



Volume 1	Issue 2	June (2021)	DOI: 10.47540/ijias.v1i2.216	Page: 113 – 123
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China and India's Comparative Response to the 2017 Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Geostrategic Power, Global Power, Rohingya Crisis.

Received : 01 May 2021

Revised : 09 May 2021

Accepted : 04 June 2021

ABSTRACT

The simultaneous rise of China and India has been creating significant re-orientation in the contemporary international system. Both the countries are trying to climb up in the global power hierarchy but for the first instance, they are competing with each other for the Pan-Asian leadership. As a result, their neighboring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar are becoming hot spots for geostrategic power play between the two Asian powers. The Sino-Indian geostrategic competition intensified after 25 August 2017 when the military crackdown happened at the Rakhine state on Rohingya people. This paper illustrates the nature and dimensions of the response from New Delhi and Beijing on the 2017 Rohingya Refugee crisis. This paper adopted a qualitative method and data was analyzed based on secondary data. The findings argue that there was a qualitative difference between the responses from India and China in this crisis. India claimed to remain neutral in the crisis and provided limited humanitarian and economic assistance to Bangladesh and Myanmar. This paper also reviews why China and India back Myanmar and the international response to this crisis. Finally, this paper concludes with Bangladesh's challenges from the Sino-Indian geostrategic interests in the Rakhine state.

INTRODUCTION

China and India are two superpowers in Asia that compete with each other in the Pan-Asian leadership. Both consider South Asia and Southeast Asia as their power-play pivots. The Sino-Indian rivalry intensified after the Doklam crisis but in the Rohingya crisis, both of these countries are on the same page. As Myanmar lies in a strategic location between South Asia and Southeast Asia, China and India have geostrategic interest for their trade and economy from this area. Besides China and India are showing unwillingness to stop the conflict because they have different interests and strategies toward this situation.

Rohingya people are one of the world's most persecuted minority groups. According to UNHCR, Myanmar is responsible for the world's large number of refugees belong to it. The Rohingya ethnic minority group is among some of those stateless people who used to live in the Rakhine

State of Myanmar. There are officially 135 ethnic minority groups in Myanmar who have a different ethnicity, language, and religion. Among these groups where Burma's are majority consists of 32%, the Rohingya people are the most discriminated in terms of rights, power, and resources (Stokke et al., 2018). The fate of Rohingyas was not always like this. But now they are not even recognized as a citizen of Myanmar. They have a long history of being victims of mass violence and military crackdown. First, it occurred in 1978, then 1992, 2012, 2015, 2016, and last in 2017 when more than 723,000 fled to Bangladesh. Around one million Rohingyas are living in inhuman conditions in some camps of Cox's Bazar. Now more Rohingyas are living in Bangladesh than Myanmar.

The UN described the situation as an example of Ethnic Cleansing in the Rakhine State. The Myanmar government and military forces

conducted mass killing, torture, and sexual violence against the Rohingyas. These incidents created questions to their Nobel Award-Winning leader Aung San Suu Kyi role to solve the problem. The Rakhine state has geostrategic importance in the connection of South Asia and Southeast Asia. Besides this place has a lot of natural resources and a root for energy supply. Both Asian superpower China and India are keeping a close eye on that region for their geopolitical interest. Not only do they have their different geopolitical aspects, but they also have a comparative response in dealing with the Rohingya crisis. Despite China and India both have an interest in Bangladesh, they diplomatically supported Myanmar in the UN and signed agreements against terrorism activities.

China and India have a qualitative comparative response in the Rohingya crisis and while India is playing a neutral role, China is playing a constructive role here in this situation. Their coexistence to some extent makes confusion. China and India are trying to influence Myanmar for their national interest. But Myanmar's policy is different as it gets to benefit from the Sino-Indian geopolitics and the strategic location of its Rakhine state. The objective of this paper is to show the comparative response of China and India in the Rohingya Crisis of 2017 as well as their geostrategic interests in the Rakhine state. This paper focuses on two specific research questions: (1) How did China and India respond to the 2017 Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh? (2) Why Rakhine state is important for China and India from a geostrategic perspective?

METHODS

This paper discussed the qualitative research methods available for the study and what was applicable for it to use in response to the problem of this paper. Likewise, this paper presented the various procedures and strategies in identifying sources for needed information on China and India's comparative response over the 2017 Rohingya crisis. Secondary data was collected from available books, publications, research studies, journals, websites, and articles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Why Rohingya Case has a Geostrategic Importance?

Rohingya people mainly live in the Rakhine State (also known as Arakan until 1989) of Myanmar. It consists of five districts and seventeen townships. There are 3.3 million people in the Rakhine state, among them the Rakhine Buddhists are the majority, but other ethnic and religious groups are also living in the state. Among them, the Rohingya people are the only ones who faced the misfortune of this ethnic cleansing.

The ethnic cleansing of Rohingya people in the Rakhine state implies a national interest of Myanmar. The rivalry between the government and the Rohingya people is nothing new. The condition of Rohingya people was not like this some decades ago, they were rich, educated, military servicemen, and even parliament members. But after the 1962 marshal law, Myanmar has been denying their citizenship and labeled them as "Bengali intruders" (Mithun, 2018). Since then, thousands of Rohingya people have fled to Malaysia, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the even Middle East. There are other ethnic-religious minority groups, but the government only wants to get rid of Rohingyas because the Rakhine state contains the Muslim majority ethnic group of Rohingya. Obviously there other are reasons for this decade's long crisis, but this Rakhine state appeared too important to Myanmar as it seems.

The Rakhine state connects South Asia to Southeast Asian countries. It has 360 miles long strategic coast, which gives passage to the Indian Ocean. This state is located near the Malacca Strait which is one of the most strategic natural waterways. It has a critical strategic and commercial link between the Middle East and India. It is also situated near the Bay of Bengal and abundance of resource make Rakhine state an economically strategic area (Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2015).

So, this strategic area of Rakhine state made it harder to live in this place. Back in the 1990s, they were asked to move from this area but the Rohingyas denied that proposal. The perception of the Myanmar government cares not only about their national interest but also the investment from the international community. As Rohingya people living in the Rakhine state are making concerns, the

government implied strong forces to clear that area. So, from a geopolitical perspective, the Rohingya issue has great geostrategic importance.

Myanmar's Bilateral Relation with China and India

Myanmar shares a border with five countries; Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, and Thailand. Among these, India dominates Myanmar's western borders, just as China dominates its northeastern borders. Myanmar has the same strategic importance for China and India in both the geopolitical sense and the geoeconomics sense. After the Myanmar military seized power in September 1988, the Chinese and Indian governments both endeavored to expand their influence in Myanmar to protect their national interests. Their policies toward Myanmar had many similarities, but there were also important differences in content and results. Myanmar is now viewed as a critical area of interest to China and India. While China has developed close political, military, and economic relations with Myanmar, India is in the process of following suit. Sino-Myanmar relations offer some interesting aspects of how they are adopting the geostrategic setting and political environment of the region to their advantage (Routray, 2018).

Sino-Myanmar relation has a long history. China and Myanmar share a close linguistic and anthropologic link. Myanmar started to play a crucial role in China's foreign policy calculations ever since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. China has several policy objectives in Myanmar, including access to the Indian Ocean, energy security, border stability, and bilateral economic cooperation. China has stepped up its influence on Myanmar through economic, military, and development assistance. China has been providing military hardware to Myanmar to overcome international sanctions Myanmar's military to grow in strength. Till recently almost 80 percent of Myanmar's defense equipment was of Chinese origin. China has considerable economic influence in Myanmar over several fields, including the supply of electricity and trade and commerce. China has always played the big brother role of Myanmar. Therefore, in the UN council regarding the Rohingya situation, they supported the Myanmar government and diplomatically presented the crisis from their perspective. China blocked the

UN effort to pass a strong resolution aimed to condemn Myanmar's excessive military action against the Rohingya community. This shows the deep Sino-Myanmar relation (Mahtani, 2016).

India and Myanmar have a historical connection. Both were part of the extended British Empire in Asia. After world war two, India and Myanmar were not great neighbors and the military rule in 1988 raised the tension for India. After Aung San Suu Kyi's election, India sees the golden opportunity to make economic relations with Myanmar. India realized how Myanmar offers strategic locations for Indian "Act East" policy implementation and following the footsteps of China. They now have a good relationship in terms of economy, business, and trade.

India considers Myanmar a key ally in maintaining Northeast India consists of Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland. Both of these countries including Bangladesh have discussed gas-pipelines interconnections. To counter China's growing Southeast Asia and Bay of Bengal activities. The convergence of all these aspects has impelled New Delhi to invest heavily in Myanmar, setting forth several maritime and land-based Myanmar infra-structural development plans, such as the landmark Kaladan multimodal project, India-Myanmar-Thailand Asian Trilateral Highway, and a road- river-port cargo transport project. India signed bilateral treaties with Myanmar about energy supply from Sittwe and building infrastructure in Myanmar. India is also dependent on Myanmar for Southeast trade routes with ASEAN countries. So, they made a mutual cooperative relation with Myanmar (Taufiq, 2019).

Different Geopolitical Aspect; China and India's Interest in Rakhine State

The Rakhine state holds large economic potentials with an abundance of natural resources such as oil, natural gas, and maritime resources (Myanmar Investment Commission, 2019). According to the US Energy Information Administration, Myanmar has an estimated 10 trillion (now) cubic feet of proven gas reserves and an estimated 50 million barrels of proven oil reserves (Charltons Myanmar, 2015). In total, 105 oil and gas fields are discovered in Myanmar, 54 onshore and 51 offshore fields. Notably, among those 105 oil and gas fields, 25 oil and gas fields are situated in the region of Rakhine state. Besides

natural resources, there are vast economic opportunities for investors in many sectors in the Rakhine state. In the past, the state's economy was dependent on agriculture and fisheries only. However, the recent discovery of oil and gas brings a massive amount of foreign investment in the state (Myanmar Investment Commission, 2019).

The Rakhine state earned a lot of foreign revenue for Myanmar with its resources. A foreign investor was eager to pour money but the military rule neglected the opportunity. After the NLD came into power, the door for foreign investors opened again. The government of Myanmar along with China and India were interested in the Rakhine state. The different geopolitical aspects of China and India and their interest in the Rakhine state are given here. China is the largest investor in Myanmar. From 1988/89 to 2018, 297 Chinese enterprises invested around 20,353.528 million USD, which is 25.92% of the total FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) of Myanmar (Frankel, 2010).

Also, China is the largest arms supplier (2014-18) to Myanmar too. China is always supportive of the Myanmar regime as they need safeguards for its massive investments can be seen from the past that Chinese investment projects are fuelling disputes about land ownership across Myanmar. The new perception of China towards Myanmar is that they see Myanmar 'as the bridge to the Bay of Bengal and the waters beyond'. China's main interest in Rakhine is economic, and they are doing many projects in the Rakhine state (Pieter et al., 2019).

China had the world's attention when they declared their Belt and Road Initiative. This BRI project would connect countries as the Silk Road did and the purpose of this huge project is to dominate the international trade market for China. Myanmar is a big part of this BRI project. China-focused on Southeast Asia as an important route for Belt and Road Initiative. A large part of Myanmar's Rakhine State is directly related to China's BRI project. Specifically, in Kyauk Pyu (a coastal town in Rakhine state), China built a deep-sea water port, a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), and an Oil and Gas Pipeline. Also, there are more upcoming projects in the queue such as China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), Kunming-Kyaukpyu railway project. All these projects are part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (Blanchard, 2018).

Rakhine state is also important for Myanmar because it earns a high amount of foreign revenue by exporting oil and natural gas to China. China has many companies which work in this gas and oil extraction. China built an oil and gas pipeline and twelve mega oil storage tanks in Kyaukphu, Rakhine State. China's state-owned company, China International Trust Investment Corporation (CITIC), got the tender of making the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and a deep-sea port in 2015. The Kyaukphyu deep-sea port project is part of China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative, which also includes the port of Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka on large scale (Lee& Aung, 2017; Funaiole& Hillman, 2018).

India, as a neighboring country of Myanmar, maintained close relationships since the NLD came into power in 2016. This new government of Myanmar created a new trading opportunity for India though India is not a large investor like China in Myanmar. From the Shwe gas field in Rakhine state, Indian companies are trying to build a cross-border pipeline. India is also Myanmar's one of the top arms suppliers. They sell military aircraft, artillery, naval vessels, and many other combat types of equipment to the military force of Myanmar (Choudhury, 2019).

India declared their "Act East" policy in 2014 after China announced its BRI project in 2013. To counter China and to increase economic and security interest, this policy was taken. It is the modified version of the 1992 look east policy for Southeast Asian countries' economic interest. With the Act East Policy, India wants to create close relationships with the ASEAN countries as well as the other Asia Pacific countries. Also, it will integrate the North Eastern Region of India. Remarkably, Myanmar is at the center of the current Indian government's Act East trade policy and holds an essential geostrategic position in India's vision of ties with ASEAN states. Therefore, to fulfill this vision, India already started and developed many projects such as the Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (Fair, 2018; Mohan, 2017).

Along with vast economic interests, there are many other geopolitical concerns that urge India to get engaged closely with Myanmar. India has both a competitive and, in some cases, conflict relationship

with China. India is always worried about Chinese expansion in its backyard. Rakhine state is an important location for India to rule its southeast four states. India is always concerned about its security issues. Like ARSA, India does not want any radical terrorist groups in the southeast part of it. So, they closely look after the Rakhine state as it implies critical observation to Indian security (Bhaumik, 2017).

China and India's Comparative Response to the Rohingya Issue

At the beginning of this Rohingya problem, China and India together declared that they would not interfere in this issue as Bangladesh and Myanmar are sovereign countries. Moreover, when Bangladesh had sought diplomatic support to China and India, they responded in their own national interest-based. There is a qualitative difference in their response. China and India are not strongly supporting or officially giving statements in favor of Myanmar, instead of their comparative response to this shedding light on their standing (Bhaumik, 2017).

China for the first time in the international arena played the role of mediator between Bangladesh and Myanmar and now is officially engaged in the Rohingya crisis. They have supported Myanmar in the global community too including the UN and working with Bangladesh in the repatriation of Rohingya people. In a significant development, the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the government of Bangladesh to meditate with Myanmar regarding the repatriation of Rohingya people. In November 2017, China had proposed a three-step solution to address the Rohingya issue-first ceasefire on the ground, a second bilateral dialogue between Bangladesh and Myanmar to reach a workable solution, and finally, poverty alleviation to tackle what it perceives as the root cause of the crisis. In the mediation process, China will first offer financial aid to people in the area to help their lives there, while at the same time use diplomacy to try to convince Bangladesh to stop deporting Rohingya refugees. It will also try to persuade Myanmar's government to acknowledge the identity of the Rohingya people as its citizens. The Foreign Minister of China Visited Bangladesh several times and working efficiently on the mediation process. A group of the official from

Myanmar visited the Rohingya people in Bangladesh and Chinese member was present there playing the role of mediator. If these mediations become successful, Bangladesh would be finally negotiated with Myanmar (Chakraverty, 2019).

Other than China, India did not work constructively on the Rohingya issue. It played a passive role and did not make any official statement regarding the Rohingya issue. Indian Government did not condemn Suu Kyi's government either. From Indian politics and their realism, India does not want to interfere in other country's internal issues. So, it did not directly involve here like the Chinese did and stayed neutral for both countries. It did not deploy armies or made sanctions on the borders. Rather it only gave some aids and medications to the Rohingyas.

They did not help significantly in crisis as they should. India, as a regional power could arrange a diplomatic talk between Bangladesh and Myanmar to sort any solution. India itself has a Rohingya problem. Yet it did not take any steps effectively to respond. In this humanitarian crisis, India only assisted Myanmar but on the Rohingya issue, they did not take any initiatives. Apart from geopolitics, the growing security concerns and the need for diplomatic balancing between Bangladesh and Myanmar also drive away from any strong engagement.

There is a qualitative difference between the response of China and India on the Rohingya issue. While China has engaged officially in this program, India did not announce any official statement. Though it supported the Myanmar government on the security issue, on Rohingya ethnic cleansing, India remained silent. For western attention, India allotted some aids to these refugees while it could play a vital role in helping Bangladesh and Myanmar to negotiate. Chinese government here for the first time is meditating between two countries and now actively working in the Rohingya crisis. Different Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between Bangladesh and China and they are playing a constructive role regarding the Rohingya issue. So, the Chinese constructive role and Indian neutral role here show the comparative response of these countries regarding the Rohingya crisis of 2017.

Why did China and India back Myanmar in the Rohingya Case?

After the military standoff in Doklam between Indian Armed Force and the Chinese Army, the Sino- Indian rivalry once again came into discussion. These two superpowers of Asia take policies to counter each other in trade, security, and bilateral treaties among other Asian countries. While China aims to trade globally, India also concentrating its focus on Central Asia. There is no doubt that these two countries are trying to compete with each other in achieving regional power. From Belt and Road Initiatives to Indo-Pacific Strategy, Sino-Indian rivalry is noticeable. But when it comes to the Rohingya issue, we see both of these countries are on the same page. The Rohingya crackdown of the Rakhine state by the Myanmar army led nearly 700000 Rohingya people in Bangladesh. The Muslim countries around the world along with humanitarian organizations kept pressuring Myanmar to take their people back but Myanmar is reluctant in its standing. The international community also raised a voice against Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership, but after two years these people are still living as refugees in Bangladesh. Prime Minister of Bangladesh expressed her concerns that Myanmar might want to engage in war over the Rohingya issue and the Asian giant powers are silently backing Myanmar Instead of Bangladesh.

India, a neighbor of both Bangladesh and Myanmar, backs Myanmar up while allowing aids to these refugees Rohingyas. India fears a jihadi nexus. Its intelligence services have reported close links between the ARSA, Bangladesh's Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB), and the Indian Mujahideen, all apparently backed by Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba that New Delhi holds responsible for the 2008 terror strike on Mumbai (Gao, 2017). India has a lot of interest in the Rakhine states as we already discussed. Besides, it is highly concerned about terrorist organizations like ARSA, fearing they might introduce similar groups in the Southeast Indian State. To a further extent, India threatened to expel its 40,000 Rohingyas in the country to avoid international pressure upon the Rohingya issue (Chenyang, 2010).

China also extends its support for Myanmar in the Rakhine state. It addressed the Rohingya crisis as an internal issue of Myanmar and Myanmar

should handle the situation on its own. In the diplomatic discussion of the UN council, China also backed Myanmar and request to solve the problem internally. China blocked the UN effort to pass a strong resolution aimed to condemn Myanmar's excessive military action against the Rohingya community (Cumming-Bruce, 2018).

Both China and India have a lot of infrastructures, gas and oil pipelines, construction projects, and ports in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Muslim Rohingyas are the majority in Buddhist Myanmar and that is the apple of discord for foreign investors like China and India. The threat of terrorism in their infrastructure and investment is a reason that they back Myanmar up. India directly expressed its concerns that ARSA might blow their gas pipeline up and nothing would be left to recover it. New Delhi and Beijing both are afraid that terrorism might exist in Rakhine if Rohingya people are living there.

Despite having border tension between China and India, they both agreed to work constructively on regional stability. Obviously, they are competing for influence in Myanmar, but their open supports for Myanmar gained criticism from media and world leaders. Like Sri Lanka, China is investing billions in the Kyauk Phyu seaport. Kyauk Phyu is important for China because the port is the entry point for a Chinese oil and gas pipeline which gives it an alternative route for energy imports from the Middle East that avoids the Malacca Strait. India shared concerns that this might be another debt trap like Sri Lanka and Myanmar would face domination of China by this joint venture. For each of their interests and security matters, both China and India are backing Myanmar up in the Rohingya issue (Poling, 2018).

Can China and India Coexist in Rakhine State?

China and India have different objectives in Myanmar including protection of national interest, ensuring geopolitical and geoeconomics security. So, there are obvious reasons for these two countries to be competing against each other. Both China and India have different geostrategic importance in the Rakhine state and while China is Myanmar's largest investor, India also investing millions of dollars for their energy supply and "Act East" policy.

It is clear that India is extremely concerned about its security from the neighboring state

Myanmar as its southeast part is far from New Delhi. Afraid of terrorist groups like ARSA, India found close relation with Laskar-e-Taiba and JMB with this ARSA attack. India officially stated that they supported Myanmar in their time of crisis, and they would back Myanmar in its fight. India also showed further support to Myanmar when they threatened to expel 40,000 Rohingyas from India. This action of India drew sharp criticism of the UN (Sen, 2017).

Like India, China also extended strong support to Myanmar. The Chinese ambassador to Myanmar said that the international community should create an external environment so that Myanmar could solve its problems properly. This comment was before the open discussion on Rakhine at the UN Security Council. Later China blocked the UN effort to pass a strong resolution aimed to condemn Myanmar's excessive military action against the Rohingya community. Because of the enormous Chinese and Indian infrastructure projects in the Rakhine, China and India coexist in the humanitarian question of the Rohingya people. The China-India competition in Myanmar shows China ahead of India, but India trying to reduce that dependence on China through Naypyidaw's policy. Myanmar cannot rely on any one country too much for political and economic sustenance, thus possibly threatening Chinese and Indian interests (United Nations, 2017).

During the September 2017 BRICS Summit, the Indian Prime Minister met the Chinese president and agreed on the ongoing Rohingya issue. According to Binod Mishra, head of the Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development in India: "Both India and China engage the Burmese military as much as the civilian government because the country is key to India's Act East policy and China's 'One Belt and Road Initiative.' Though both India and China seek a truce, they also compete with each other for power and influence. Myanmar has other strategic options as well if either India or China tries to influence it too much. In Southeast Asia, there is also an interest of the USA and Russia to form a blockade in this region to have access to the Indian Ocean and ISP. Though there is competition for influence between India and China, they could form an alliance if they reach a point when they have to compete with other important national interests. So, in terms of their interests and

investments, China and India coexist in the Rakhine state (Palit, 2016).

International Community vs Myanmar with China and India's Geopolitics

International communities along with countries and organizations showed sympathy over the ethnic cleansing of Rohingyas in Rakhine state and been giving aids to refugees in Bangladesh. Humanitarian activities of Bangladesh got appreciated worldwide, similarly, the inactive role of China and India regarding this issue carried criticism for them. Bangladesh's government is trying to strengthen the diplomatic efforts to earn China and India's support for Rohingya repatriation, but their role is imperative to resolve the crisis.

Bangladesh already filed a case of "genocide" in the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court. Myanmar is waiting for the verdict to respond but they are not showing any interest to take back the Rohingyas. Several officials from Bangladesh visited Myanmar since August 2017 and none of that visit is fruitful yet. Bureaucrats said they needed to continue their diplomacy with the US and the United Nations to make them impose sanctions on Myanmar over "genocide" charges. The UN has been monitoring the case of Rohingya people from the beginning, but the councils failed to resolve the issue. China and Russia exercised their veto power in the UN Security Council meeting over the Rohingya issue. There was no sign that they have changed minds and their geopolitics care about the Rakhine state, not the Rohingya people. India also restrained itself from exercising a vote that would have gone in favor of Bangladesh. Although Bangladesh is having a golden bilateral friendship with India, when it comes to the Rohingya issue Indian response is just constructive (The Daily Star, 2019).

China and India have good relations with Myanmar, and they are in competition with each other to further strengthen the relationship. For that, they are standing with Myanmar in the international arena like the UN and ICJ. Recently Gambia filed a case against Myanmar in the ICJ accused Myanmar of mass killing Rohingya people. The verdict is yet to come, and this area is out of the influence of Myanmar's strong friend China and India (Goldberg, 2019).

Bangladesh's Challenges from Sino-Indian Alliance towards Rohingya Crisis

When two big powers make any alliance, there are personal interests behind the alliance. The same happened between China and India. Though they have power rivalry in South Asian geopolitics and tension in the borders, they made a truce and mutually backing Myanmar in the Rohingya issue. This Sino-Indian alliance is making security and economic concerns for Bangladesh. Their huge investment in the Rakhine state and silence about the Rohingya issue made it clear that Myanmar is now more important to them than Bangladesh.

Rakhine is only about 150 km away from Chattogram in Bangladesh. The economic and geographic maps of this region are changing rapidly. The continued focus on the Rakhine issue by both India and China reduces the geographic and strategic importance of Bangladesh to them. The government of Bangladesh is trying to earn the support of India and China, but they are imperative to resolve the problem. Their passive role and unwillingness causing Bangladesh concerns (Taufiq, 2019).

This Sino-Indian alliance now creating some challenges for Bangladesh. Although Bangladesh signed the Belt and Road Initiative with China in 2016 and some megaprojects with China, it seems China playing a neutral role as a third party between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Both China and Myanmar have a different response to this Rohingya issue, but their alliance making to clear they are not willing to play an active role here. Myanmar also pushing these countries to play in favor of them. So that is another challenge for Bangladesh to overcome. China is providing remarkable aids and building constructions in the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh to please both Bangladesh and Myanmar. If these works stop by the triple alliance, Bangladesh would be facing huge management problems. The funding remains a great challenge as only 36% met of required \$920m for 2019. In this situation, both China and India are backing Myanmar instead of Bangladesh, which is a diplomatic failure of this South Asian country. The role that China playing as a mediator is a light of hope for Bangladesh, maybe the only hope to negotiate with Myanmar.

Bangladesh is expecting the support of the two powerful neighboring countries that have close

economical and geographical interests in Myanmar. China and India are not willing to interfere with the internal issue of these countries. The coexistence of China and India in the Rakhine and their formal alliance thus created challenges for Bangladesh to overcome in Rohingya issue.

Rohingya people have been living in the Rakhine state for hundred years. They are Muslims in faith and culturally near to Bengali. The former Arakan state (now Rakhine) was the eastern part of Bengali but now it is situated in Myanmar. After the independence of Myanmar, its army coup in 1962 brought misfortune for these Rohingya people. They refused to recognize these people as their citizens and been pushing them to Bangladesh. In the 2017 Rohingya crisis, we have seen the exodus of people crossing the border for the fear of persecution and entering Bangladesh. For a third-world country like Bangladesh, this influx number of people, nearly one million marked many challenges. Unwilling to take the people where they belong, the government of Myanmar is calculating the benefits of this ethnic cleansing.

Bangladesh, then moved to China and India to resolve this issue of Rohingya. Bangladesh tried to earn diplomatic support of China and India but for different economic and security issues, both China and India stand with Myanmar regarding this issue. As they both have geostrategic hotspots in the Rakhine and invested for big projects like BRI and energy supply, China and India showed unwillingness to interfere. Their different geopolitical aspects proved they have more interests in Rakhine than Bangladesh for now. With the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya people, both China and India are beneficiaries of their own interests. India has a security issue regarding the ARSA attack on the Myanmar police station and was afraid that these radical groups might be a threat to their projects in the Rakhine.

Similarly, China has invested millions in Rakhine for their BRI project and Kyauk Phyu Seaport. They are much interested in the connection of South Asia and Southeast Asia through this Rakhine state. In the Buddhist majority country, the Muslims were the majority in the Rakhine and now as they have left, it is undoubtedly good news for China and India. For their geostrategic importance in the Rakhine, they had backed Myanmar in this crisis. Not only that, China and India both are on the

same page when it comes to influencing Myanmar. Instead of their power rivalry in South Asia, they have coexisted in the Rakhine. Besides both, China and India responded differently regarding the issue.

China responded that as both Bangladesh and Myanmar are sovereign countries, they should resolve the problem themselves and played the role of mediator in some extent. Whereas India provided limited humanitarian and economic assistance to Bangladesh and played a neutral role as both Bangladesh and Myanmar are direct shareholders of it. This Sino-Indian mutual alliance brought challenges for Bangladesh both diplomatically and strategically. Bangladesh now bearing the burden of these Rohingya people alone with limited assistance of the international community. Now it has been two years since the crackdown of Rohingya people and still, there is no sign of repatriation or rehabilitation of these people. With these powerful countries like China and India backing Myanmar, it will be hard for Bangladesh to find a solution of this Rohingya problem geopolitically and economically.

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh is currently the largest refugee holding country in the world. The military crackdown caused more than 700,000 Rohingya people to stateless and this minority ethnic group feared to stay in that country. When Indonesia, India, and Malaysia refused to accept the Rohingyas, Bangladesh opened its border to shelter these mass people. The regional powerful states appreciated this step but failed to play an active role in this. Being helpless, Bangladesh asked for support to China and India for cooperation. China is playing the role of mediator since 2017 according to some MoU signed with Bangladesh. But India is playing a neutral role on sides. China and India have been competing with each other for Pan-Asian leadership and they both have geostrategic interest in Bangladesh and Myanmar. But when it comes to the Rohingya crisis, China and India are shamelessly backing Myanmar.

India also supported Myanmar on security aspects and responded not to interfere in their internal situation. But both of these countries have geostrategic interest in Myanmar which would benefit them in terms of trade, communication, access to the Indian Sea, and energy supply. For

these, the Rakhine state is very crucial for both China and India regarding its strategic location, hence they do not want the Rohingya problem to be solved. Now that Bangladesh has lost the hope to get any support from these two countries, it should wait for the negotiation with Myanmar with a third party involved. If that does not happen, there would be other big changes for South Asian geopolitics.

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