

Examining India's Stance on the Rohingya Crisis

K. YHOME

ABSTRACT The current debate on Delhi's approach towards the Rohingya crisis focuses principally on the implications. While this aspect, without doubt, deserves careful examination, there is a need for a more holistic understanding. This brief fills the gap by shifting the focus on the role that India is playing in finding a solution to the crisis. It looks beyond what the approach means for India and explores ways for Delhi to further deepen and expand its engagements in resolving the crisis. By doing so, the brief argues, Delhi may be able to regain its long tradition of dealing with refugees and create space for itself in taking a leadership role in the region—both of which have come under scrutiny recently.

INTRODUCTION

An issue that has come to be known as the 'Rohingya crisis' is a tragedy that was in the making for over several decades and concerns the plight of hundreds of thousands of people belonging to the Rohingya-Muslim minority community in Myanmar's Rakhine State.¹ Myanmar does not recognise the community as its citizens and considers them "illegal immigrants" from Bangladesh. Recent

violence in Rakhine State has displaced several hundred thousand Rohingyas within Myanmar and driven out some 700,000 of them to neighbouring Bangladesh after the military launched a bloody crackdown triggered by militant attacks on security posts in late August 2017.² The United Nations (UN) has described the violence against the Rohingya community as a "textbook example

Observer Research Foundation (ORF) is a public policy think tank that aims to influence the formulation of policies for building a strong and prosperous India. ORF pursues these goals by providing informed analyses and in-depth research, and organising events that serve as platforms for stimulating and productive discussions.



To know more about
ORF scan this code

of ethnic cleansing.”³ The crisis has also acquired a security dimension with concerns being raised over the infiltration of Islamic extremism amongst the Rohingyas, who have grown increasingly desperate over their plight.⁴ The massive refugee outflow has created a serious humanitarian crisis that carries implications on regional stability and security.

In November 2017, Myanmar and Bangladesh signed an agreement on repatriation of the refugees.⁵ In recent months, the Myanmar government has been making claims that it is working towards a long-lasting solution to the Rohingya crisis. Officials say they are putting in place mechanisms to receive back the returnees, and taking measures to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.⁶ In late May 2018, Myanmar signed an MoU with the UN to allow hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas to “return safely and by choice.”⁷ The international community have urged Myanmar to speed up the process of repatriation, though concerns remain on the long-term political issues including “community reconciliation” and “citizenship status.”⁸

The Rohingya crisis could be seen as merely symptomatic of modern Myanmar being long mired in internal conflict. At the root of these conflicts is the inability of the Buddhist-majority community to accept that the nation is a multiracial, multilingual and multireligious society. The Rohingya Muslims question is part of this larger problem. Historically, the entry of the military into politics and the continuing struggle for power between the military and the civilian—with the military

seeing itself as the protector of the nation—is an outcome of the narrowly defined nationalistic outlook. In such a construct of what makes the Myanmar ‘nation’, the Rohingya-Muslim community are doubly disadvantaged. First, unlike the rest of the other ethnic minorities, the Rohingyas are regarded as “illegal immigrants”. Second, the acrimonious relationship between the Rakhine ethnic group (also Buddhists) and the politically dominant Bamar-Buddhist majority meant that the Rohingyas are unlikely to be favoured by the central government at the cost of the Rakhines. Third, the Rohingyas suffer from the general negative sentiment against Muslims and are easy targets of vitriolic attacks and pronouncements from ultra-nationalist Buddhist forces. Further, the opening up of the nation with the democratisation process allowed these sentiments to express themselves more freely, with consequences on the fragile social fabric of the nation and on the future of the country’s democracy itself.

This brief examines India’s approach towards the Rohingya crisis and explores ways for India to strengthen its role in finding solutions. India’s Rohingya position has two aspects. The first concerns the implications of India’s stand on the Rohingya refugees; the second, how India can play a role in finding a solution to the crisis. Much of the current debate focuses on the former, while the latter has not received much attention. This brief spells out some ideas on the second aspect as a way forward. The Rohingya crisis has raised several questions about India’s approach towards refugees, in general, and the Rohingyas, in particular. Regardless of how

India's Rohingya approach is viewed, there is a consensus that it is shaped by various factors, including diplomatic, domestic political compulsions, humanitarian, security and geopolitical considerations. The importance of these factors has also changed over time.

INDIA'S RESPONSE TO THE ROHINGYA CRISIS

India's response to the Rohingya crisis has evolved swiftly. Three phases are identifiable. In the first phase that began with the eruption of violent conflicts between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State in 2012,⁹ Delhi considered it an 'internal affair' but was sympathetic to Myanmar. The then External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid visited Rakhine State and announced a US\$ 1-million package of relief assistance to Myanmar.¹⁰ Wittingly or not, India also allowed Rohingya refugees to enter the country and did not make it an issue in its domestic politics or in its bilateral relations with Myanmar. A few days after Minister Khurshid's Rakhine visit, then UN High Commissioner for Refugees (and currently UN Secretary General) Antonio Guterres visited India and expressed "high appreciation for India's age-old tradition of tolerance and understanding which manifested itself in its current policy of protecting and assisting refugees" and its "strict adherence to the principle of non-refoulement and voluntary repatriation."¹¹ When the BJP-led NDA government came to power in May 2014, it tacitly endorsed the position of the UPA government. In 2015, the Rohingya crisis assumed a regional dimension when Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia all turned away

overcrowded boats carrying Rohingyas attempting to land on their shores, leaving hundreds in the high seas.¹² There were calls for Delhi to help rescue the Rohingyas,¹³ but India decided to look the other way. This came soon after the devastating earthquake in Nepal, where India was quick to extend assistance.

A combination of factors seemed to have shaped India's approach in the first phase. Delhi took the side of the Myanmar government because it was concerned that raising the issue publicly might push Myanmar towards China as it was building relations with the then newly formed quasi-democratic government. India also has economic interests with its companies holding stakes in Shwe Gas field off the coast of Rakhine State. Along with energy interests and plans to build cross-border pipelines,¹⁴ India also has a connectivity interest to link its landlocked northeastern region with the Bay of Bengal through Rakhine State under a joint project with Myanmar that includes development of port at Sittwe, inland-waterway in the Kaladan River, and road construction to connect it with India's Northeast. Delhi was wary that instability in the Rakhine State would have adverse effects on these interests. With growing security cooperation between the two countries, particularly in tackling cross-border ethnic insurgency in their shared border regions, India was careful not to upset the Myanmar regime. India's offer of relief assistance was a token of support to the Myanmar government as much as it was about its humanitarian concerns in a neighbouring country. Thus, geopolitics, security and economic interests

and humanitarian concerns were key in moulding India's Rohingya response during this phase.

The second phase of India's Rohingya approach began sometime in mid-2017 with the announcement of the government's plans to deport the Rohingyas who have settled in different parts of India. While answering a question in Parliament on 9 August 2017, India's Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijiju said the government was planning to deport Rohingyas from India because they are "illegal immigrants."¹⁵ The minister later clarified that the deportation plan was "not yet firmed up."¹⁶ According to media reports citing government estimates, the number of Rohingyas in India was 10,500 in 2015 and increased four times to 40,000 in the following two years.¹⁷ A month after the announcement of the deportation plan and soon after the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) — a Rohingya insurgent group formed in 2013 — staged attacks on police and army outposts in northern Rakhine State, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Myanmar. The joint statement issued during the visit "condemned the recent terrorist attacks" in Rakhine but was silent about the Rohingya refugee crisis.¹⁸ The one-sided position of the Indian government had to be nuanced when Bangladesh, the country that bore the brunt of the refugee outflow, sought India's help.¹⁹ On 14 September 2017, India launched "Operation *Insaniyat*" to provide relief assistance for the refugee camps in Bangladesh.²⁰ Delhi's decision to extend help fits into its desire to de-incentivise Rohingya refugees entering into India. As Delhi recalibrated its approach, the West Bengal

government adopted a contrary position to the central government by expressing its support for the Rohingya refugees.²¹ Though the West Bengal government's position did not change the central government's Rohingya approach, it sent a message to Delhi that it needed to take into account voices of state governments on the issue. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Dhaka on 9 October 2017 and reassured the Bangladeshi government of Delhi's support.²²

In the second phase, apart from geopolitics, humanitarian concerns and non-interference in internal affairs, two other factors appeared to have driven the Indian approach: the growing security concerns and the need for diplomatic balancing between Bangladesh and Myanmar. In the latter part of the second phase, Delhi's assessment allowed it to formulate three points that became the basis to drive its Rohingya approach²³: the first is the assessment that restoring "normalcy" can happen "only with the return of the displaced persons to Rakhine state." This position implied that the return of Rohingyas to Myanmar from Bangladesh and elsewhere would also mean the return of Rohingyas from India. Officially, Delhi continues to refer to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh as "displaced persons", but those in India are seen as "illegal immigrants." The second point relates to Delhi's assessment of the situation that socio-economic development in Rakhine State is "the only long-term solution." Therefore, the need for supporting and mobilising resources for development on its own as well as urging the international community to assist development efforts in Rakhine has been prioritised. The third point relates to Delhi's

stand that it would maintain constructive engagement with both Myanmar and Bangladesh, and that the international community needs “to handle the situation with restraint, keeping in mind the welfare of the population.” There is an impression that the initial lukewarm response of the BJP-led government towards the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh was perhaps a signal to Dhaka on the long-standing issue of “illegal immigrants” in India. The BJP has long championed the issue of deporting Bangladeshi “illegal immigrants” in India’s Northeast. In its 2014 election manifesto, the party promised to “address the issue of infiltration and illegal immigrants in the Northeast region on a priority basis.”²⁴

Delhi’s approach in the third phase was probably driven by the need to find a role for itself in finding a resolution to the crisis by strengthening its quiet diplomacy. The phase began soon after China stepped in with its “three-step solution” to the Rohingya crisis²⁵ and the subsequent signing of the repatriation agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar on 23 November 2017. Delhi’s assessment perhaps was shaped by its calculation that any delay in stepping up its role might allow other players to leverage the situation for geopolitical gains, at the cost of its own interests. On 20 December 2017, Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankhar visited Myanmar and signed an MoU on Rakhine State Development Programme with Myanmar’s Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement aimed at “socio-economic development and livelihood initiatives in Rakhine State” that included “a project to build prefabricated housing in Rakhine State to meet the immediate needs of

returning people.”²⁶ Under the MoU, India pledged US\$25 million for a five-year development project in Rakhine State.²⁷ At the invitation of the Myanmar government, India joined the UNSC delegation that visited Myanmar in early May 2018 along with three other neighbours, China, Laos, and Thailand.²⁸ During Minister Swaraj’s visit to Myanmar on 10-11 May 2018, she stressed the importance of “safe, speedy and sustainable return of displaced persons to Rakhine State.”²⁹ This indicates a step forward from the previous position when it called for “restraint” in handling the situation in Rakhine.³⁰

There is a view that with the Western world embroiled in its own challenges, there is a lack of global leadership. Under these circumstances, perhaps Delhi has framed an approach towards the Rohingya crisis without the need to concern itself about the reactions of the Western powers, who otherwise tend to preach to other countries from their self-appointed high-moral ground. China tried to fill in the leadership gap. However, the Chinese three-step formula turned out to be of little consequence so far.

EXPLAINING INDIA’S STANCE

Broadly, two schools of thought have explained India’s Rohingya approach. Though differing on most issues, both agree that the lack of a national policy framework on refugees has complicated India’s handling of the Rohingya crisis. The first school argues that the current Rohingya approach has some elements of continuity, as it is “consistent with [India’s] traditional hesitation about automatically designating asylum seekers as refugees.”³¹

According to this line of thinking, India has conventionally “created disincentives” for refugees to “stay on in India permanently”, citing the case of refugees from Bangladesh (East Pakistan then) during the 1971 war. India helped Bangladesh but did not regard those fleeing the country as refugees and that “ensured their return” to Bangladesh after the war.³² This school may not be completely wrong when it argues that India discourages permanent settlement of refugees and that the lack of a national refugee policy complicated Delhi’s approach towards the Rohingya crisis. However, there seems to be a big difference between the BJP-led government’s Rohingya approach and older ways of managing refugees. In the case of the Rohingyas, the government shut the doors to them, whereas India had always welcomed refugees in other cases. Moreover, no refugees in the past had been seen as posing a “terrorist threat”, whereas the security concern was the key argument of the government in the case of the Rohingyas.

The second explanation views the current approach as a departure from the past and analyses it from the perspective of potential implications on India. This school argues that the framing of the Rohingya crisis through the security argument is short-sighted as it could create more security challenges for India, including “greater radicalisation” of a repressed community that could have serious “spill over” effects on India.³³ According to this line of reasoning, the government’s Rohingya approach has put at stake the lives of thousands of Indian diaspora communities in different countries including Myanmar.³⁴ It asserts that the government’s silence has

allowed “ceding space for other countries to take the lead” in the Rohingya crisis.³⁵ Further, the approach has undermined India’s long traditional heritage as an “open” and “democratic” society that has always kept its doors open for refugees.³⁶ There is also a notion that the Rohingya approach might have been driven by a “trend” under the BJP-led government towards Muslims, citing the proposed 2016 Citizenship Amendment Bill that recognises “non-Muslim refugees” in India as “citizens” of the country.³⁷ This impression gained cogency in late 2017, at a time when security was being beefed up along the Indian states bordering Myanmar to bar Rohingya refugees, the Indian government allowed hundreds of refugees, mostly Christians and Buddhists, fleeing violence in Myanmar to enter its northeastern state of Mizoram.³⁸ Some have cautioned India that it stands “to lose not just [its] good name, but the opportunity of aiding the transformation of a vast region that is wracked by ethnic strife, poverty and backwardness.”³⁹

Three issues emerge from the above analysis of the two views on India’s Rohingya approach. First, the way India has handled the Rohingya crisis has raised questions on its democratic credentials. Second, India’s reservations in taking the lead may have already undermined its regional and global leadership aspirations. Third, the approach may have served short-term security goals, but concentration of thousands of desperate people in the neighbourhood could create a fertile breeding ground for radicalisation. Taking a hard position towards the Rohingya refugees makes India a potential target of radical groups.

THE WAY FORWARD

It may not be erroneous to say that the current debate has emphasised on the implications of India's approach in handling the Rohingya crisis. These issues need serious consideration by policy-makers. Even so, it does not capture the entirety of the Indian approach, particularly the aspect of what role the country can play in facilitating long-term solutions to the crisis. This section attempts to flesh out some ideas on this aspect as a way of going forward. Clearly, between quiet diplomacy and megaphone diplomacy, Delhi has favoured the former. The question is how India can make its approach work more effectively to ensure that it helps 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. Active and effective role in these areas can help reposition Delhi in the lead role in finding an enduring solution to the crisis.

At the national level, India needs to ensure that no Rohingya refugee in India is deported back to Myanmar until it is safe to do so. With the Rohingya refugees case now in the Supreme Court, any attempt to deport the Rohingyas will be complicated.⁴⁰ At the same time, ensuring basic amenities in refugee camps will be critical. In early February 2018, a terrorist attack on an army camp in Sunjuwan of Jammu city sparked a debate on the involvement of Rohingyas as many had settled around the camp.⁴¹ This gave right-wing parties the fuel to step up their campaign of asking Rohingyas to leave Jammu even as probing into the attack had barely begun.⁴²

While those found guilty should be punished, there is an urgent need to guard against further politicisation of the issue in domestic politics, particularly in an election year as this may constrain the government from taking decisions that serve the country's long-term interests. Like any nation, India has the right to prioritise its national security. However, the security concerns need to take into account the comprehensive long-term consequences. As an analyst has argued, the issue with India's Rohingya approach "is not that it is placing security over humanitarian... [But] that it is doing so in a way that is imprudent and likely to be self-defeating."⁴³ Moreover, given its historical bent towards protecting refugees, India must rise to the occasion and demonstrate that it is not solely driven by narrow domestic political interests.

At the bilateral level, Minister Swaraj's May visit to Myanmar has further opened room for India to scale up its role. While maintaining a constructive engagement with Myanmar, Delhi has been able to convey to the Myanmar authorities that the only solution to the Rohingya crisis is the safe return of the refugees to Myanmar. Towards this end, India has operationalised the MoU on Rakhine State Development Programme signed in December 2017.⁴⁴ As Delhi continues its support to Dhaka with relief assistance for refugee camps in Bangladesh, an immediate requirement is in dealing with the impact of the current monsoon rains. India has been working closely with both Myanmar and Bangladesh in the security sector. Sharing of information is a key element of security cooperation to prevent terror groups from trying to radicalise Rohingyas in refugee camps. As India extends

support to both countries, it will be crucial for Delhi to ensure that talks between Naypyitaw and Dhaka continue in finding a resolution to the crisis. It is appreciable that talks between Naypyitaw and Dhaka have progressed in recent months. However, given the complexities of the issue, there is a tendency on both sides to blame each other when things do not go their way.⁴⁵ Delhi will need to use its good offices to ensure that things do not get out of hand. These efforts can be made parallel to working out bilateral mechanisms that will prepare the ground for deportation when it happens.

At the regional level, Delhi has not shown interest in making the Rohingya issue a part of the agenda for the subregional grouping, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), despite prioritising its strategic focus on the grouping in recent years. Nor has there been a call from any of the seven BIMSTEC nations for a meeting on the issue. Delhi's hesitation to initiate any role through the BIMSTEC grouping may have been influenced by its own experience in SAARC where bilateral issues—particularly the continued hostility between Delhi and Islamabad—has impeded the progress of the association. Myanmar and Bangladesh are both members of BIMSTEC and the bilateral angle of the Rohingya issue could affect the workings of BIMSTEC. Within this context, a positive development in BIMSTEC that should encourage the member-states to work more closely is in the field of security. BIMSTEC has a mechanism for national security advisers (NSAs) of the member-states. At the first BIMSTEC-NSA meeting in early 2017, it

“recognised the need for urgent measures to counter and prevent the spread of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization” and further decided, “to take concrete measures to enhance cooperation and coordination among their law enforcement, intelligence and security organisations and enhance capacity building.”⁴⁶ At the end of August 2018, BIMSTEC is scheduled to hold its summit in Nepal. Delhi may use this platform to strengthen the grouping's growing security cooperation with the member states and offer financial assistance to the BIMSTEC Secretariat to play a role in humanitarian assistance and socio-economic development in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Such a symbolic gesture may provide an opportunity for Delhi to stress the role of cooperation among the BIMSTEC members and create a precedent on how the subregional grouping approaches bilateral issues affecting its member-states.

Even as BIMSTEC members try to find ways in strengthening cooperation, particularly in the security field, India needs to work closely with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The bloc's inability to deliver on various issues including the Rohingya crisis has come under heavy criticism.⁴⁷ Yet, despite its shortcomings, there is today no other grouping that enjoys the same standing in the region as ASEAN. Moreover, the grouping's strength lies in the fact that it is one of the very few organisations that enjoys the confidence of Myanmar. Given the nature of the Rohingya crisis, the need for a “regional approach” has been argued.⁴⁸ The scale and complexity of the issue demands coordination and cooperation among the regional countries. Even as ASEAN and its

member-states have been offering humanitarian assistance, there is increasing debate on how ASEAN can do more. Some have talked about the need for ASEAN to play the “bridging role” between the Myanmar government and the international community.⁴⁹ As ASEAN evaluates its role, Delhi may find it mutually beneficial to work with ASEAN, while Delhi engages both Myanmar and Bangladesh.

In many ways, India shares similar positions with ASEAN on the Rohingya issue. Both India and ASEAN view the issue through the prism of sovereignty. Both have stepped up socio-economic development in Rakhine State. Both believe that constructive engagement is more practical in finding a solution rather than megaphone diplomacy. Beyond their similar approaches, the stakes are high for both India and ASEAN. As discussed above, the reputation and global standing of India has come under inspection. The effectiveness of ASEAN as a regional body has also been questioned. Both India and ASEAN are aware that they will be the first to face the consequences of any terror activities emanating from radicalisation among the Rohingyas. The constructive approach of India and ASEAN is based on the belief that isolating Myanmar will not solve the problem. Nudging the Myanmar government through engagement has produced positive results in the past and it remains the most pragmatic option in dealing with the current crisis. In the 2015 migration crisis involving the Rohingyas, ASEAN took the lead in finding a solution.⁵⁰

As both India and ASEAN work out their respective plans, there are many areas where the two can cooperate. Some of the key areas

include policy coordination in international forums such as the UN and its agencies. Both can strengthen cooperation in the socio-economic development in Rakhine State. Rather than undertaking individual development projects in Rakhine State, their work could be synchronised. Security cooperation in terms of sharing of information on terror-related activities concerning the Rohingyas along with Bangladesh and Myanmar is another area that could be strengthened. These efforts can go hand-in-hand with exerting pressure on the Myanmar government, when and where necessary, to speed up the repatriation process, ensuring non-recurrence of conflict in Rakhine, and speedy implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

Even as India engages with both ASEAN and BIMSTEC on the Rohingya crisis, a combination of both bilateral and regional engagements and coordination may prove to be more effective in producing tangible outcomes. Two ASEAN members (Singapore and Indonesia) and two BIMSTEC members (Bangladesh and Thailand) are critical. Bangladesh is undoubtedly a victim of the crisis and will need to be part of any effort in finding solutions. Sharing long land boundary with Myanmar and as a Buddhist majority nation, Thailand has its own concerns and experiences in dealing with conflicts for years (both within as well as due to spillovers of conflicts from Myanmar) and has taken the lead in finding a solution to the migration crisis involving the Rohingyas in the past. Indonesia has been actively involved, extending humanitarian and socio-economic development assistance in Rakhine State. As

the largest Muslim nation in ASEAN, Indonesia's role is significant. Singapore, for its part, is the current chair of ASEAN and Delhi could leverage its close relations with the city-state at the bilateral level.

At the global level, as Delhi fine-tunes its approach it could take steps that will help it regain lost ground. At one level, India will need to impress upon the West that sanctions are unlikely to work as Myanmar has alternative economic ties with countries such as China.⁵¹ It has not worked in the past and it will not work now. The most pragmatic approach is to engage both Naypyitaw and Dhaka. In this context, the visit by the UNSC delegation to Bangladesh and Myanmar is a positive development.⁵² The international community needs to keep its focus on the crisis with the aim to nudge the Myanmar government to find long-lasting solutions to the crisis. Myanmar has recently agreed to work with UN agencies in the repatriation process.⁵³ India needs to urge Myanmar for greater access to Rakhine State and involvement of the international community as this will give confidence to the outside world. At another level, not everything is lost for India and if it actively involves itself as part of the solution to the crisis, it could create ground for itself in taking a leadership role. While India has taken some time in carving out a space for itself in shaping the discourse, its actions on the ground (in India, Myanmar and Bangladesh) may help shape its position on the wider refugee discourse.

CONCLUSION

History may be repeating itself in Myanmar. For many years, the country's internal political

struggle between the military regime and the pro-democracy supporters divided the international community: the West led by the US adopted isolation and sanctions policy towards Myanmar, while Myanmar's neighbours including India and ASEAN maintained constructive engagement. When the Myanmar military regime decided to take the path of democratisation and the country witnessed its first elections in 20 years, both the West and Myanmar's neighbours claimed their policies have worked in bringing about change in the country. Academic debate continues on whether the "isolationist" or the "constructive" strategy was more effective. Meanwhile, the West led by the US has been increasingly taking a hard position against the Myanmar government over the Rohingya issue, while Myanmar's neighbours including India and ASEAN have taken a constructive engagement. The international community may be entering into another phase of international divide. If history is any indication, at best, this will end up with claims and counter-claims over which strategy was more effective. Meanwhile, the international divide only makes things more difficult for anyone to help those suffering from conflicts.

So far, the Indian approach towards the Rohingya crisis has been viewed as contradicting its traditional position on refugees. As the Rohingya crisis unfolds, there is still a lot that India can do to facilitate the finding of long-term solutions. These actions will be key in determining India's regional and global standing. Minister Swaraj's Myanmar visit suggests that Delhi is committed to remain an active partner in ending the crisis, but this is only the beginning of what India can and must do. As a rising

power with global aspirations, and with a long tradition in dealing with refugees, India is duty-bound. In the end, India may be in a

better position to shape regional and global discourses on emerging issues affecting global governance, including on refugees. [ORF](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

K. Yhome is a Senior Fellow with ORF's Neighbourhood Regional Studies Initiative.

ENDNOTES

1. See a few excellent backgrounders on the issue including M.W. Charney, “Theories and Historiography of the Religious Basis of Ethnonyms in Rakhaing (Arakan), Myanmar (Burma)” [Paper originally presented at the Workshop, “The Forgotten Kingdom of Arakan: A Public Seminar on the People of Present Day Arakan State of Myanmar,” 23 November 2005, Bangkok, Thailand, listed under the title of “Buddhism in Arakan: Theories and Historiography of the Religious Basis of Ethnonyms”]; Eleanor Albert, “The Rohingya Crisis”, Backgrounder, Council on Foreign Relations (April 20, 2018), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/rohingya-crisis>; a special issue on the Rakhine issue in *ASEAN Focus*, ASEAN Studies Centre, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Issue 2 (March-April 2018), pp.12-28.
2. “Myanmar’s Rohingya Crisis Enters a Dangerous New Phase,” International Crisis Group, *Asia Report No. 292* (December 7, 2017), <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/292-myanmar-s-rohingya-crisis-enters-a-dangerous-new-phase.pdf>
3. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on 11 September 2017 see “UN human rights chief points to ‘textbook example of ethnic cleansing’ in Myanmar”, *UN News* (September 11, 2017), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/564622-un-human-rights-chief-points-textbook-example-ethnic-cleansing-myanmar>
4. Jasminder Singh, “The Rohingya Crisis: Regional Security Implications” *RSIS Commentary*, No. 293 (December 2, 2016), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CO16293.pdf>
5. “Bangladesh, Myanmar finally strike Rohingya repatriation deal”, *The Dhaka Tribune* (November 23, 2017), <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2017/11/23/bangladesh-myanmar-finally-strike-rohingya-repatriation-deal/>
6. “Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine”, Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (August 2017), http://www.rakhinecommission.org/app/uploads/2017/08/FinalReport_Eng.pdf
7. “U.N. and Myanmar agree outline of Rohingya return deal, no details”, *Reuters* (May 31, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-un/un-and-myanmar-agree-outline-of-rohingya-return-deal-no-details-idUSKCN1IW2F2>
8. “UK briefs Security Council on mission to Bangladesh and Burma”, Statement by Ambassador Karen Pierce, UK Permanent Representative to the UN (May 14, 2018), <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/uk-briefs-security-council-on-mission-to-bangladesh-and-burma>
9. Max Beauchamp, “Beyond bigotry: Unravelling ethnic violence in Rakhine”, *New Mandala* (December 19, 2013), <http://www.newmandala.org/beyond-bigotry-unravelling-ethnic-violence-in-rakhine/>
10. See Ministry of External Affairs: Annual Report 2012-2013, Government of India, p. 8, http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/21385_Annual_Report_2012-2013_English.pdf
11. “Visit of UN High Commissioner for Refugees to India”, Press Releases, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (December 19, 2012), <http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/20980/Visit+of+UN+High+Commissioner+for+Refugees+to+India>

12. "Malaysia and Thailand turn away hundreds on migrant boats", *The Guardian* (May 14, 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/14/malaysia-turns-back-migrant-boat-with-more-than-500-aboard>
13. K. Yhome, "Rohingyas Adrift, Far From the Shores of Asia's Conscience", *The Wire* (May 21, 2015), <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/rohingyas-adrift-far-from-the-shores-of-asias-conscience>
14. "Tri-nation pipeline envisaged", *The Telegraph* (March 6, 2017), https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170306/jsp/business/story_139183.jsp
15. "Who are Rohingya Muslims and why govt wants to deport 40,000 of them?" *India Today* (August 10, 2017), <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/rohingya-muslim-india-myanmar-deportation-1029075-2017-08-10>
16. "No plan yet to deport Rohingya, says Kiren Rijiju", *The Hindu* (September 11, 2017), <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/no-plan-yet-to-deport-rohingya-says-rijiju/article19664225.ece>
17. "Who are Rohingya Muslims and why govt wants to deport 40,000 of them?", Op cit.
18. "India-Myanmar Joint Statement issued on the occasion of the State Visit of Prime Minister of India to Myanmar (September 5-7, 2017)", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (September 6, 2017), [http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28924/India Myanmar+Joint+Statement+issued+on+the+occasion+of+the+State+Visit+of+Prime+Minister+of+India+to+Myanmar+September+5+2017](http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28924/India+Myanmar+Joint+Statement+issued+on+the+occasion+of+the+State+Visit+of+Prime+Minister+of+India+to+Myanmar+September+5+2017)
19. "Bangladesh wants India's support over Rohingya crisis", *The New Indian Express* (September 10, 2017), <http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2017/sep/10/bangladesh-wants-indias-support-over-rohingya-crisis-1655140.html>
20. "Operation Insaniyat - Humanitarian assistance to Bangladesh on account of influx of refugees", Press Releases, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (September 14, 2017), http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/28944/Operation_Insaniyat__Humanitarian_assistance_to_Bangladesh_on_account_of_influx_of_refugees
21. "Mamata supports Rohingya refugees, sides with UN instead of PM: Bengal chief minister says all refugees not terrorists", *The Hindustan Times* (September 15, 2017), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/mamata-supports-rohingya-refugees-sides-with-un-instead-of-pm/story-Q8OLoUBzOzPvmVhITmC7dM.html>
22. "Sushma Swaraj in Dhaka: Only long-term solution to Rohingya crisis is rapid socio-economic, infra development", *The Indian Express* (October 22, 2017), <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/sushma-swaraj-dhaka-visit-bangladesh-myanmar-rohingya-muslims-4901221/>
23. Ibid.
24. BJP Election Manifesto 2014, https://www.bjp.org/images/pdf_2014/full_manifesto_english_07.04.2014.pdf
25. "China says 3-step approach to tackle Rohingya crisis approved by Myanmar and Bangladesh", *The Hindustan Times* (November 20, 2017) <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/china-says-3-step-approach-to-tackle-rohingya-crisis-approved-by-myanmar-and-bangladesh/story-EXINfEalCsho4rcHBAEknN.html>

26. "Visit of Foreign Secretary of India to Myanmar (December 20, 2017)", Press Releases, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (December 20, 2017), <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29186/Visit+of+Foreign+Secretary+of+India+to+Myanmar+December+20+2017>
27. "India commits \$25 million to develop Myanmar's Rakhine state", *The Hindustan Times* (December 21, 2017), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-commits-25-million-to-develop-myanmar-s-rakhine-state/story-lpwndpPujIn1hCwBhJqAJ.html>
28. "UNSC, neighbours off to Rakhine next week", *The Myanmar Times* (April 26, 2018), <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/unsc-neighbours-rakhine-next-week.html>
29. "Visit of External Affairs Minister to Myanmar (May 10-11, 2018)", Press Releases, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (May 11, 2018), http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29889/Visit_of_External_Affairs_Minister_to_Myanmar_May_1011_2018
30. "Situation in Rakhine State of Myanmar", Press Releases, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (September 9, 2017), http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/28931/Situation_in_Rakhine_State_of_Myanmar
31. Dhruva Jaishankar and Tushita Saraf, "India's traditional refugee policy shows why it's unlikely to give Rohingyas sanctuary", *The Print* (September 30, 2017), <https://theprint.in/opinion/indias-policy-refugees-rohingya/11232/>
32. Ibid.
33. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "A few sacks of rice", *The Indian Express* (September 23, 2017), <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/a-few-sacks-of-rice-rohingya-refugees-myanmar-4856665/> and Nimmi Kurian, "Why the 'good' refugee is a bad idea", *Open democracy* (April 30, 2018), <https://www.opendemocracy.net/openindia/nimmi-kurian/why-good-refugee-is-bad-idea>
34. Rajmohan Gandhi, "The other as foe", *The Indian Express* (September 29, 2017), <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/rohingya-muslims-violence-myanmar-the-other-as-foe-4864478/>
35. Suhasini Haidar, "Such a strange silence: India's stand on the Rohingya crisis", *The Hindu* (December 1, 2017), <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/such-a-strange-silence-indias-stand-on-the-rohingya-crisis/article21235760.ece>
36. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "A few sacks of rice", Op cit.
37. Niranjana Sahoo, "India's Rohingya Realpolitik", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (October 31, 2017), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/10/31/india-s-rohingya-realpolitik-pub-74590>
38. Rajeev Bhattacharyya, "Myanmar crisis: Caught between army and rebel group, refugees in Mizoram hope for better future but are reluctant to return", *The Firstpost* (January 2, 2018), <https://www.firstpost.com/india/myanmar-refugee-crisis-caught-between-army-and-rebel-group-refugees-in-mizoram-hope-for-better-future-but-are-reluctant-to-return-4283813.html> and "More than 1,200 refugees flee Myanmar fighting, enter Mizoram", *The Week* (November 25, 2017), <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/more-than-1200-refugees-flee-myanmar-fighting-enter-mizoram.html>

39. Manoj Joshi, "Shunning Rohingya Refugees Is a Bad Geopolitical Strategy for India", *The Wire* (October 15, 2017), <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/rohingya-india-myanmar-china-bangladesh>
40. "Supreme Court seeks Centre's stand on plea challenging Rohingyas' deportation", *The Indian Express* (September 5, 2017), <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/supreme-court-seeks-govts-stand-on-plea-challenging-rohingyas-deportation-4829246/>
41. "Not the first attack on Sunjuwan army camp: Militants had stormed base in 2003", *The Hindustan Times* (February 10, 2018), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/not-the-first-attack-on-sunjuwan-army-camp-militants-had-stormed-base-in-2003/story-QtVMCohfFOxCwefV2beXZP.html>
42. Auqib Javeed, "Media, Right-Wing Parties Linking Rohingya to Militant Attack Without Evidence, Refugees Allege", *The Wire* (February 19, 2018), <https://thewire.in/politics/rohingya-refugees-militant-attack-jammu>
43. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "A few sacks of rice", Op cit.
44. "Visit of External Affairs Minister to Myanmar (May 10-11, 2018)", Press Releases, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (May 11, 2018), <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29889/Visit+of+External+Affairs+Minister+to+Myanmar+May+1011+2018>
45. "In India, Hasina seeks help on Rohingya", *The Times of India* (May 26, 2018), https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/in-india-hasina-seeks-help-on-rohingya/articleshow/64326178.cms?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=TOI&utm_content=om-bm&from=mdr and "Myanmar Permanent Representative made a statement on the UN Security Council's visit to Myanmar", President Office, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar (May 15, 2018), <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=issues/rakhine-state-affairs/id-8766>
46. "First meeting of the BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs (March 21, 2017)", Press Releases, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (March 21, 2017), http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/28193/First_meeting_of_the_BIMSTEC_National_Security_Chiefs_March_21_2017
47. "Asean should lead effort to end Rohingya crisis: The Nation", *The Strait Times* (March 6, 2018), <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/asean-should-lead-effort-to-end-rohingya-crisis-the-nation>
48. "Myanmar's 'Rohingya issue' is a regional refugee crisis – ASEAN must intervene", *The Conversation* (March 17, 2017), <https://theconversation.com/myanmars-rohingya-issue-is-a-regional-refugee-crisis-asean-must-intervene-70849>
49. "ASEAN must go further than aid on Rakhine State: Marty Natalegawa", *Frontier Myanmar* (May 9, 2018), <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/asean-must-go-further-than-aid-on-rakhine-state-marty-natalegawa> and Moe Thuzar and Hoang Thi Ha, "Reconciling ASEAN's Non-Interference with Regional Engagement", *ASEAN Focus*, ASEAN Studies Centre, Op cit.
50. Sriprapha Petchamesree, Peter Hughes, Steven Wong, Travers McLeod and Tri Nuke Pudjiastuti, "The Andaman Sea Refugee Crisis a Year On: Is the Region Now Better Prepared?", *The Wire* (May 27, 2016), <https://thewire.in/rights/the-andaman-sea-refugee-crisis-a-year-on-is-the-region-now-better-prepared>

51. "US House Backs Measures to Sanction Myanmar's Military, Nudge Gem Sector Reform", *The Irrawaddy* (May 25, 2018), <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/us-house-backs-measures-sanction-myanmars-military-nudge-gem-sector-reform.html/amp>
52. "Myanmar: Security Council meets leaders face-to-face", *UN News* (April 30, 2018), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/04/1008582>
53. "Myanmar close to signing deal with UN agencies", *The Myanmar Times* (May 22, 2018), <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/myanmar-close-signing-deal-un-agencies.html>



Ideas • Forums • Leadership • Impact

20, Rouse Avenue Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110 002, INDIA

Ph. : +91-11-35332000. Fax : +91-11-35332005.

E-mail: contactus@orfonline.org

Website: www.orfonline.org