

Dhaka seeks solution to Rohingya crisis

Rohingya refugees in Whaikhyang, Bangladesh. Getty images Dan Kitwood

Bangladesh, which has seen an influx of Rohingya refugees from the neighbouring Myanmar in recent days, is facing a policy predicament over how to deal with the crisis.

About 2,70,000 Rohingya Muslims are estimated to have entered Bangladesh in recent weeks as Myanmar security troops carry out an “anti-insurgency” operation in the Rakhine State. Many more are waiting on the borders. Prior to this, some 5,00,000 Rohingya people have already come to Bangladesh and settled in refugee camps.

Bangladesh’s society appears to be sharply divided over the refugee crisis. Pro-Islamist groups argue that the Rohingya Muslims are facing ethnic cleansing in Myanmar.

The Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its Islamist allies addressed a human chain in Dhaka on Friday against the persecution of Rohingya. Another section, including the secular parties, sees it as a humanitarian problem, not a religious one. They are also alarmed by the Rohingya militancy, and believe it is supported by global Islamists, with help from Pakistan.

Both sides, however, urge the government to do more to address the crisis. Rohingya, who are not even granted citizenship in Myanmar, are seen as illegal immigrants.

Diplomatic efforts

Diplomatic sources told *The Hindu* that Bangladesh has begun diplomatic efforts aimed at addressing the crisis, including holding talks with India and China. Both countries maintain “very close” relations with Myanmar, and have not condemned the violence against Rohingya, said one diplomat.

Referring to the August 25 attacks on Myanmar security camps by insurgents, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently said: “Bangladesh never supported such kind of acts. But the way the Myanmar government is reacting is creating problems for Bangladesh.”

Dhaka’s main request to Myanmar to take back the refugees has so far fallen on deaf ears. As part of its diplomatic efforts, Dhaka has circulated “evidence” of atrocities by Myanmar troops among UN bodies and other organisations, asking them to put pressure on Myanmar, said the sources.

Dhaka has also offered support to the recommendations made by a commission headed by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, which included the formation of an “international safe zone” for Rohingya under UN supervision.

Diplomats say Bangladesh is looking for a peaceful solution despite Myanmar’s non-reciprocity. They hope that the UN General Assembly, which will convene on September 12, may adopt a motion condemning Myanmar’s actions on the Rohingya, and put pressure on the country to take back the refugees.

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