Rohingya - Bangladesh’s dilemma

What is the issue?

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With prevailing persecution of Rohingyas, Bangladesh’s people and government feel morally pressured to take in the refugees. But the hard realities make it difficult.

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Why it is an emotional issue?

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- It is argued that Bengalis should look back at the history of their own persecution by the Pakistan army in 1971, when 10 million of them crossed into India and were provided shelter and everything that such shelter entailed for more than the nine months when the country’s War of Liberation was at its peak.
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- Images of Bangladesh’s coast guard and its navy turning away Rohingya approaching the country’s shores and probably compelling them to drift out to the Bay of Bengal have been deeply unsettling for people.
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Why Bangladesh government is reluctant?

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- The 1971 analogy does not work as the Rohingya are not engaged in a war of independence. Another reason is that the conditions do not exist for Bangladesh to pursue a military solution to the Rohingya issue with Myanmar.
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- Bangladesh government remains wary of letting the Rohingya in owing to their experiences in the past. In the 1990s, a very large number of Rohingya, fleeing persecution in Myanmar entered Bangladesh and made their home in the coastal regions of the country.
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- While a very insignificant number of these earlier Rohingya migrants returned home as a result of local and international measures, a very large segment of as many as 5,00,000 stayed back.
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- The fears of a fresh influx of Rohingya therefore have compelled the Bangladesh government to refuse entry.
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- Bangladesh's government and vast sections of its people are not swayed by the argument, that once the Yangon authorities are persuaded into arriving at a deal on the status of the Rohingya, those allowed entry into Bangladesh will go back home.
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- From among those Rohingya who have been in Cox's Bazar and Chittagong for the past couple of decades has emerged a new class of Islamist militants hostile to the growth of liberal politics in the country. Most of these new militants came under indoctrination by such fanatical groups as the Jamaat-e-Islami.
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- Add to that the corruption involved in a supply of Bangladeshi passports illegally to large groups of Rohingya, who then made it to West Asia as wage earners. They committed criminal acts in the Middle East, leaving the country red in the face.
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- Adding to these, Bangladesh's government and people were confounded by the absolute silence of Myanmar's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi on the issue.
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- In her years in incarceration, Suu Kyi enjoyed mass adoration in Bangladesh and it was only natural to expect that she would influence a change in the approach to the Rohingya situation.
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- That she has said not a word, and has carefully stayed clear of addressing these persecuted people as Rohingya, has convinced people in Bangladesh that the Myanmar military continues to call the shots and that Suu Kyi wields little authority.
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