

# **STRENGTHENING BANGLADESH – MYANMAR RELATIONS: A FOCUS ON ECONOMIC ISSUES AND CONNECTIVITY**

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## **Introduction**

Bangladesh and Myanmar are two neighboring countries having 271 kilometer of international boundary. After the independence of Bangladesh Myanmar recognized Bangladesh on 13 January, 1972 as a sovereign state. On 13 August, 1973 a general trade agreement was signed between Bangladesh and Burma. Three memorandum of understanding were signed on June 1989 to start border trade and economic cooperation. After that, cooperation and joint venture within private sector got momentum and Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) and Union of Myanmar Chamber of Commerce (UMCCI) started working together. On 18 May 1994, border protocol was signed between this two neighbours which facilitated informal border trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar. From 05 September 1995 border trade formally started between Teknaf and Maungdaw. (Maung Tun, 2016).

Bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar became strained after 25 August 2017. Approximately 1.2 million Rohingyas have been forced to leave Myanmar. It indicates that Myanmar is shifting its Rohingya people to Bangladesh. Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina, the Mother of Humanity, accepted these oppressed people inside Bangladesh territory (Ali, 2018). This problem is posing threat to the security and creating pressure on the economy of Bangladesh.

Government of Bangladesh has taken all-out effort to attain sustainable development and achieve vision 2041 to be a developed nation. A harmonious relationship with the neighbours are essential for attaining

that goal. Ongoing Rohingya crisis or other issues should not create impediments in developing the relationship. Myanmar should feel comfortable in dealing with Bangladesh in terms of trade and economic cooperation. Bangladesh border with Myanmar should remain peaceful for uninterrupted trade and commerce and should be economically productive. Bangladesh and Myanmar must develop an environment where both the countries can engage in a 'win-win' situation.

## **Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations**

Bangladesh and Myanmar are historically related and both the country has a common colonial inheritance. Myanmar is important for Bangladesh as it provides the gateway to South East Asia as well as to China. Bangladesh intent to maintain close ties and develop bilateral relations on the basis of peaceful co-existence, non-alignment and mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and national dignity (Ali, 2018). Just after that President Ne Win for the first time visited Bangladesh in the mid-1974. For last 40 years, number of visits by high officials took place between the two countries. Despite all the efforts these two neighbor failed to utilize the potential benefit out of these (Ahmed, 2014).

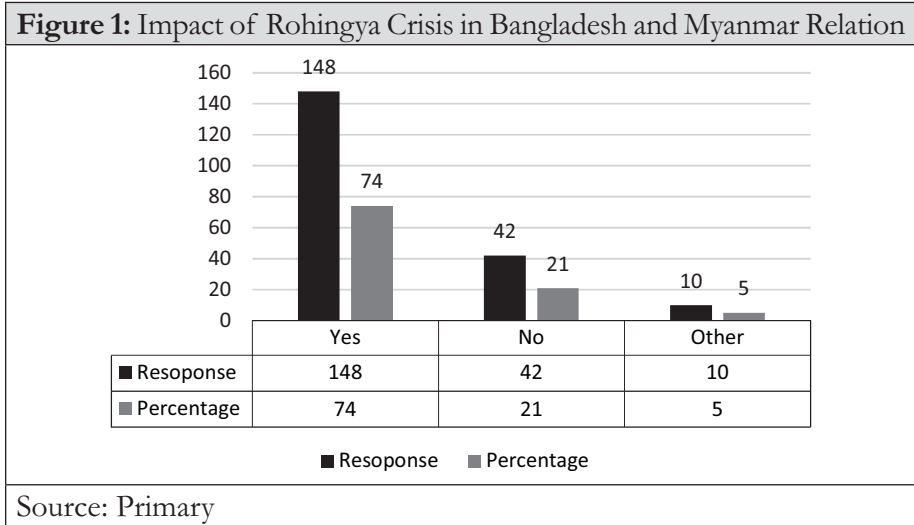
Bangladesh Myanmar relation took a positive turn when Head of the State General Than Shwe visited Bangladesh in December 2002 and then the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister to Myanmar in March 2003. Those visits were very important in developing Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. In March 2003, three agreements were concluded, those are Coastal Shipping, Trade Account, and Joint Business Council agreements. In October 2008, Myanmar vice Senior General Maung Aye visited Bangladesh and after that visit in May 2009 Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Dipu Moni visited Myanmar (Haque, 2018).

Relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar were expected to move towards greater economic cooperation after Aung San Suu Kyi came to power and Myanmar's gradual transition towards democracy. In December

2011, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Myanmar for strengthening the bilateral relations and developing mutual trade between the two countries. After the official bilateral meeting between Sheikh Hasina and president U Thein Sein in Myanmar's new capital Nay Pyi Taw , 15 point joint statement were delivered. Prime Minister of Bangladesh expressed Bangladesh's willingness to import energy from Myanmar and requested the President to import readymade garments (RMG), pharmaceutical products, knitwear, jute and ceramic goods from Bangladesh at competitive price (Ali, 2018). During that visit an agreement was also signed for establishing a Joint Commission for bilateral cooperation between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

## **Ongoing Bangladesh-Myanmar Relation**

Recent Rohingya crisis has affected the ongoing trade and commerce between two countries. Other bilateral issues which were on progress are also came to stand still. This problem need to be addressed bilaterally and multilaterally for strengthening of the relationship between the two countries (Mirdha, 2018). Bangladesh cannot shut the door of dialogue with the neighbours. Myanmar is getting benefits from the transition to democracy from the western countries. Bangladesh need to develop the relationship for her economic benefit, connectivity, security issues and other unsettled areas (Uddin, 2018). From the survey it was found that 75 percent of respondent opined that, existing relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar is not cordial. There will be always issues between neighbours, as good neighbour these issues to be solved amicably. Recent Rohingya crisis has grave implication in economic stability and security situation (Uddin, 2018). These need to be addressed by both Bangladesh and Myanmar. 74 percent respondents opined that Rohingya crisis has deteriorated the relationship further as shown in figure 1:



It is expected by the people of Bangladesh that the situation needs to be improved, 99 percent respondents expressed this view. It can be said that, due to ongoing Rohingya crisis the relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar is not congenial and efforts must be taken to improve this situation.

From the History, Bilateral relationship, the geostrategic location, regional trade opportunities, natural resources and strategic partnership of Bangladesh and Myanmar, following assessment may be made:

Both Bangladesh and Myanmar are located in a very significant Geostrategic area. This unique feature can contribute further for growth and economic development of the region.

Both the country has significant trade relationship with the International Community. Trade relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar to be developed as there is scope for significant improvement.

India and China have growing involvement in both Myanmar and Bangladesh. This must be utilized for solving bilateral issues developing connectivity and economic relations with Myanmar.

India and China can play major role in developing Myanmar - Bangladesh relationship. Bangladesh need to keep both the regional power to engage effectively with Myanmar.

Myanmar is a lucrative destination for investment for the investor of ASEAN countries, China and India. Bangladesh also can come forward to invest in Myanmar.

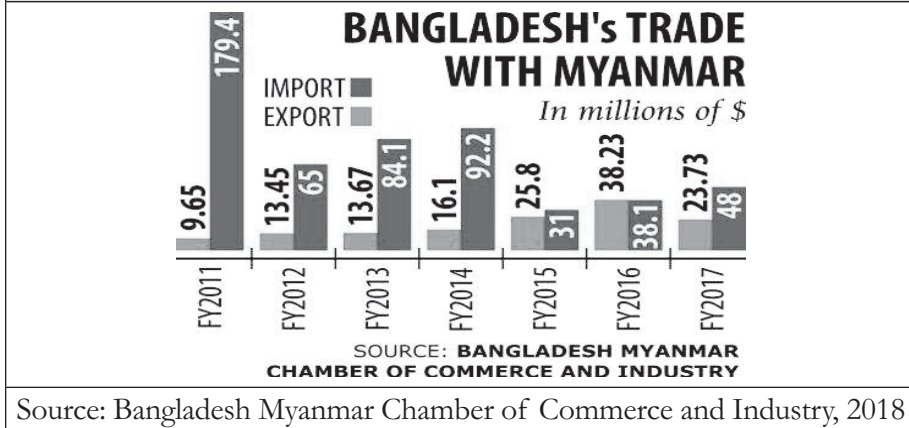
### **Promoting Trade and Commerce with Myanmar**

Bangladesh and Myanmar have huge possibilities in developing their bilateral economic relations. Bangladesh need to understand and study its domestic dynamics, ethnic, religious and geopolitical issues to address this. In Myanmar, there are urge for reforms both by insiders and outsiders, the pace is rather slow and unpredictable which have implications for the country's relations with its neighbours (Islam, 2018). Myanmar has huge natural resources from which Bangladesh can also be benefitted (Kallol, 2017). The border trade with Myanmar through Sittwe and Maungdaw stations is nominal compared to other neighboring border trade stations of Myanmar, such as Tamu and Reed. Bangladesh should continuously try to get the market access with Myanmar. The country has huge potential and this must be utilized effectively (Rashid, 2018).

### **Trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar**

Recent crisis with Myanmar effected existing trade and commerce. From July and December 2017, exports to Myanmar declined 12.08 percent according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau. In January-February 2018, trade through Teknaf land port declined nearly 10 percent. Business communities of both the countries are continuing trade despite ongoing situation (Hoque, 2018). Bangladesh's trade with Myanmar in this period is shown figure 2:

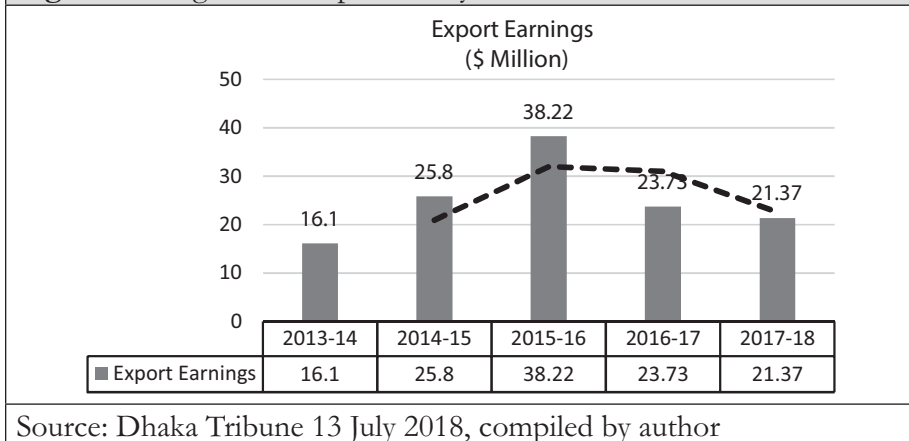
Figure 2: Bangladesh’s Trade with Myanmar



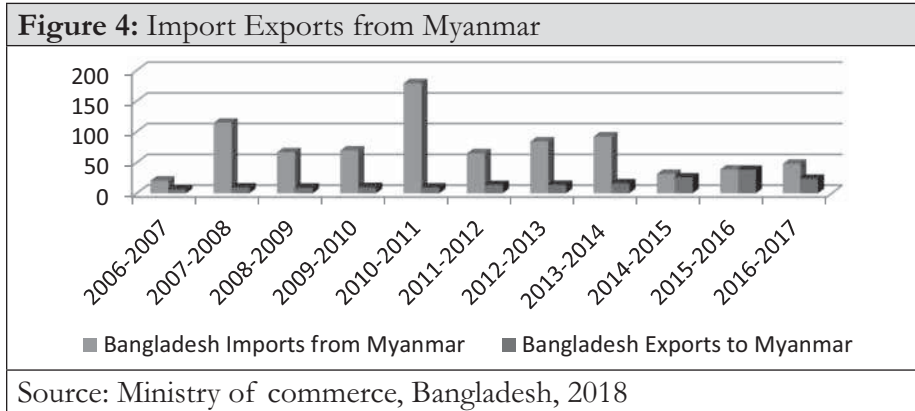
Source: Bangladesh Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2018

Business between the two countries should not stop because it generates employment opportunity. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar should have a common understanding in both political and economic issues so that the business runs well as they need exist together (Mohiuddin, 2018). Bangladesh exports to Myanmar have declined nearly ten percent in fiscal year 2017-18 due to the Rohingya crisis. The business community and trade experts blamed the ongoing Rohingya crisis for the decline in export earnings as it upset the shipment of export goods at the border (Ovi, 2018). Bangladesh’s export to Myanmar is shown in the figure below:

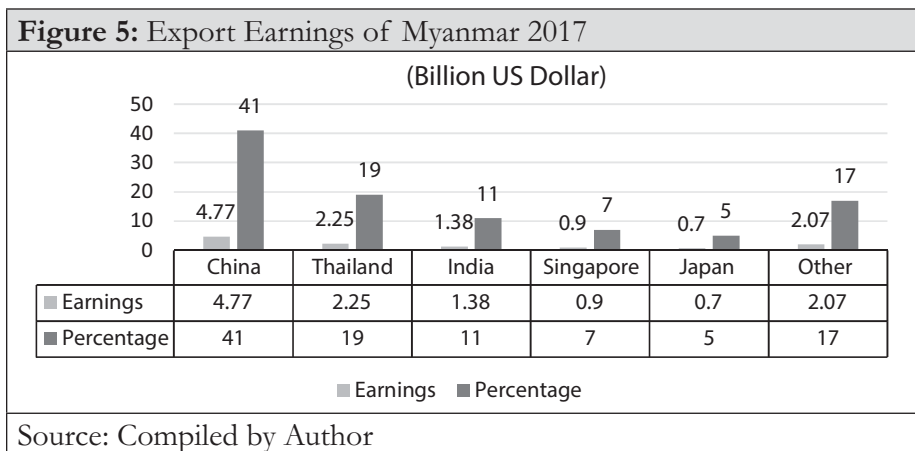
Figure 3: Bangladesh’s export to Myanmar



There are scope to improve the trade relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar as it did not reach to optimum level. Trade figures between Bangladesh and Myanmar are shown in the figure below:



Myanmar has emerged as a democratic country promising greater possibilities for growth through trade partnerships with different countries including Bangladesh. Total export earnings of Myanmar in 2017 was US \$ 11.67 billion. Out of this 9.6 billion dollar is from five countries (Daily Jugantor, 09 May 2018). Details are:



Total import of Myanmar is also dominated by these five countries. In 2017 Myanmar imported goods of US \$ 12.7 billion from China, Singapore, Thailand Japan and India. Bangladesh along with China and India can take

a coordinated effort for solving the Rohingya crisis and improve bilateral relationship. These countries play significant role in major economic activities of Myanmar. Support of these five countries can contribute significantly in developing bilateral relationship with Myanmar as well as confidence building (Daily Jugantor, 09 May 2018).

There is no investment agreement, shipping or air agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Till now there is no tourism and currency agreements. Being neighbour there are no road connectivity between these two countries. The existing shipping service between Teknaf and Sittwe to be intensified and efforts may be taken to connect Chittagong sea port with Myanmar's Yangon (Kabir, 2018). To reduce the cost of business, goods can be transported from Teknaf to Sittwe via river route and from there by road to other parts of Myanmar (Haque, 2018).

On 19 June 2018, Myanmar reformed its investment commission, according to Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA), Myanmar will also enforce a new company's law starting from First august 2018 aiming at attracting more foreign investment. The new law will facilitate rapid registration for companies using the online registration system. According to statistics Myanmar attracted 5.7 billion US dollars annual foreign investment in fiscal year 2017-18. Singapore topped the list of foreign investors with 2.1 billion US dollars followed by China with 1.39 billion US dollars (Daily Star, 20 June 2018). Bangladesh can take advantage of this law and can be benefitted.

To develop trade and commerce with Myanmar, existing infrastructure for trade and commerce in Bangladesh need to be developed. Border trade will increase if more facilities are available and local traders can continue trade with ease. Existing infrastructure is not perfect and needs improvement as opined by 95 percent respondents. Due to existing Rohingya crisis border trade slowed down as opined by 85 percent respondents. Bangladesh is not interested to stop the trade with Myanmar as it will give rise to unemployment problem and will have adverse effect on the local economy. 82 percent



of respondents expressed that Economic development will have positive impact in developing better relationship. Successful diplomacy along with economic engagement can also contribute in developing relationship.

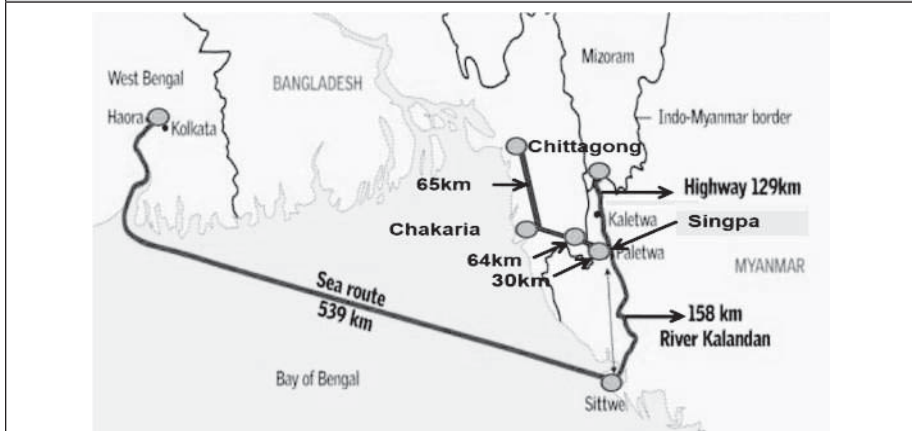
## **Developing Connectivity with Myanmar**

Connectivity is considered as an important element for bilateral and multilateral cooperation (Rahman, 2018). Connectivity fosters economy, development, trade and people to people contact (Shringla, 2018). As a developing economy Bangladesh is always positive in developing connectivity within the regional countries. Connectivity with Myanmar will contribute in development of infrastructure in both the countries, creation of job opportunities, increase trade and commerce with Myanmar, ASEAN countries and China. This will increase people to people to contact and develop interpersonal and social connection and build confidence. Land communication through road and rail if establish will enhance business, export import and promote tourism manifold. Bangladesh's eastern Sea line of communication and uninterrupted flow of supply can also be ensured through this sea route in case of any eventualities. Direct air connection is available now from Bangladesh to Yangon by Bangladesh Biman. Connectivity with China through Myanmar will take place as China is pursuing Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Present Rohingya crisis has made the progress slow but it will continue. Connectivity will be a reality in this region in future (Rahman, 2018). Bangladesh took initiative to establish connectivity through Myanmar. From Alikdam area of Bandarban district road can be contracted through the hills and that can be connected with Paletwa area through Chin state. From there this road will go to China or through different city of Myanmar to other ASEAN countries (Akhand, 2018). For Bangladesh, with Myanmar there is considerable scope for extensive collaboration in areas of physical connectivity, economic, trade, investments, tourism and culture. From survey, 93 percent of respondent opined that better Connectivity contribute in flourishing trade and commerce and can contribute in developing relationship.

## Cooperation through BIMSTEC

Bangladesh and Myanmar are also the member of BIMSTEC. Bangladesh needs to be connected with the road that is going to be finished on 2018, which will connect Mizoram of India with Chin and Rakhine state of Myanmar a part of Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project. From Bangladesh the road will originate from Chokoria and go via Alikadam and Madak to Kaletwa inside Myanmar to join with the road connecting Kyauktaw-Paletwa. This road will reduce the transportation cost and time for trade and commerce between Bangladesh and south East Asian countries along with China. Proposed road connectivity is shown in the figure below:

**Figure 6:** Proposed Road Connectivity between Bangladesh - Myanmar



Source: Compiled by Author

Chittagong hill tracts can be developed and connected with the ASEAN countries through this road. By this another economic sector will be opened and Bangladesh will be benefitted out of that (Mannan, 2018).

## The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The BRI aims to enhance the flow of people, capital and goods between Europe, Africa and Asia. China has already provided monetary support

in infrastructure projects in several countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia (Singh, 2018). If implemented Bangladesh will be benefited from this forum and connectivity with Myanmar, ASEAN countries and China will improve. Bangladesh need to undertake initiative to integrate the economy with regional economic giants and thereby leverage such connectivity to promote security and economic benefits (Kabir, 2018)

## **Challenges and Options**

### **Challenges-Bangladesh Myanmar Relations**

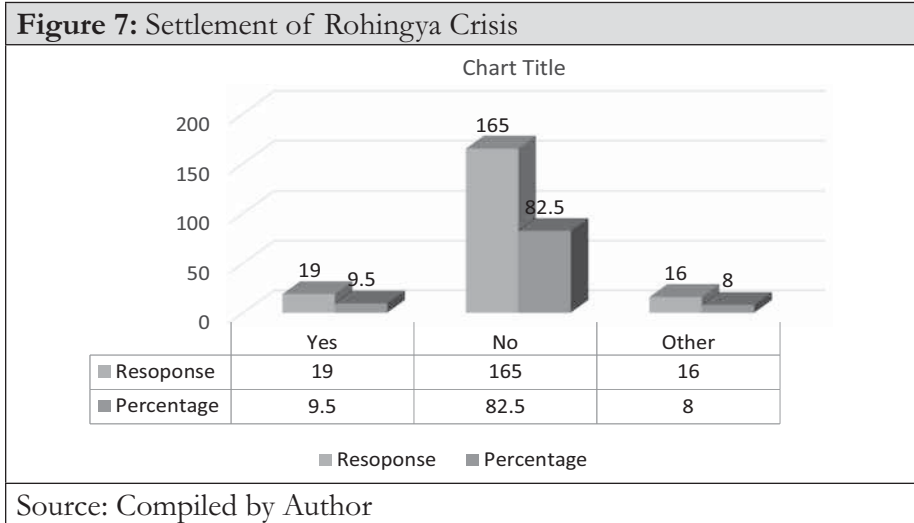
There are number of challenges in Bangladesh Myanmar relationship. Democracy in Myanmar is in very nascent stage. Army is still dominating the major activities of the government and it will continue. This divided government takes the decision very slowly. Myanmar government is ready to accept the fact but reluctant in solving the issue (Ali, 2018). All these create hindrance in developing bilateral relationship. In this paper focus is given mainly with trade, commerce, recent Rohingya crisis and connectivity.

### **Rohingya Crisis**

The Rohingyas of Myanmar have faced havoc in 1978, 1991–1992, 2012, 2015, 2016 and finally in August 2017. Recent incidents has exceeded all the previous instances. Bangladesh is making relentless efforts to resolve this issue through diplomatic channels. But due to Myanmar Government's inflexibility and their definition of citizenship, refugee problem is creating pressure on local economy and social harmony (Sobhan, 2018). Now is the time for operational organizations, donors and the government of Bangladesh to start preparing for the impact of long-term displacement. Rohingya problem is not going to be settled immediately as came out from the survey<sup>1</sup>. The result is shown on the figure:

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1. Survey carried out during the research by author.



It is evident that Myanmar is run by the military and thereby everything happens in that country is under autocratic rule. So it will take a bit of time for the change to take place from military rule to civilian rule. Until such time Bangladesh should have patience since aggravating tension won't do any good to the people living in the country. There is a need to engage constructively with China and India to persuade Myanmar to recognize the issue and get in meaningful dialogue with Bangladesh.

### **Mistrust in the psyche of Military and Spread of hatred against Rohingyas, Muslims and Bangladeshi by the regime**

In Myanmar a strong message is given to the common people regarding the Bangladeshi and Rohingyas. They felt threatened that huge population of Bangladesh will come and occupy their land. There will be threat to their culture and religion. During the military regime this type of propaganda were carried out to foster nationalism among Bhamar and Buddhist people of Myanmar. This has negative impact on Bangladesh Myanmar relationship (Akhand, 2018). By the late 1980 the military regime was concerned regarding the bordering areas of Rakhine state. In 1988 a document was circulated around the ministry for the progress of Border

areas and national races known as Na Ta La. This was an 11 point strategy to turn back the tide against an encroaching Islam. This was done to strive for the increase in Buddhist population to be more than the number of Muslim people by way of establishing Natala villages in Arakan with Buddhist settlers from different township and from out of the country (Wade, 2017). Military government of Myanmar used to portray Bangladesh as a country with heavy population growth. These Bangladeshis will grab their land and gradually their religion will be attacked by these people. These were the propaganda by the military for their survival. Repeated negative propaganda has antagonized some of them and developed hatred among them (Haque, 2018).

## **Challenges Related to Trade and Commerce**

Bangladesh has a very large population and big market, this is a strength of Bangladesh. From Bangladesh Pharmaceutical products, fabric cotton, raw jute cosmetics can be exported to Myanmar as these goods have demand there. Myanmar economy is mainly controlled by China. India is also investing in Myanmar. Other superpowers also have interest in Myanmar. Myanmar can understand its importance to regional powers and Super powers. In this aspect Bangladesh gets no priority to Myanmar (Jasim Uddin, 2018). China looks at Bangladesh as trading nation. China also considers Bangladesh as pivotal node for connectivity and people to people contact with South and Southeast Asia (Sobhan, 2018).

## **Effectiveness of Look east policy**

Look east policy of Bangladesh needs to be pursued further to develop effective bilateral relationship and people to people contact. After the election of Myanmar when National League for Democracy (NLD) came to power our diplomats were first to congratulate Aung Sun Suu Kei. During that time they did not appreciate the military regime for arranging this election and support the democratic process. In Myanmar military dominates the politics and they will have influence over politics in near

future also. As per constitution their representative will be appointed in different tier of administration. Bangladesh failed to utilize the influence of Myanmar Army in her favour.

## SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is carried out by the author to find out the strength, weakness, opportunities and threats that exist in Bangladesh Myanmar relationship for developing the bilateral relationship. The details are:

<b>Figure 8: SWOT Analysis</b>	
<p><b>Strength</b></p> <p>Exposure to huge market of the regional countries.</p> <p>Geo-strategic location of Bangladesh.</p> <p>Relationship with regional power. Support of world community.</p> <p>Democratic/ elected government of both the countries.</p> <p>Good will and good neighbourly attitude of Bangladesh.</p> <p>Positive attitude and dynamism in the leadership of Bangladesh.</p> <p>Attitude to contain the situation and not to aggravate but address to solve gradually.</p> <p>Adaptability with the changed environment</p>	<p><b>Weakness</b></p> <p>Less number of products for export to regional countries.</p> <p>Non availability of connectivity via road, rail and sea with Myanmar, China and ASEAN countries.</p> <p>Ignorance about the neighbouring country Myanmar.</p> <p>Divided government of Myanmar.</p> <p>Lack of people to people contact.</p> <p>Lack of knowledge, education and training and shortage of seasoned diplomats.</p>
<p><b>Opportunity</b></p> <p>Diplomatic relationship with China and opening up with ASEAN countries.</p> <p>Strategic location between South Asia and Southeast Asia.</p> <p>World interest shown in BIMSTEC.</p> <p>Chinese interest in Bangladesh and this region.</p>	<p><b>Threat</b></p> <p>Unresponsiveness attitude of Myanmar. Regional political hegemony.</p> <p>Emerging security threat and trust building.</p> <p>Recent Rohingya crisis and its impact on bilateral relationship.</p>
<p>Source: Compiled by Author</p>	

From above it is clear that there are opportunities to strengthen the relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar. The existing threats can be minimized through strong diplomatic efforts, track II diplomacy and with the help of friendly countries.

## **Options available for Bangladesh**

Despite number of challenges there are options available for Bangladesh to strengthen bilateral relationship with Myanmar (Ali, 2018). To form engagement partnership with Myanmar and to consider it an indispensable part of Bangladesh's 'look east' policy to enhance economic, diplomatic, cultural, business, and people to people contacts with all the South-East Asian nations including China. Myanmar should be considered as an indispensable part of Bangladesh's 'Look East' policy. Bangladesh await Myanmar's sincere engagement on resolving the protracted Rohingya crisis, in keeping with the position that Prime Minister articulated at the UN General Assembly in September 2017, in New York (Ali, 2018).

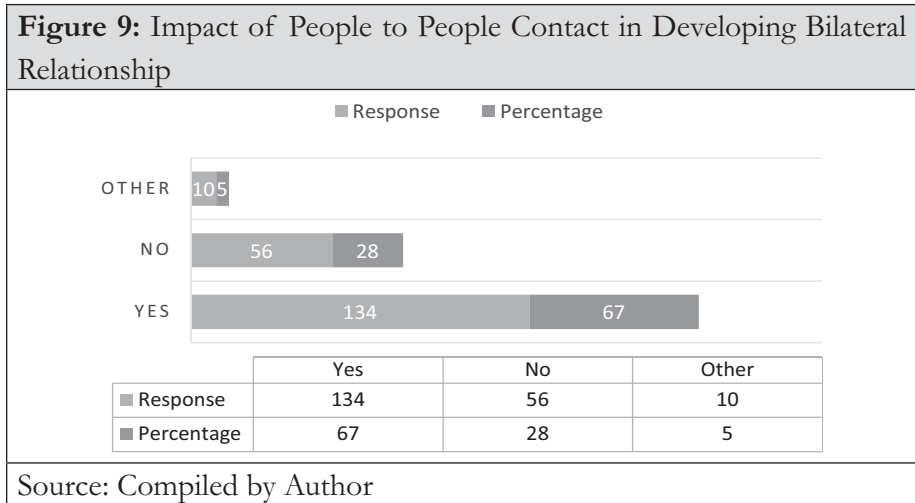
## **Effective Economic Engagement**

Trade and commerce has been an integral part of economic diplomacy, a means for development in this modern world and in this area neighbouring countries naturally get a greater focus and even adverse political relations are put aside in this consideration. Everybody needs consumers and market for trade and commerce to flourish (Ramadan, 2018). As Myanmar is welcoming the foreign investments and bringing reform in their policy, interested investors from Bangladesh can be encouraged to invest there. For developing the relationship there is no alternative to the effective economic engagements. Bangladesh and Myanmar does not have any official agreements on investment, tourism and currency exchange (Rashid, 2018).

## **People to People Contact**

People to people exchange is the key for attaining a new height in Bangladesh- Myanmar relations. It can be done through tourism, student

exchange, organizing sports events etc. People to people contact is a powerful tool of diplomacy which can shape the opinion of the people in favour of building stronger relations, trust and understanding between the countries. Better people to people contact can breach existing mistrust and can contribute bilateral relationship as shown in the figure below:



This need to be enhanced through a blend of new mechanism, resource and sustained spirit for strengthening bilateral relationship.

### Cooperation in Promoting Human Resources

Bangladesh is capable to cooperate in developing human resources of Myanmar. Bangladesh can assist Myanmar on microcredit, education and women empowerment as the country is proud to have two globally reputed microcredit organizations like Grameen Bank and BRAC. BRAC has already started activities in Myanmar on a small scale. It can play significant role in promoting human resources in remote or backward areas like Rakhine state in Myanmar. A developed Rakhine state will contribute in establishing peace in the neighbouring areas. Vocational training could be another area, where they can help Myanmar.



## **Diplomatic Engagement**

Diplomatic maneuver by Bangladesh Government through diplomat's adequacy, effective diplomacy by those diplomats, and exchange of delegation visits between these two countries, and close ties among the diplomats of these two countries should continue. As per the Myanmar's Constitution, the policy making body, both at national and state or regional level is military dominant (Constitution of Myanmar, 2008). Representatives from Military should also be taken on board for solving any dispute. 74 percent respondent opined that proactive role taken by Bangladesh can develop the relationship with Myanmar. Bangladesh need to instil a sense of trust into the mind of the government and the people of Myanmar. With diplomatic proficiency, efforts must continue to resolve the issues including Rohingya crisis (Kabir, 2018). Measures should be taken to eliminate the mistrust gradually, that has been implanted in the mind of the people through propaganda by different interested groups in Myanmar. Bangladesh government should undertake confidence building measures to develop relationship with Myanmar. This initiative will strengthen relationship as opined by 90 percent respondents. Reducing mistrust and developing confidence in bilateral association will help in strengthen the bond among Bangladesh and Myanmar.

## **Amicable Settlement of Rohingya Crisis**

Past experiences of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and other countries, indicate that this crisis is likely to persist for years (Uddin, 2018). To resolve this issue, more diplomatic pressure must be brought to bear towards a political solution to the persecution and discrimination that is at the heart of the crisis. China and ASEAN can be particularly influential given their links and ties to Myanmar (UK Government Response to the Committee's First Report, 2018). India is beside Bangladesh in solving Rohingya crisis. India is actively participating in developing the Rakhine state of Myanmar and constructing shelters for the Rohingya's before there repatriation (Shringla, 2018). Japan has very good and historical relationship with

Myanmar. Support from Japan may expedite the repatriation of Rohingya refugees (Ashrafuddoulla, 2018). A multidirectional approach is needed to address, urgent humanitarian needs for the Rohingya refugees along with mobilization of resources to support a longer-term developmental plan as well as significant shift in policy to enhance refugees' rights and freedom (Wake and Yu, 2018).

## **Recommendations**

Despite number of challenges there are options available for Bangladesh to strengthen bilateral relationship with Myanmar. Bangladesh should form engagement partnership with Myanmar and consider it as an indispensable part of Bangladesh's 'look east' policy to enhance economic, diplomatic, cultural, business, and people to people contacts with all the South-East Asian nations including China. For fostering the confidence and trust of the Myanmar government and its people and to convey that Bangladesh is sincere about bilateral relationship based on the policy of non-interference and respect for each other's sovereignty. Look East policy of Bangladesh need to be pursued to promote and strengthen the relationship with Myanmar. From this research following recommendations are made to strengthen bilateral relationship with Myanmar on economic issues and connectivity:

- Due to ongoing Rohingya crisis the relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar became strained. This affected the ongoing trade and commerce between two countries. Bangladesh should take strong diplomatic stand with the help of China, India and International Community for quick compliance of the repatriation agreement including the 'Kofi Annan Commission' report and reach to a plausible solution of the Rohingya issue.
- Effort should be taken to develop connectivity with China and ASEAN countries through Myanmar. To materialize this, Bangladesh should take initiative and strong diplomatic efforts to utilize the existing forums like BCIM, BRI and BIMSTEC for pursuing this issue with the support from China and other ASEAN countries.

- Bangladesh lacks adequate knowledge about Myanmar. Efforts should be taken to develop expertise on Myanmar for understanding the mindset, cultural and historical values of the country, sentiment of the people and politicians, to engage effectively with Myanmar for sustained development through economic engagement and connectivity.
- Confidence building measures should be taken by Bangladesh utilizing all available means. Strong diplomatic effort, people to people contact and Track II diplomacy should go simultaneously to pursue this issue. Myanmar should be assured that Bangladesh is not going to destabilize and disturb its political and religious harmony by diplomatic efforts and with the help of the friendly countries like China, India and ASEAN countries.
- Myanmar is rich in raw materials and is depository of oil and gas. Bangladesh with its trained manpower can build an export-based manufacturing hub jointly with Myanmar. Bangladesh should take appropriate step to get the power and energy from Myanmar.
- Myanmar is welcoming the foreign investments and bringing reform in their policy. Interested investors from Bangladesh should be given appropriate incentives and should be encouraged to invest in Myanmar. This will pave the way for developing bilateral relations and people to people contact.
- Bangladesh should take proactive measure to develop relationship with the democratic government as well as with the military authority of Myanmar. In Myanmar military dominates the politics and this will continue for some time. Bangladesh should utilize the influence of Myanmar Army along with political parties in her favour to strengthen bilateral relationship.
- Bangladesh should develop existing infrastructure for developing cross border trade and connectivity to reduce the cost of business and encourage local businessmen for trade and commerce with Myanmar. Coastal shipping agreement should be signed and implemented for easy shipment of goods from Bangladesh to Myanmar and vice versa.

## Conclusion

Trade relationship between Bangladesh and Myanmar can be developed as there is scope for significant improvement. India and China has growing involvement in both Myanmar and Bangladesh. This must be utilized for solving bilateral issues developing connectivity and economic relations with Myanmar. Bangladesh need to keep both the regional power to engage effectively with Myanmar. Myanmar's preventive economic policy, military rules, illegal drug smuggling and Repeated Rohingya crisis had impact on developing mutual cooperation. Both countries can largely be benefitted from bilateral trade and investment, energy cooperation, maritime trade, and regional connectivity.

Connectivity with Myanmar will initiate the development of infrastructure, creation of job opportunities, increase trade and commerce with Myanmar, ASEAN countries and China. For Bangladesh, there are scope for extensive collaboration in areas of physical connectivity, economic, trade, investments, tourism and culture with Myanmar. At present there are no shipping links between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Bangladesh and Myanmar are negotiating bilateral coastal shipping agreements. Establishment of land connectivity between Bangladesh and Myanmar will reduce the transportation cost and cost of doing business between Bangladesh and Southeast Asian countries along with China.

Despite number of challenges there are options available for Bangladesh to strengthen bilateral relationship with Myanmar. In present scenario Bangladesh should interact with Myanmar through diplomacy dominant engagement, information dominant engagement and economy dominant engagement. Look East policy of Bangladesh need to be pursued to promote and strengthen the relationship with Myanmar. Bangladesh is capable to cooperate in developing human resources of Myanmar. Bangladesh government should undertake confidence building measures to develop relationship with Myanmar. Bangladesh need to maintain constant contact with Myanmar for solving this crisis along with China and India and international Community.

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## **Author**

Brigadier General Hasan Md Shamsuddin, afwc, psc is a course member of NDC 2018. He was born on 1 January 1967. He was commissioned from Bangladesh Military Academy On 26 June 1987 in the Corps of Ordnance. Brigadier General Shams served in different regimental appointments as a regimental officer. He served in Logistics Area and an Infantry Division as Staff Officer. He was both Instructor and Chief Instructor in Ordnance Centre and School. He also commanded a Division Ordnance Company and two Border Guard Bangladesh Battalions.

Brigadier General Shams attended number of courses both at home and abroad. He attended Armed Forces War Course at National Defence College, Bangladesh and obtained his Masters in War Studies from Bangladesh University of Professionals. He is a graduate of Defence Service Command and Staff College, Bangladesh and obtained his Master of Defence Studies from National University of Bangladesh. He also obtained his Masters in Business Administration degree from Dhaka University. He served as Sector Operation Officer in Northern Iraq (UNGCI) in 1996-97, as Force Headquarters Staff Officer in Ivory Coast (UNOCI) in 2004-05 and as Force Headquarters Senior Staff Officer in South Sudan (UNMISS) in 2013-14. Brigadier General Shams is a widely traveled person. He enjoys travelling and reading. He authored a book 'Kurdistaner Dinguli' on UN mission experience in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq. He worked as Directing Staff (Army), AFWC Wing, NDC from 30 November 2015 and served there prior to joining in NDC 2018.