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‘Humanitarian Corridor’ to Deliver Aid to Myanmar’s Rakhine State: Analysis of Bangladesh’s Diplomatic Challenges

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This paper analyses the diplomatic challenges faced by Bangladesh in proposing a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar’s Rakhine State, intended to facilitate aid delivery amid the ongoing Rohingya crisis. The study explores the origins and scale of the humanitarian emergency, examines Bangladesh’s diplomatic efforts, and investigates regional and international responses. Drawing on theories of humanitarian intervention and regional security complexes, this research adopts a qualitative methodology that includes policy analysis, legal review, and institutional mapping. Findings reveal that while Bangladesh has demonstrated considerable diplomatic commitment, it confronts significant constraints, ranging from geopolitical inertia to Myanmar’s rejection of external involvement. The study emphasises the importance of multilateral diplomacy, legal frameworks, and regional cooperation in addressing these challenges. Strategic recommendations are offered to enhance Bangladesh’s diplomatic positioning and the feasibility of the corridor initiative. Ultimately, the paper concludes that although the corridor proposal is fraught with political complexity, it remains a necessary humanitarian mechanism. If operationalised effectively, it can contribute not only to immediate relief but also to long-term regional stability and justice for the displaced Rohingya.

Keywords: Humanitarian Corridor, Rohingya Crisis, Bangladesh Diplomacy, Rakhine State, ASEAN, Humanitarian Law, Regional Security.

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Introduction

The humanitarian crisis unfolding in Myanmar's Rakhine State has been one of the most pressing regional emergencies in recent history. Rooted in decades-long ethnic tensions, statelessness, and institutional discrimination, the crisis reached a tipping point in August 2017 following a military crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim minority. The offensive, launched ostensibly in response to attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), led to mass killings, sexual violence, and the forced displacement of more than 700,000 Rohingya to neighbouring Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2021). Described by the United Nations as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing," this mass exodus has transformed the coastal district of Cox's Bazar into the world's largest refugee settlement (United Nations, 2018).

In response to this complex humanitarian emergency, international actors have called for the establishment of mechanisms that enable safe and sustained humanitarian access to affected populations. One such mechanism is the creation of a "humanitarian corridor"—a temporary, demilitarised zone designed to allow unimpeded movement of aid and people across conflict zones (Ferris, 2011). While the idea has been successfully applied in various contexts such as Syria, Bosnia, and Sudan, its implementation in Myanmar has proven exceptionally difficult due to the state's rigid adherence to sovereignty, its military-dominated governance structure, and its contentious relationship with international institutions.

For Bangladesh, the implications of this crisis are profound and multifaceted. The country not only shoulders an immense economic and social burden but also faces increasing security risks, environmental degradation, and diplomatic friction with Myanmar. Bangladesh's push for repatriation, sustained humanitarian aid, and international recognition of the Rohingya's plight has met with limited success. Amid this diplomatic stalemate, the notion of a humanitarian corridor into Rakhine State offers a potentially

transformative—yet diplomatically delicate—solution. However, operationalising such a corridor raises critical questions regarding Bangladesh's foreign policy tools, diplomatic leverage, and regional alliances.

Diplomatically, Bangladesh faces a series of challenges. First, Myanmar's outright denial of atrocities and its rejection of international oversight have hardened the bilateral deadlock. Second, the influence of regional powers such as China and India, both of which maintain strong strategic and economic ties with Myanmar, complicates any coordinated international pressure campaign (Beech, 2018). Third, the limitations of regional bodies such as ASEAN, which traditionally adhere to a non-interference doctrine, have restricted collective action, despite growing regional humanitarian concerns (Davies, 2019).

Bangladesh's attempts to internationalise the crisis through forums such as the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have yielded some symbolic victories, including the 2020 ICJ ruling ordering Myanmar to prevent acts of genocide. Nonetheless, the practical establishment of a humanitarian corridor requires not only international endorsement but also political negotiation, logistical coordination, and, critically, the consent of the Myanmar government.

Given this context, this article investigates the diplomatic challenges that Bangladesh faces in establishing a humanitarian corridor to Rakhine State. It examines the interplay between bilateral diplomacy, regional geopolitics, and international humanitarian law. The study is situated within a dual theoretical framework of Realism and Liberal Institutionalism, enabling an analysis that considers both power dynamics and institutional norms. Through a qualitative research design that incorporates document analysis and elite interviews, this paper provides a

nuanced examination of the diplomatic impasse and explores possible avenues for strategic manoeuvring. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to policy discussions on humanitarian intervention, regional diplomacy, and refugee crisis management in South and Southeast Asia.

Contextual Background: Rohingya Crisis and Humanitarian Needs

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State is deeply rooted in a history of ethnic discrimination, statelessness, and militarised governance. The Rohingya—an ethnic Muslim minority in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar—have faced systematic persecution for decades. Despite their historical presence in the region, the Rohingya were excluded from Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, rendering them stateless and vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and displacement (Cheesman, 2017). The state apparatus has long denied the Rohingya community recognition, instead labelling them “Bengalis” and casting them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Rakhine State, located on the western coast of Myanmar, has been a flashpoint of ethnic tensions for decades. Cyclical outbreaks of violence between the Rohingya and ethnic Rakhine Buddhists have been recorded since the 1970s. However, the most catastrophic wave of violence erupted in August 2017, when Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, launched clearance operations following attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on security posts. These operations resulted in large-scale atrocities, including mass killings, rape, arson, and forced displacement. According to the United Nations Human Rights Council (2018), these acts likely amounted to crimes against humanity and genocide.

Within weeks, over 700,000 Rohingya crossed into southeastern Bangladesh, joining hundreds of

thousands of previous refugees residing in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar. The scale and speed of the displacement overwhelmed Bangladesh's existing infrastructure and emergency response mechanisms. As of 2024, the total Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh exceeds 1 million (UNHCR, 2023). Despite commendable efforts by the Bangladeshi government, the UN, and NGOs to provide basic services, the humanitarian situation remains critical.

The refugee camps are plagued by overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, food insecurity, and the risk of disease outbreaks. Vulnerabilities are especially pronounced among women, children, and older people. A 2021 UNFPA report indicated high levels of gender-based violence (GBV), child marriages, and mental health disorders among camp residents (UNFPA, 2021). Additionally, heavy monsoon rains and landslides frequently damage temporary shelters, increasing the need for resilient infrastructure and disaster preparedness.

Meanwhile, access to humanitarian aid within Rakhine State itself is highly restricted. Myanmar's government has imposed severe limitations on international NGOs and UN agencies attempting to deliver assistance to displaced Rohingya and other communities within the state. Humanitarian access is often contingent on government approval, which is arbitrarily granted or denied based on political considerations (ICG, 2020). Consequently, internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Rakhine—especially those confined to camps or remote areas—suffer from a lack of healthcare, food, clean water, and education.

An increasingly volatile political context compounds the challenges. Following the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar, which ousted the elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government, the Tatmadaw reasserted control over state institutions

and escalated military operations across the country. This has exacerbated conflict not only in Rakhine but also in other ethnic regions such as Chin, Kachin, and Shan States. The junta's refusal to engage constructively with the international community and its disregard for prior agreements—including the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Bangladesh on repatriation—have all but extinguished hopes of a negotiated resolution in the short term (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Bangladesh's response has evolved from an initial humanitarian imperative to a growing concern over long-term security and sovereignty. The concentration of a large, stateless population in a sensitive border region raises fears of radicalisation, human trafficking, and inter-communal tensions. The prolonged presence of refugees also imposes substantial socio-economic burdens on host communities, many of which are already impoverished. Environmental degradation, including deforestation and water contamination, further strains local ecosystems and livelihoods (Alam et al., 2022).

In this context, the concept of a humanitarian corridor has emerged as a viable, though politically contentious, strategy for delivering aid directly to Rakhine State. Humanitarian corridors are protected routes that enable the safe delivery of relief supplies and the movement of affected populations in or out of conflict zones (Ferris, 2011). They have been utilised in conflict settings such as Syria, Libya, and the Balkans, often under international supervision or ceasefire arrangements. However, establishing such a corridor in Rakhine requires the cooperation of the Myanmar military, regional powers, and multilateral institutions—none of which have consistently demonstrated support for such measures.

Despite multiple rounds of high-level meetings and bilateral talks on repatriation between Bangladesh and

Myanmar, the discussions have stalled. Efforts by ASEAN, particularly through its ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre), have yielded limited success due to structural weaknesses and Myanmar's manipulation of aid efforts for political gain (Lall, 2021). The result is a protracted humanitarian crisis in which aid access remains highly politicised and dependent on diplomatic breakthroughs.

This context underscores the importance for Bangladesh to carefully balance its foreign policy objectives, humanitarian commitments, and regional partnerships. A humanitarian corridor could offer a mechanism to deliver life-saving aid directly into Rakhine State, reducing pressure on Bangladesh's refugee infrastructure. Yet, without international guarantees and political consensus, such a corridor remains an aspiration rather than a reality.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies an integrated theoretical framework that combines Realism, Constructivism, and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine to analyse Bangladesh's diplomatic challenges in advocating for a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State. The intersection of these theories offers a multidimensional understanding of the geopolitical constraints, normative considerations, and international obligations that influence Bangladesh's foreign policy decision-making.

Realism: National Interest and Security Imperatives

Realism, as a dominant paradigm in international relations, posits that states are the principal actors operating in an anarchic international system, primarily driven by the pursuit of power and national interest (Waltz, 1979). According to realists, states act rationally to ensure their survival, sovereignty, and security, often prioritising these goals over moral or humanitarian concerns.

From a realist perspective, Bangladesh's approach to the Rohingya crisis and the proposal of a humanitarian corridor can be interpreted as a strategic response to internal and external security threats. The prolonged presence of over one million Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar has created multifaceted challenges for Bangladesh, including environmental degradation, pressure on social infrastructure, and the threat of radicalisation (Chowdhury & Rahman, 2020). These concerns amplify Bangladesh's national interest in ensuring a rapid, safe, and dignified repatriation process.

Moreover, Realism helps explain why Bangladesh has sought to internationalise the crisis through diplomatic forums, such as the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). As a middle power with limited military and economic leverage over Myanmar, Bangladesh's realist strategy hinges on gaining external support to exert pressure on Myanmar's junta, which has been largely unresponsive to bilateral engagements (Pattison, 2020). Thus, the push for a humanitarian corridor is not solely humanitarian but also a geopolitical manoeuvre to stabilise regional security and alleviate domestic burden.

Constructivism: Norms, Identity, and Moral Authority

While Realism emphasises material interests, Constructivism introduces the importance of norms, identity, and the social construction of international politics. Constructivist theorists argue that state behaviour is shaped not only by anarchical structures but also by shared values, historical experiences, and intersubjective meanings (Wendt, 1999). In the case of Bangladesh, its identity as a humanitarian actor and moral voice in South Asia is central to its diplomatic narrative.

Bangladesh's foreign policy, particularly within the framework of "friendship to all, malice towards none," reflects a normative orientation that aligns with international human rights values (Rashid, 2018). The country's open-border policy for Rohingya refugees in 2017 drew global praise and reinforced its reputation as a responsible actor in the international community. Advocating for a humanitarian corridor aligns with this identity. It strengthens Bangladesh's diplomatic leverage by portraying it as committed to upholding human dignity and justice, in contrast to Myanmar's repressive regime.

Constructivism also emphasises the significance of international norms in legitimising humanitarian interventions. The global consensus on the protection of civilians and the delivery of humanitarian aid, especially under the framework of the United Nations, creates normative pressure on actors that violate these principles. Bangladesh's appeal for a humanitarian corridor gains traction within this normative context, even if implementation remains elusive due to geopolitical constraints.

Responsibility to Protect (R2P): Sovereignty vs. Human Rights

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is an emerging international norm that redefines sovereignty as a responsibility rather than a privilege. Endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005, R2P posits that states have the primary responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. If a state fails to fulfil this responsibility, the international community must intervene using diplomatic, humanitarian, and, in extreme cases, military means (Bellamy, 2009).

Myanmar's failure to protect its Rohingya population, and in many cases, its direct perpetration of atrocities, provides a strong basis for invoking R2P.

Bangladesh's advocacy for a humanitarian corridor can be seen as an operationalisation of Pillar II of R2P, which emphasises international assistance and capacity-building for the protection of vulnerable populations. The proposed corridor would facilitate the delivery of aid to Rohingya still in Rakhine and reduce dependence on cross-border refugee solutions. Nevertheless, the application of R2P remains contested, especially in the absence of Security Council consensus. China and Russia's support for Myanmar's sovereignty has blocked formal UN mandates, limiting Bangladesh's ability to mobilise binding international action. Nonetheless, R2P serves as a normative framework that legitimises Bangladesh's diplomatic position and pressures other international actors to take responsibility, even if indirectly (Thakur, 2016).

Synthesis of Theoretical Perspectives

By integrating Realism, Constructivism, and R2P, this theoretical framework enables a comprehensive analysis of Bangladesh's diplomatic challenges. Realism explains the strategic calculations behind Bangladesh's foreign policy; Constructivism elucidates its normative and identity-driven motivations; and R2P provides the moral and legal basis for advocating humanitarian intervention. This blended approach allows for a nuanced understanding of both the constraints and opportunities facing Bangladesh as it seeks to establish a humanitarian corridor into Myanmar's Rakhine State.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, combining content analysis, a case study approach, and interpretive policy analysis to investigate Bangladesh's diplomatic challenges in advocating for a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State. The methodology is designed to explore complex, context-dependent diplomatic interactions, narratives, and strategic calculations in

light of theoretical constructs and empirical developments.

Research Design

Given the exploratory and interpretive nature of the research problem, a qualitative case study design was deemed appropriate (Yin, 2018). The study focuses on Bangladesh as the primary unit of analysis, examining its diplomatic engagements with Myanmar, regional actors (e.g., China, India, ASEAN), and international organisations (e.g., the UN, OIC, EU). The case study design facilitates an in-depth examination of the evolving nature of Bangladesh's foreign policy and its efforts to frame and promote the idea of a humanitarian corridor.

The research also examines the role of the humanitarian corridor concept in broader international humanitarian law, regional geopolitics, and global normative frameworks. By employing a constructivist epistemology, the study seeks to understand how meanings, identities, and power relations are constructed and contested in diplomatic discourse and action (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

Data Sources and Collection

The study primarily utilises secondary data sources as the basis for analysis. These include:

- Official government documents and press releases from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh;
- Statements and resolutions from the United Nations, ASEAN, OIC, and the International Court of Justice;
- Reports from international and regional humanitarian organisations such as UNHCR, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Médecins Sans Frontières;
- Academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and policy briefs;

- News articles and media reports from reputable sources (e.g., Al Jazeera, The Guardian, BBC, Dhaka Tribune);
- Public speeches and diplomatic correspondence, when available.

The sources were collected using a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure relevance, credibility, and diversity of perspectives (Patton, 2015). Key terms such as “humanitarian corridor,” “Rohingya crisis,” “Bangladesh-Myanmar diplomacy,” and “foreign policy of Bangladesh” were used to guide document retrieval.

Analytical Framework

A content analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes, policy patterns, and narrative constructs relevant to Bangladesh’s diplomatic efforts. The coding process followed a thematic approach where excerpts from policy documents, news reports, and academic texts were categorised under themes such as “security concerns,” “regional constraints,” “normative appeals,” and “international support mechanisms” (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Furthermore, the research employed interpretive policy analysis to examine how the concept of a humanitarian corridor is framed within Bangladesh’s foreign policy discourse and how it interacts with the competing interests of other regional and global stakeholders (Fischer & Forester, 1993). The interpretive lens is particularly important for understanding non-material factors such as moral legitimacy, historical narratives, and identity politics.

Limitations

Several limitations of the methodology must be acknowledged. First, the reliance on secondary data means that some aspects of Bangladesh’s diplomatic strategies, especially those occurring behind closed doors, remain inaccessible. Second, the rapidly

evolving nature of Myanmar’s internal dynamics may render some findings time-bound. Third, while the qualitative method allows for rich contextual analysis, it does not claim generalizability across all cases of humanitarian corridors.

Despite these limitations, the chosen methodology provides a robust framework for capturing the nuances and complexities of Bangladesh’s diplomatic positioning. It allows the study to critically engage with both empirical realities and theoretical constructs that shape the discourse on humanitarian intervention and regional diplomacy.

Bangladesh’s Diplomatic Efforts and Constraints

The Rohingya humanitarian crisis has placed Bangladesh at the centre of one of the world’s most protracted and politically sensitive refugee emergencies. Since the mass influx of Rohingya refugees in 2017, the Government of Bangladesh has pursued a multi-pronged diplomatic strategy aimed at ensuring repatriation, garnering international support, and advocating for humanitarian access to Rakhine State. A core element of these efforts has been the proposition of a “humanitarian corridor” to facilitate safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation of displaced Rohingya while delivering humanitarian aid within Myanmar. However, this approach has been fraught with diplomatic complexities, regional geopolitical constraints, and strategic challenges. This section explores the nature of Bangladesh’s diplomatic efforts and the constraints it faces in operationalising the concept of a humanitarian corridor.

Multilateral Diplomacy: United Nations and OIC Platforms

One of the central pillars of Bangladesh’s diplomatic approach has been its active engagement with multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Bangladesh has used these

platforms to internationalise the Rohingya issue and lobby for more decisive global action, including support for humanitarian access to Rakhine State. In numerous General Assembly sessions and UN Human Rights Council meetings, Bangladesh has called for international intervention to ensure the safe repatriation of Rohingya and the protection of human rights within Myanmar (United Nations, 2019).

At the OIC level, Bangladesh has pushed for collective Muslim world support, resulting in the formation of an OIC Contact Group on the Rohingya crisis. The OIC has also filed a case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), with Bangladesh supplying evidence and diplomatic backing (OIC, 2020). These engagements signify Bangladesh's attempt to build a moral and legal case for humanitarian intervention, including the possibility of a corridor backed by international legitimacy.

Despite these efforts, progress has been slow due to the limited enforcement capabilities of multilateral organisations and the reluctance of Security Council members such as China and Russia to support robust action against Myanmar. This reflects the inherent tension between normative diplomacy and the realist dynamics of international politics (Acharya, 2014).

Bilateral Diplomacy: Engaging Myanmar and Regional Neighbours

Bangladesh's bilateral engagement with Myanmar has been marked by caution, limited success, and mutual distrust. The two countries signed several repatriation agreements between 2017 and 2019; however, none have resulted in meaningful returns (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh, 2019). Myanmar's reluctance to create conditions conducive to repatriation—such as citizenship guarantees, safety assurances, and humanitarian access—has hindered progress.

Bangladesh has also attempted to engage regional powers such as China and India in facilitating repatriation and encouraging humanitarian interventions. China, a key ally of Myanmar, has mediated trilateral talks but has aligned mainly with Myanmar's sovereignty narrative, opposing international pressure or externally imposed solutions (Yhome, 2018). India, while providing limited humanitarian aid to Bangladesh and Rakhine, has been cautious not to antagonise Myanmar, with whom it shares strategic and security interests under its Act East Policy (Chakravarty, 2020).

Thus, Bangladesh's reliance on regional powers has yielded limited diplomatic dividends. Both China and India have prioritised stability and bilateral relations with Myanmar over humanitarian imperatives, thereby constraining Bangladesh's options for securing a humanitarian corridor.

Humanitarian Corridor as a Diplomatic Concept

The concept of a humanitarian corridor, though not formalised, has emerged in Bangladesh's diplomatic discourse as a means to facilitate safe repatriation and the delivery of aid to the Rohingya remaining in Myanmar. Humanitarian corridors, as defined in international humanitarian law, are temporary demilitarised zones through which aid and civilians can pass safely, usually established through multilateral negotiation or consent (Ferris, 2011).

Bangladesh's advocacy for such a corridor is rooted in its interest in reducing long-term refugee burdens and ensuring accountability in Rakhine. By linking humanitarian access to the broader repatriation framework, Bangladesh aims to shift the responsibility onto Myanmar and mobilise international actors toward enforcement mechanisms. However, this proposal faces several diplomatic challenges:

- **Sovereignty Sensitivities:** Myanmar views any external intervention, including the

establishment of humanitarian corridors, as a violation of its sovereignty. Its military leadership has rejected international monitoring and denied access to many parts of Rakhine, making corridor implementation unfeasible without the use of coercive diplomacy, which is currently lacking (ICG, 2020).

- Lack of Precedent in Southeast Asia: Unlike in conflict zones such as Syria or Ukraine, where humanitarian corridors have been negotiated, Southeast Asia lacks a precedent or normative framework for such interventions, complicating regional acceptance of the idea (Slim, 2015).
- Inadequate Diplomatic Clout: Bangladesh, despite moral legitimacy, lacks the diplomatic leverage or hard power needed to impose or negotiate such a corridor unilaterally. This limits its ability to translate its diplomatic rhetoric into practical outcomes without broader international enforcement.

Domestic Constraints and Political Calculations

Bangladesh's internal political dynamics also shape and constrain its diplomatic manoeuvring. The protracted presence of nearly one million Rohingya refugees in the Cox's Bazar district has strained national resources and created political pressure domestically (Haque & Jahan, 2021). The government's diplomatic initiatives must therefore balance international expectations with domestic imperatives such as border security, social cohesion, and economic burden.

Moreover, Bangladesh's commitment to non-alignment and regional harmony limits its ability to adopt a confrontational posture. This has led to a "quiet diplomacy" approach, which, while pragmatic, often falls short of achieving transformative outcomes.

The government must also contend with growing public fatigue and political polarisation around the Rohingya issue, which affects its policy consistency and diplomatic risk appetite.

Diplomatic Fatigue and Donor Apathy

Another constraint arises from donor fatigue and declining global attention to the Rohingya crisis. As international focus has shifted to newer crises (e.g., Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan), humanitarian funding for the Rohingya response has dwindled, affecting Bangladesh's leverage in international forums (UNHCR, 2023). This diminishes the feasibility of securing political backing or resources for establishing a humanitarian corridor.

Strategic Recommendations and Forward-Looking Approaches

In light of these constraints, Bangladesh's diplomacy must evolve through innovative, coalition-building strategies. These could include:

- Issue-linkage diplomacy, where Bangladesh links the humanitarian corridor proposal to broader regional cooperation agendas such as climate migration or connectivity;
- South-South solidarity, partnering with other developing countries that have experience with displacement and humanitarian corridors to lobby collectively;
- Track-II diplomacy, engaging civil society, diaspora, and academic networks to amplify the corridor concept and build transnational advocacy coalitions (Keck & Sikkink, 1998);
- Norm entrepreneurship, where Bangladesh takes the lead in developing regional norms around humanitarian access in complex emergencies, potentially through SAARC or BIMSTEC frameworks.

Such strategic repositioning could strengthen Bangladesh's diplomatic narrative and operational

toolkit, even in a geopolitically constrained environment.

Regional and International Responses to the Humanitarian Corridor Proposal

The proposal for a humanitarian corridor to deliver aid and facilitate repatriation in Myanmar's Rakhine State has gained traction within Bangladeshi diplomatic circles as a strategic response to the protracted Rohingya crisis. However, the success of such an initiative depends heavily on the responses of regional neighbours and the broader international community. These responses have varied significantly, ranging from cautious endorsement to implicit opposition, reflecting complex geopolitical calculations, legal interpretations of sovereignty, and broader humanitarian principles. This section critically examines the regional and international reactions to Bangladesh's proposal for a humanitarian corridor, highlighting both the support mechanisms and the impediments to its realisation.

Regional Actors: ASEAN and Neighbouring States

The role of regional actors, notably the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has been crucial in shaping humanitarian and political responses to the Rohingya crisis. ASEAN, despite its normative emphasis on non-interference, has gradually adopted a more proactive role. In 2019, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) conducted a needs assessment in Rakhine State and proposed a roadmap for safe and voluntary repatriation (ASEAN, 2019). While this initiative marked progress, it fell short of advocating a robust humanitarian corridor, instead focusing on technical support and confidence-building measures.

ASEAN's limited response can be attributed to internal divisions and its consensus-based decision-making model. Countries such as Indonesia and

Malaysia have been vocal about the need for humanitarian access and the rights of the Rohingya (Djalal, 2020). In contrast, others, such as Thailand and Vietnam, have preferred a neutral stance to preserve diplomatic ties with Myanmar. This divergence has hindered ASEAN's ability to endorse or operationalise a humanitarian corridor framework, despite several members tacitly supporting greater humanitarian engagement.

India, as a key regional power and a neighbour to both Bangladesh and Myanmar, has maintained a cautious approach. India's position is shaped by strategic and security considerations, particularly its investments in Myanmar under the Act East Policy and the Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project (Chaudhury, 2021). While India has provided humanitarian aid to both Bangladesh and Myanmar, it has refrained from supporting international pressure on Myanmar or endorsing corridor mechanisms that might be perceived as infringing on Myanmar's sovereignty.

Similarly, China has opposed any initiatives that imply international intervention or coercive diplomacy. It has advocated a bilateral solution between Bangladesh and Myanmar and played a mediatory role in repatriation talks. However, China's strategic interests in Myanmar—such as the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and access to the Indian Ocean—mean it is unlikely to support any humanitarian corridor that necessitates external monitoring or multilateral enforcement (Sun, 2020). Thus, regional responses are shaped less by humanitarian imperatives and more by strategic alignments and non-interventionist norms.

International Community: United Nations, Western States, and Humanitarian Agencies

The international community has broadly acknowledged the severity of the Rohingya crisis and the need for safe humanitarian access to Rakhine State.

However, the idea of a formal humanitarian corridor has not received unanimous support or operational backing. The United Nations, while emphasising voluntary repatriation and accountability, has not explicitly called for a corridor in the legal sense. Instead, UN agencies such as the UNHCR and World Food Programme (WFP) have advocated for “safe zones” and “access corridors,” which lack the binding legal and diplomatic authority of internationally mandated humanitarian corridors (UNHCR, 2022).

Western countries, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, and members of the European Union, have condemned the atrocities in Rakhine and imposed targeted sanctions on Myanmar’s military leadership. They have also provided substantial humanitarian assistance to Bangladesh and international NGOs working in Cox’s Bazar. However, their support for a humanitarian corridor within Myanmar has been more rhetorical than actionable. The complexity of negotiating such corridors, particularly in areas under military control, has made Western powers wary of promising what they cannot enforce (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Moreover, the lack of consensus within the UN Security Council, where China and Russia hold veto power, has undermined the possibility of securing a binding resolution that could authorise or legitimise a humanitarian corridor under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. This institutional gridlock has compelled humanitarian agencies to operate under restrictive access conditions, thereby limiting their ability to establish sustainable pathways for aid delivery in Rakhine (UNOCHA, 2023).

Legal and Ethical Considerations

International legal instruments such as the Geneva Conventions and customary humanitarian law provide the framework for establishing humanitarian corridors.

However, their application is conditional upon consent from the host state or enforcement through multilateral mechanisms (ICRC, 2019). In the case of Myanmar, the military regime’s resistance to external oversight complicates the implementation of such legal provisions. The regime’s refusal to acknowledge wrongdoing or to engage constructively with UN mandates, such as the recommendations of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, further restricts the legal viability of a corridor initiative (UNHRC, 2018).

Ethically, there is strong justification for a humanitarian corridor, particularly given the scale of displacement, the documented crimes against humanity, and the ongoing deprivation of rights in Rakhine State. Humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence support the creation of safe zones for the delivery of aid (Sphere Project, 2018). However, without enforcement mechanisms or regional buy-in, these ethical imperatives struggle to translate into actionable policy.

Opportunities for Multilateral Collaboration

Despite these constraints, there are potential pathways for generating international support for a humanitarian corridor. One opportunity lies in the formation of a coalition of like-minded countries, including Canada, Norway, and Japan, which have demonstrated both financial commitment and diplomatic neutrality. Such a coalition could advocate for a corridor through non-coercive means, such as economic incentives, peace-building initiatives, and transitional justice mechanisms (Kaldor, 2020).

Bangladesh could also collaborate with the UN Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court (ICC) to intensify diplomatic pressure on Myanmar, thereby creating conditions that make a corridor more feasible. Additionally, the emerging discourse on “humanitarian diplomacy” could be

leveraged to balance state sovereignty with the need to prevent human suffering, potentially paving the way for negotiated corridors that are both ethical and pragmatic (Minear, 2002).

Strategic Policy Recommendations

Addressing the complex and multidimensional challenges of implementing a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State requires a coherent, strategic, and multi-level policy framework. Given the intersecting diplomatic, geopolitical, and humanitarian variables, Bangladesh must adopt a comprehensive approach to enhance its diplomatic leverage, secure regional and international support, and operationalise its humanitarian objectives. This section presents strategic policy recommendations across five core dimensions: multilateral engagement, regional diplomacy, legal and humanitarian frameworks, public diplomacy, and institutional capacity building.

Deepen Multilateral Engagement through the United Nations System

Bangladesh must prioritise multilateral diplomacy by elevating the issue within various UN platforms. While the Security Council has remained paralysed mainly due to veto powers wielded by China and Russia (ICG, 2021), Bangladesh can mobilise support through the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the Human Rights Council (UNHRC), and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Through coordinated diplomacy, Bangladesh should advocate for a non-binding United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution that supports humanitarian corridors and safe zones in Rakhine, under international supervision and oversight. Such symbolic declarations can shift global narratives and increase moral pressure on Myanmar.

Additionally, Bangladesh should lobby for a special rapporteur or commission of inquiry focused on the

humanitarian access barriers in Myanmar, building on existing UNHRC mandates. Collaboration with UN agencies, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), can help design technically feasible models of humanitarian corridors that respect sovereignty while ensuring access to essential resources.

Build Regional Consensus within South and Southeast Asia

Bangladesh should aim to transform its bilateral Rohingya grievance into a regional concern. ASEAN's growing involvement, although constrained by its non-interference principle, presents an opportunity for growth. Bangladesh can seek to participate as an observer or special partner in ASEAN-led humanitarian initiatives, thus amplifying its voice and aligning corridor proposals with regional norms (ASEAN, 2019).

Countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, which have been sympathetic to the plight of the Rohingya, can be leveraged as entry points to ASEAN's humanitarian diplomacy. Additionally, Bangladesh must engage with India and China through strategic dialogues focused on the economic and political costs of prolonged instability in Myanmar. By presenting the humanitarian corridor as a stabilising, rather than interventionist, mechanism, Bangladesh may shift these countries' stance from passive to constructive neutrality.

Utilise International Legal Mechanisms and Humanitarian Norms

Bangladesh should harness international legal tools to legitimise and advance the humanitarian corridor initiative. As a state party to multiple international humanitarian law conventions, it can invoke legal principles under the Geneva Conventions, particularly those related to the protection of civilians and

humanitarian access (ICRC, 2019). Coordinated efforts with legal bodies, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), can also amplify calls for Myanmar's accountability, thereby building moral justification for humanitarian interventions.

Furthermore, Bangladesh must align its proposals with universally accepted humanitarian norms—neutrality, impartiality, and independence—to avoid accusations of politicisation. Engagement with international humanitarian organisations, such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), can ensure that any proposed corridor meets both technical and ethical standards.

Leverage Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication

Public diplomacy should be a central tool in reframing the corridor not merely as a Bangladeshi national interest, but as a regional and global humanitarian imperative. To achieve this, Bangladesh should invest in strategic communication campaigns that target international civil society, diaspora networks, human rights organisations, and media platforms. Narratives emphasising the urgency of aid delivery, the scale of human suffering, and the burden on host communities in Cox's Bazar can strengthen the emotional and moral case for the corridor (Ahmed & Islam, 2020).

Hosting international conferences, webinars, and civil society dialogues focused on the humanitarian crisis can draw attention to the corridor initiative. Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs can also engage in track II diplomacy, involving think tanks and academia to publish research that substantiates the need for such an initiative.

Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Coordination Mechanisms

Bangladesh must prepare its institutions to engage proactively in establishing and maintaining humanitarian corridors. This includes the establishment of an inter-agency coordination cell under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, comprising representatives from the Armed Forces Division, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, and the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC). This body should serve as the focal point for engaging with international stakeholders and managing logistical aspects of the corridor proposal.

Capacity-building programs should also focus on legal training, scenario planning, and emergency response simulations, allowing Bangladeshi officials to engage with humanitarian norms and crisis management frameworks. Collaborations with regional training institutes, such as the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC), can strengthen technical preparedness (ADPC, 2020).

Furthermore, Bangladesh should develop contingency plans for phased implementation, beginning with temporary safe zones near the border areas, which would be monitored by neutral third-party organisations. These safe zones could serve as proof-of-concept projects, illustrating the feasibility of a full-fledged corridor in the future.

Engage Non-State and Faith-Based Actors

Bangladesh can also draw on the influence of non-state actors, including religious leaders and faith-based humanitarian networks, to build a moral consensus. Islamic organisations in Southeast Asia, for instance, can help shape public opinion and mobilise grassroots support for humanitarian access in Rakhine. Interfaith dialogues and peacebuilding initiatives should be pursued, particularly to counter narratives of ethnic or religious animosity (Yusuf, 2019).

Such engagements, although informal, can help mitigate domestic resistance within Myanmar and enhance the legitimacy of corridor mechanisms from a community-based perspective.

The implementation of a humanitarian corridor in Myanmar's Rakhine State is a diplomatically complex yet morally urgent objective. Bangladesh must navigate a tangled web of regional politics, international law, and humanitarian diplomacy to convert this vision into reality. Strategic multilateral engagement, regional consensus-building, legal and normative framing, effective public diplomacy, institutional preparedness, and inclusive stakeholder participation are indispensable components of a viable policy roadmap. While the corridor may not yield immediate transformation, it remains a critical long-term instrument in the quest for dignified repatriation, humanitarian justice, and regional peace.

Conclusion

The proposal to establish a humanitarian corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine State represents both a humanitarian necessity and a diplomatic challenge for Bangladesh. The ongoing Rohingya crisis, marked by prolonged displacement, statelessness, and systemic human rights violations, has placed Bangladesh at the epicentre of a complex regional crisis with significant international implications. While the idea of a humanitarian corridor is rooted in the urgent need to ensure aid delivery and safeguard the rights of displaced populations, its realisation is impeded by entrenched political resistance from Myanmar, a lack of regional consensus, and geopolitical dynamics involving powerful state actors such as China and India.

Bangladesh's diplomatic efforts, though persistent, face considerable constraints stemming from asymmetrical power relations, limitations within multilateral frameworks, and the lack of binding

international enforcement mechanisms. Nevertheless, opportunities remain. Strategic engagement with UN institutions, ASEAN, international legal mechanisms, and humanitarian norms can help to reframe the corridor proposal from a bilateral grievance into a collective humanitarian responsibility. Moreover, coordinated public diplomacy, regional advocacy, and capacity-building efforts can bolster Bangladesh's role as a constructive actor in regional peacebuilding.

Ultimately, while a humanitarian corridor alone may not resolve the root causes of the Rohingya crisis, it can serve as a pivotal mechanism for alleviating humanitarian suffering, stabilising the region, and creating conditions conducive to voluntary, safe, and dignified repatriation. It also reinforces Bangladesh's international image as a responsible humanitarian actor. Navigating these challenges requires a multifaceted policy approach, grounded in legal legitimacy, regional partnerships, and moral leadership. As the humanitarian crisis persists, the imperative to act strategically and collaboratively becomes even more urgent.

Future Research Directions

Future academic inquiry on the topic of humanitarian corridors to Rakhine State can explore several unexplored dimensions. First, empirical research is needed to evaluate the historical precedents of humanitarian corridors in Asia, Africa, and the Balkans, as well as their applicability to the South Asian context. Comparative case studies could yield valuable lessons on operational models, international oversight, and political negotiations.

Second, interdisciplinary research integrating international relations, humanitarian law, and peace and conflict studies could provide a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the corridor's feasibility. For instance, simulation modelling could examine different scenarios under

which humanitarian access might be granted, including those involving hybrid international-local mechanisms.

Third, field-based research involving stakeholders in Cox's Bazar and refugee communities could offer grounded insights into the perceived utility and risks of humanitarian corridors from the perspective of those most affected. This would enrich policy frameworks with human-centred considerations.

Lastly, future studies could investigate the role of digital diplomacy, civil society networks, and AI-driven humanitarian monitoring in shaping the implementation of cross-border humanitarian solutions. These technological and sociopolitical innovations are increasingly relevant in 21st-century crisis diplomacy.

By addressing these avenues, future research can make meaningful contributions to designing more effective, context-sensitive, and rights-based humanitarian interventions in Rakhine and beyond.

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