is an East-West corridor connecting Northeast India with Myanmar and Thailand; the Rhi-Tiddim road; supply of Bailey bridges; assistance for border area development in the Naga Self Administered Zone by financing bridges, roads, schools and small health centres; assistance in setting up institutions for higher learning and research.

(c) **Enhancing Cultural Ties**. India and Myanmar share **close cultural ties and a sense of deep kinship given India's Buddhist heritage**. Building on this shared heritage, India is undertaking some key initiatives: Restoration of the Ananda Temple in Bagan, 16 foot replica of the Sarnath Buddha Statue which has been installed at the premises of Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon, the ‘Samvad-II’ Interfaith dialogue held on 6-7 August 2017 in Yangon are to name a few.

**Dimensions of Strategic Concern with Myanmar**

**Look East to Act East**. The PV Narshimarao government in **1991, embarked on a “Look East” Policy with the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN)** to forge economic and commercial links and expand strategic and security cooperation, which was then expanded and built upon by successive governments.[[71]](#footnote-71) The current government has undertaken to **enhance it under its “Neighbourhood First” and “Act East” policy**.[[72]](#footnote-72) **Myanmar is the only ASEAN country adjoining India** and, therefore, the **gateway to South East Asia** with which India is seeking **greater economic integration through India's 'Look East' and now 'Act East' Policy**.[[73]](#footnote-73) **Business opportunities** that emerge from a surging economy in Myanmar also provide new opportunities for engagement. Myanmar plays a **critical role in the realisation of India’s eastward integration** and is important from India’s external and internal perspective. It forms the gateway to South East Asia and at the same time is **crucial for development of India’s North East**. India has signed several agreements with Myanmar to boost various aspects such as trade and investments, commerce, natural resources, education, culture, tourism etc.[[74]](#footnote-74) India and Myanmar are both **members of various cooperative multilateral arrangements** in the region such as ASEAN, Mekong- Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in 1997 which is a regional organization comprising seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity ie. five deriving from South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.[[75]](#footnote-75)

**Security Cooperation with Myanmar**. The relationship with the Government of Myanmar has resulted in close cooperation in the security domain. **India’s borders with Myanmar** are extremely difficult with inhospitable terrain, which is highly **conducive for insurgent and terrorists** to operate from, leading to concerns of a **transnational nature**. **India’s northeast**, has long been home to a **range of insurgent groups** who have been fighting for autonomy or secession for decades, one of which, the Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K), is largely **based in Myanmar**. Myanmar has **cooperated closely in helping India combat the various groups** in the north-eastern region of India which **operate from areas along the borders**. In June 2015, the **Indian Army had launched a strike** along the borders against insurgent groups in **retaliation to a deadly ambush** which had resulted in the deaths of 18 Indian soldiers, one of the worst in recent times.[[76]](#footnote-76) On November 20, 2017 the India-Myanmar Bilateral Military Exercise (IMBAX-2017), the first **military training exercise** between India and Myanmar on United National Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO), was held in India.[[77]](#footnote-77) The **defence relationship** between both countries is an essential component of India’s broader foreign policy objective. India and Myanmar regularly interact at very high levels. In a recent meeting between the Indian Union Home Secretary Rajiv Mehrishi with a Myanmar delegation led by Deputy Minister of Home Affairs Major General Aung Soe, measures to enhance **cooperation to check activities of insurgent groups along the border, arms smuggling, intelligence sharing among security agencies, checking wildlife smuggling and issues relating to border management including joint inspection and construction of border pillars** were discussed.[[78]](#footnote-78) The delegation met with the Indian Union Home Minister, underscoring the importance of the nature and scope of cooperation. The Northeast Security Review meeting was presided over by India’s Home Minister Rajnath Singh, on 16 May 2017 in New Delhi, which assessed five districts in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland as the hub of insurgents in the Northeast resulting from porous borders with Myanmar.[[79]](#footnote-79) **Chinese assistance to the North-eastern groups can destabilise the region further to undo whatever success in counterinsurgency operations have accrued due to the cooperation** extended by Bangladesh and Myanmar. Thus, the **strategic relationship with Myanmar becomes extremely important**.

**Arena of Strategic Competition with China**. 416. Myanmar has **historical political and trade relations with China**. China’s strategic priority is to prevent Myanmar from falling under the influence of a power hostile to its interests. In pursuit of that goal, Mao Zedong and his successors offered packages of arms and military training to the Burmese, first to the insurgent Burma Communist Party (until 1989), and then to the Yangon government. Yunnan’s minorities—ethnic Wa, Tai, Kokang, Kachin, Lisu, and Akha—have moved across the border since the 1980s to buy land and open small businesses, accompanied by larger corporate investors from Kunming and more distant cities. In return for various economic concessions (and support in the UN), China seems to have been given **preferential access to exploit Myanmar's natural resources and port facilities along Myanmar's coast**. Chinese investment includes **involvement in the Shwe gas project off Myanmar's western coast**. China began (in September 2009) the laying of 1,100 km long, **parallel oil and natural gas pipelines from the deep-sea port at Kyaukpyu (on Myanmar’s Arakan coast in the Bay of Bengal) to Kunming**. PLAN is also associated with **Myanmar naval bases at Munaung, Hainggyi, Katan Island, Zadalki Island**. China also intends to **construct a road and waterway link from its Southern Yuan province to Myanmar port of Yangon, which will provide it direct access to the Bay of Bengal**.

422. India’s interests in Myanmar are key to it’s Act East Policy in integrating with South East Asia and becomes an arena of conflicting interests with China for regional status. As India and China compete for maritime influence in the Indian Ocean, they will soon be **face to face in Myanmar’s Sittwe deep water port in the Bay of Bengal**. Sittwe could emerge as the symbol of the potential tension between the two rising powers of Asia. **India has been looking at the port as a gateway to its North East**. Sittwe offers an **alternative to the Siliguri corridor** to the North East. Denial of overland transit by Bangladesh can be overcome by Sittwe and a **transport corridor at the mouth of the Kaladan which runs south from Mizoram**. India is also interested in building a **pipeline from the Arakan coast to move Myanmar’s gas into North East**. In April 2009, India and Burma signed a framework agreement, along with two other documents on the construction and operation of the 120-million USD **multi-modal transits and transport facility on the Kaladan River, to connect Sittwe with the Indian State of Mizoram**. The seaport of Sittwe is a major part of the Kaladan Multiple River Project, meant to connect with the northeast states of India. A **highway** will also be built to connect with the port in **Paletwa to enable access to the border area of Myeikwa to facilitate the flow of commodities to India's Mizoram State.**

**Opportunities for India**. The **democratic movement and enhancing of relationships with Aung San Suu Kyi** provide an opportunity for strengthening diplomatic relations. Help in **massive expansion and modernization of the armed forces** and establishment of a territorial military structure throughout the country and assisting in upliftment of the country’s strategically significant **agriculture sector** provide ample opportunities. Poor state of infrastructure and economy can be leveraged by India by **developing the land bridge with Southeast Asia for mutually beneficial economic development**.

**Chapter Summation**

This chapter highlighted the importance of the relationship with both neighbours, in the furtherance of India’s national interest. It brought out the scope of relationship with both Bangladesh and Myanmar in domains spanning security and border management, water sharing, bilateral trade and investment, economic assistance, cooperation in power and energy sectors and facilitating connectivity with North East India. The threats and opportunities emanating from both countries impacts the entire spectrum of national security interests ranging from border management, the need for military cooperation in combating insurgent groups operating along the porous borders, to the spillover of radicalisation, internal stresses generated from illegal immigration and the larger context of regional economic integration with South and South East Asia.

The mass movement of the Rohingyas into Bangladesh has caused a massive strain on Bangladesh’s already stressed economy. Besides managing the humanitarian crisis, it creates security implication as Muslim Rohingyas, in refugee camps, are extremely vulnerable and ripe for indoctrination and radicalisation efforts of numerous terrorist and jihadist groups. The fanning of religious fundamentalism can have serious repercussions for Bangladesh. India shares porous borders with Bangladesh and its spill over into India is a natural fallout, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The states of West Bengal and Assam, which share borders with Bangladesh have long faced illegal immigration from Bangladesh affecting internal security and threat to social harmony resulting from the demographic imbalances. Violent insurgencies and ethno-communal clashes have often erupted in these regions. Injection of a new source of instability, generated by a spillover of refugees, potentially poses a serious national security threat. Surgical strikes, in 2015, on the insurgent camps along the Indo-Myanmar border in retaliation to a deadly ambush, were as a result of close cooperation of the military regime in Myanmar. The security situation in North East India remains faced with numerous challenges, of which one is the insurgent’s ability to exploit the porous borders and extremely difficult terrain obtaining. Cooperation and support of Myanmar is critical to ensuring stability in the region and tackling terrorists operating in these areas. India has to be mindful of Chinese efforts at gaining inroads into Myanmar besides the security implications in the porous border it shares with Myanmar. Rising **Chinese influence**, **Islamic fundamentalism and insurgency** and the tenuous nature of the ceasefire agreements with insurgents pose **serious challenges**, which need to be tackled. A balanced and harmonious relationship with both neighbours is a *sine qua non*. The overarching umbrella of growing Chinese influence has tremendous potential of undermining Indian interests and needs to be zealously guarded against.

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