

ISSN: 1683-8475  
E-ISSN: 2709-9016

# **NDC** ***E-JOURNAL***

*Security Through Knowledge*



**VOLUME 04**

**NUMBER 01**

**DECEMBER 2024**

**A Peer Reviewed Professional e-journal of the  
National Defence College, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

*<http://ndcjournal.ndc.gov.bd/ndcj/index.php>*



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## Foreword

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National Defence College (NDC) is a premier academic institution in Bangladesh that studies current national security and development challenges. NDC E-Journal is a double-blind, peer-reviewed professional and academic journal which started its journey in 2020. The journal aims to be one of the leading journals of the Country and the Region for its contributions in the field of security and development. It will provide a platform for the publication of empirically-based, policy-oriented research and review articles on all aspects related to security and development

We view this online publication as an academic and professional platform for comprehensive, in-depth discourse on a range of topics related to defence, security, development, leadership, strategy, international relations, public policy and governance, management, war studies, and social science. We seek to develop a theoretical framework for the fields and enrich the discourses elsewhere in the world with studies relating to the disciplines.

I am happy that we are going to publish the fourth issue of NDC E-Journal. I am hopeful that the papers included in this journal covering varied range of topics would be of great interest to the academia, researchers and the ordinary readers as well. The journal will be a source of essential, content-rich, accessible information, and knowledge for researchers and readers interested in security and development.

I congratulate all authors who contributed to the current issue of NDC E-Journal. I appreciate and acknowledge the hard work of editorial board to publish this journal online. I wish every success of NDC E-Journal.



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**Lieutenant General Mohammad Shaheenul Haque**  
*Commandant, National Defence College, Dhaka, Bangladesh*  
*Chief Patron, NDC E-JOURNAL*

## The Editor in Chief's Note

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The NDC E-JOURNAL is a double-blind peer reviewed academic and professional journal that offers a unique chance to discuss, debate, and comment on national and international security and development issues, not only from the traditional perspective but also from the view point of non -traditional spectrum. The articles are selected through a rigorous process of blind review to ensure epistemic value, high standard, and originality in debates and discourses on a diverse range of topics.

We strive to maintain high standards regarding our journal's management, credibility, and outreach with the continuous assistance of an experienced and intellectually vibrant Editorial Board, Reviewers, Editorial Advisors and a dedicated Editorial team comprising Section and Language Editors.

We rely on our international network of authors, advisory boards, academia, NDC faculty, reviewers, and readers to help in identifying and exploring new areas of security and strategic studies scholarship. Hence, the submissions to the journal have seen significant growth and reach over the years. With such a broad base of support, we are going to publish the fourth issue of NDC E-Journal. This fourth volume has included scholarly and original articles focusing on Global and Regional Interests, Rohingya Crisis, Strategic Partnership, Socio-Economic Issues, Cyber Security, United Nations and National Security.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Chief Patron, the Editorial Advisors and the Editorial Team for their invaluable support. We are excited to continue working with all of you to make the NDC E-Journal a success in future also. For the upcoming volume, we anticipate receiving additional evidence-based, intriguingly inquisitive, and analytical articles. We welcome submissions as well as inputs from the journal's authors, readers, and reviewers.

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**Major General Shakil Ahmed**  
*Editor in Chief*  
NDC E-JOURNAL

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# UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL AND REGIONAL INTERESTS IN MYANMAR AND OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH FOR RESOLVING ROHINGYA CRISIS THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

**Brigadier General Ahmed Zamiul Islam, ndc, afwc, psc, M Phil  
PhD Researcher, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Dhaka**

National Defence College, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh

*(Received: 03rd February 2023; Accepted: 24th July 2023; Published: 22nd December 2024)*

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**Abstract:** Bangladesh has been hosting a huge surge of Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) and been continuing to face multi-faceted troubles in the absence of any headway towards repatriation process. Several bilateral and multilateral efforts failed to daunt the Government of Myanmar (GoM) on this issue. An apparent decline in Bangladesh-India relations after August 2024 and the fall of Maungdaw in December 2024 have further complicated situations. Under these circumstances, Bangladesh should pursue for an enduring solution with regional and global communities by utilising the opportunities derived from her strategic partnership with regional and global superpowers of India, China and USA. The goal of the research was to analyse interests of global and regional superpowers on Myanmar and to set strategies for Bangladesh to ensure that preconditions for safe and sustainable repatriation of FDMN from Bangladesh are attained by diplomatic and economic intervention. The research employed a mixed method to study linkages of global and regional interests on Myanmar with FDMN crisis and to analyse Bangladesh's diplomatic strengths with a view to suggesting strategies for repatriation of FDMN. The research concluded that Bangladesh needs to integrate FDMN issue in the strategic partnership agenda and adopt policy options such as, pursuance for positive sum result with China, deepening trade ties with Myanmar and USA, support regional economic initiatives which will differ for state to states, simultaneous engagement with both India and China along with judicious employment of geopolitical play and public diplomacy. The research examined China, India, the USA, ASEAN and the United Nations only, as global or regional actors considering their level of influence on the issue.

**Keywords:** *FDMN, Strategic Partnership, Repatriation*

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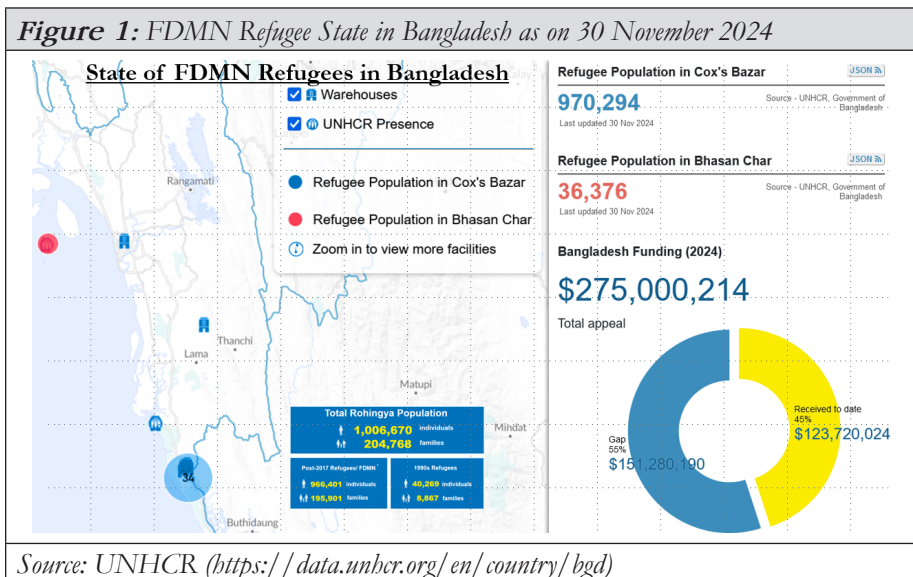
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## INTRODUCTION

The Rohingya migration from Myanmar to Bangladesh started in 1942 (Brian Gorlick, 2019) and emerged as a severe humanitarian issue towards the end of 2010. Due to unbearable torture, non-arbitrary arrest, detention, killing, and sexual and gender-based violence by military regime, FDMN are unwilling to return unless their safety is guaranteed. Global and Regional state and non-state actors are viewing this problem from their own perspectives. Some of them are maintaining a policy of silence whereas few others e.g. the United Nations, the USA, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands are actively pursuing the issue to stop genocide and address the core issues of the problem. Recent judgment of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has ordered Myanmar to implement provisional measures to preserve rights of Rohingya as claimed by Gambia on 23 January 2020 (ICJ, 2020). If the ruling of ICJ can be fully implemented, it will be instrumental in creating a congenial environment for safe and dignified repatriation of FDMN in Myanmar (Banerjee, 2020).

Myanmar, aspiring to develop its economy, has identified the complementary interests and engaged with China and India as strategic partners. China wants to gain access to the Bay of Bengal and India wants to gain economic and political edge through its investments in Rakhine (SCMP, 2017). This is obvious that Myanmar will push down internal factors that will impede its persuasion of economic objectives. Solving Rohingya crisis with a democratic approach does not fall under its political objectives because Myanmar sees them as a ‘problem’ towards development. Refugee issue of FDMN is altogether different from other conflict laden migration because Myanmar has deliberately denied the citizenship of Rohingya. So whatever the level of diplomatic move, Bangladesh is faced with two pronged problems. Firstly, Bangladesh is the worst sufferer of FDMN Crisis that has been affecting its socio-political, economy and environmental aspects. Secondly, Myanmar is very reserve on FDMN issue. Myanmar is willing to discuss about anything except the FDMN issue. When Maundaw fell to the Arakan Army in December 2024, the issue became even more complex. Rakhine State is no longer effectively under GoM’s control. Bangladesh now has to decide with whom to engage, military junta or Arakan Army. Under current situation, Bangladesh’s engagement with FDMN repatriation might legitimize the Arakan Army. Due to lack of unwillingness to show sympathy for the FDMN, the Arakan Army might threaten Bangladesh by subsequent persecution of the Rohingya population living in Rakhine State.

The growth of FDMN in Bangladesh since 2017 has reached to an alarming state and created multi-dimensional problems for Bangladesh. Figure 1 displays a fact sheet of FDMN in Bangladesh as on 30 November 2024. There are three durable solutions of United Nations, i.e. voluntary repatriation, resettlement in another country or location, and local integration. Being a densely populated country, Bangladesh’s focus for resolving FDMN crisis should be safe and dignified repatriation. Unfortunately, several bilateral efforts for repatriation of FDMN failed due to lack of interests of the GoM and ‘absence of congenial environment for their safe return’. In a strategic move, China then created a trilateral framework that included Bangladesh and Myanmar to help with the repatriation process, which was ultimately put on hold because of the escalating conflict in Myanmar. Multilateral instruments involving sanctions, protests and international prosecution in ICJ could not bring any tangible progress. Regional superpowers, India and China, maintained silent posture on FDMN issue. Situation turned into uncertainty when international organisations shifted their priority to Ukraine and partly to the Middle-East following Israel-Hamas conflict since 2023. Consequently, Bangladesh is now the only victim seeking that the FDMN be repatriated.



Bangladesh being badly affected by FDMN crisis, needs to push on the repatriation option of resolving the crisis. This paper attempts to answer how the strategic partnership approach can help Bangladesh in resolving FDMN

Crisis. In doing so, the paper first identified the global and regional interests in Myanmar with a view to study their linkages with Rohingya issue. It then analysed the characteristics of Bangladesh's strategic partnership with concerned global and regional superpowers and available geo-political advantages to offer similar options. Finally, the paper suggested strategies for Bangladesh for meaningful repatriation by utilizing its geo-political strength for productive mutual benefits in the region while seeking sustainable solution to FDMN issue through strategic partnership. The paper examined China, India, the USA, ASEAN and the United Nations as global or regional actors considering their level of influence on the issue. Geopolitical importance of Bangladesh has been captured by the regional and global superpowers. Conversely, Bangladesh moved a distance forward in establishing strategic partnership with India, China and the the USA for apprehending mutual economic benefits. However, the relationship with India has suffered a set-back since the fall of Hasina government in Bangladesh. In these circumstances, Bangladesh needs to find out appropriate track to re-initiate pressure on Myanmar through its strategic partnership. Exploring influence of all other actors on the issue were out of the scope of this paper.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The goal of the research was to analyse regional interests in Myanmar and to set strategies for Bangladesh to ensure that preconditions for safe and sustainable Rohingya repatriation from Bangladesh are attained by diplomatic and economic intervention. To attain this, the research attempted to answer how Bangladesh can engage the global and regional powers through its strengths of ongoing bi-lateral relations. For this study China, India and the USA have been chosen as global and regional super powers who are either directly or indirectly engaged in bi-lateral relationship with Myanmar.

The research adopted mixed method to collect and analyse data. Qualitative data were acquired through Open-ended Questionnaires, Content Analysis, Perception Survey and Key Informant Interviews (KII). It also conducted a study on a cross section of the course members of National Defence Course, students of Conflict Studies of reputed universities and relevant personnel from Armed Forces with a set of Close-ended Questionnaires to determine their assessments on the gap of information. These were then transformed into quantitative data. Information were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Respondents were selected purposively to record their assessments. Data thus

collected were validated through a set of open-ended unstructured questionnaires during face-to-face interviews with the resource persons from different strategic studies organisations, e.g. Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), University of Dhaka and Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), and several foreign diplomats. Research relied on the available information in the web sites and the comments of resource personnel due to inadequacy of information from Myanmar perspective.

## **GLOBAL AND REGIONAL INTERESTS IN MYANMAR**

Myanmar, the largest state in Southeast Asia, is strategically located at the gateway between South and Southeast Asia. It shares a long land boundary with five countries, namely, Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand and has a 1930km long coastline along the Bay of Bengal. Myanmar thus appears as a land bridge for “Look East” policy of both India and Bangladesh and provides an alternative access for India to India’s North-East states. It is also a land bridge for China’s direct access to the Bay of Bengal. Thus it serves the best means of achieving China’s String of Pearls strategy.

### **Access to Myanmar’s Deep Sea Ports**

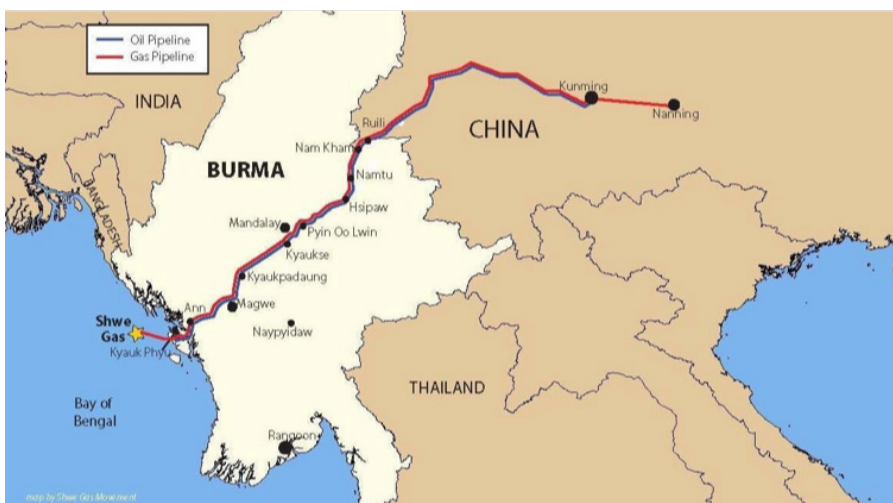
Cookson (2017) mentioned that China wants to connect the deep seaports in Kyaukphyu to the city of Kunming in order to shorten the sea route through the Straits of Malacca. Since Kyaukphyu deep-sea port is in a strategic place near Sittwe port (Ahmed, 2018), China is also building a Special Economic Zone with pipelines and railroad for supplies of oil and natural gas. This will give the Chinese a new chance to set up economic hub in the Bay of Bengal and get to the Indian Ocean. China and Myanmar agreed to build an industrial park nearby that will cost \$3.2 billion in addition to construction of \$1.3 billion worth deep-sea port in Kyaukphyu (Times, 2018). This reflects how China is becoming more and more important to Myanmar.

### **Energy Dimension**

Myanmar’s oil and gas reserves have drawn China’s attention due to China’s expanded demand for energy (Information, 2018). Several Chinese offshore oil and gas companies signed agreements with the Government of Myanmar for production, up-gradation of old oilfields and construction of gas pipelines.

China's 30-years gas deal agreement with Myanmar from the offshore blocks since 2009 (Irrawaddy, 2008) and 795 km-long Sino-Myanmar gas and oil pipeline, known as Shwe Project and completed in 2015, has reduced China's dependency on the Malacca Straits. It is now moving aggressively to get the rights to its energy reserves (Munir, 2020). The Myanmar government's oil and gas exports provide a diplomatic edge over its neighbors. Indeed, India exerted considerable effort to get Myanmar's gas from the same Bay of Bengal area. India ultimately secured an agreement with Myanmar to purchase the gas under more favorable terms based on the principle of "take or pay." This will guarantee that Myanmar gets annual earnings from India even if Myanmar cannot access the gas. Myanmar appears to have emerged victorious in the Sino-Indian energy competition.

**Figure 2: Sino-Myanmar Oil and Gas Pipeline**



Source: China Research Center ([https://www.chinacenter.net/2020/china\\_currents/19-3/a-relationship-on-a-pipeline-china-and-myanmar/](https://www.chinacenter.net/2020/china_currents/19-3/a-relationship-on-a-pipeline-china-and-myanmar/))

### **Economic Corridor**

Myanmar is the gateway for Indian Sub-continent to access the Indo-Pacific region and established multi-modal communication. Bangladesh also wants to be connected with India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) trilateral road network to make a land bridge to the Indo-Pacific region. So 'Look-east Policy' of both India and Bangladesh need access through Myanmar. Accordingly, both countries showed a keen interest to get connected with Myanmar and reinforce commercial and economic link (Wikipedia, 2022). This will open an avenue of land based trade

and commerce for Bangladesh. Myanmar can be an immediate neighbor for promoting Bangladeshi products like pharmaceuticals, electronics, garments etc.

### **Military Realism and Blockade Strategy**

India is trying to get closer to Myanmar in order to counter China's growing power as a regional leader and boost its own power and influence (Allison, 2001). India gave the Myanmar Navy its first submarine that had been updated and fixed up by Hindustan Shipyard Limited (Bhattacharjee, 2020) shortly after Bangladesh introduced similar platform in its defence inventory. India is now concerned about Chinese investment in Kyaukphyu deep sea port that might give access to China's fleet in the region. The upgrading of a naval facility in Sittwe, a significant seaport near to the eastern Indian metropolis of Kolkata and nuclear submarine base near Vishakhapatnam (Wikipedia, 2022), have sparked particular concerns and tensions between China and India.

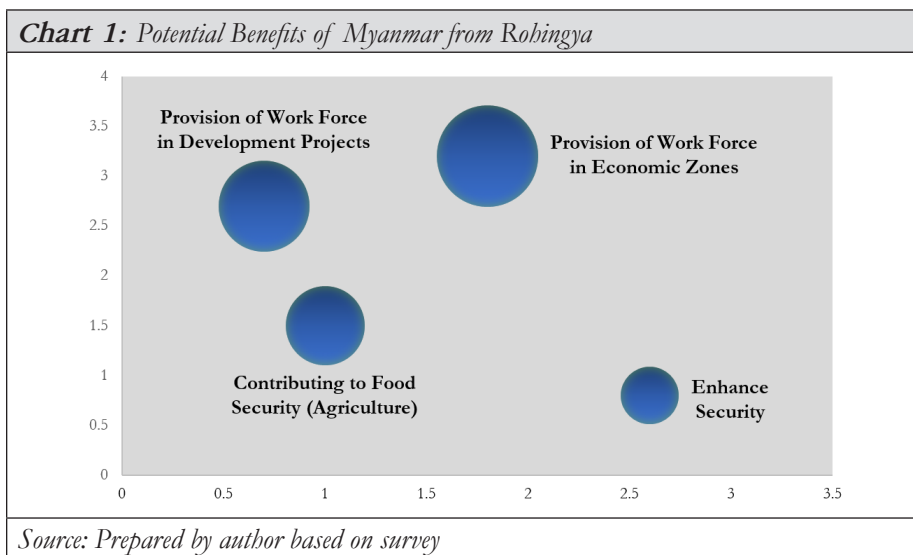
### **Revival of Democracy and Stability**

The United States wants Myanmar to be peaceful, democratic, and all of its people's rights to be respected (States, 2021) as it shares numerous geostrategic interests in Myanmar. It thinks that systematic violence directed against Rohingya as a part of "clearance operations" during campaign against Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) insurgents in August 2017, gave rise to Rohingya exodus (States, 2021). Interruption of Myanmar's transition to democracy after the military coup in February 2022, along with violence in Northern Rakhine State, challenges the United States' values that are founded in its foreign policy. Consequently, the United States can neither overlook nor disregard the ongoing violation of human rights in Myanmar. This crisis is also an opportunity for the United States to demonstrate its commitment to diplomatic engagement for a rules-based world order. As the major provider of foreign development assistance and most important commercial partner in the area, the United States may play a crucial role in Myanmar's regional success (Group, 2022).

### **Myanmar's Benefit from Its Geopolitical Elements**

Myanmar's objectives in Regional engagement are more of economic, security and political terms. In the midst of country's internal conflict, Myanmar wants to prosper by taking advantage of her abundance of natural resources and other geopolitical elements. Current military regime wants acceptance and support from the global actors in order to avoid economic sanctions and prosper through

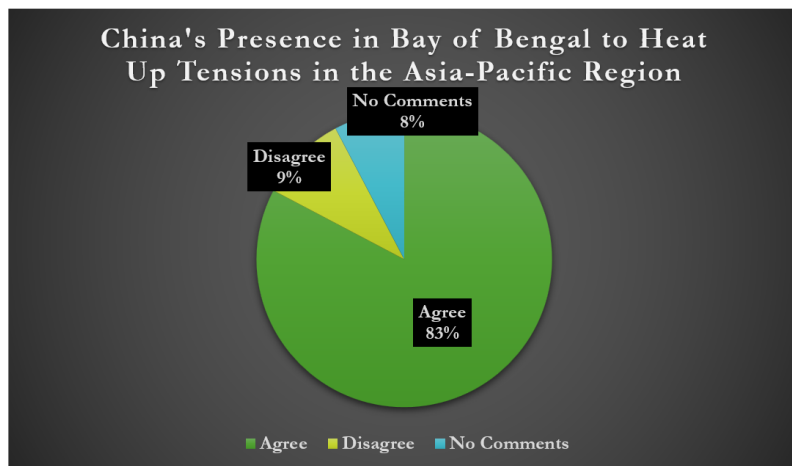
foreign investments for the construction of basic infrastructure. So it utilizes geopolitical opportunities to stand beside her in opposing global claim of violence (USIP, 2018) as well as for addressing internal conflict. In response to Myanmar's need, India extended support to Myanmar to fight ARSA for the reason of its alleged connection with terrorist groups (Wikipedia, 2022). Myanmar's growing economic interests and the need for suppressing ethnic minorities in fragile democratic condition is well secured by China, which is also concerned for securing its financial investments (USIP, 2018). Towards the path of prosperity, Myanmar wants to be free from global and regional influence and thus needs to maintain a balanced relationship with India. India's economic and military cooperation has helped Myanmar to ease the regime's international isolation and lessen Myanmar's reliance on China (Allison, 2001). Both nations sought to cooperate to counteract drug trafficking and insurgent groups operating in the border areas (Bhaumik, 2007). India and Myanmar relationship will also help India to build its influence and economic engagements with other Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) nations. However, re-establishing Rakhine's law and order situation is a prime necessity for sound regional stability. Responses from the respondents suggested that Myanmar's current regime needs to change outlook toward Rohingya who can make complimentary contribution for achieving proper security environment congenial for national development. Chart 1 shows such potential contribution.



## **IMPLICATIONS OF MYANMAR-CHINA STRATEGIC RELATIONS ON REGIONAL POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT**

China and Myanmar have increased military cooperation and exchanges since 1988. Myanmar's location is significant for China for two reasons. Firstly, direct access to the Bay of Bengal will shorten China's maritime and commercial fleet. Secondly, Myanmar-controlled islands can be useful in exerting influence on Indian-controlled islands region. Considering these, China needs to maintain reliable partnership so that it can gain multi-directional access to the Pacific and Indian Oceans (Kim, 1988). China materialized its interests by investing in gas and oil pipelines, Kyaukphyu deep sea port and special economic zone, and construction of jetty on Great Coco Island to the north of India's Nicobar Island. China also established strong surveillance and monitoring facilities for acquiring intelligence on India's military activities in the Indian Ocean, including missile testing (Kuppuswamy, 2011). Thus China's strategic achievements in Myanmar can have long-term security implications. Myanmar, on the other hand, sought to modernize its military in order to defeat separatist insurgencies with the support of China. Historically, Myanmar had modernization deals with China (Callahan, 1995). This infers China's motive to expand economic and military influence in Asia-Pacific region (Eurasia, 2022). However, it is perceived that presence of Chinese commercial fleet in the Bay of Bengal along with its maritime surveillance platforms on security issue are likely to boil-up tension in the Southern Bay of Bengal and Indian Oceanic region (please refer to Chart 2). Under the banner of Maritime Silk Road, China might conduct joint maritime exercises with Bangladesh and Myanmar. These may prompt India and its extra regional ally the USA to increase corresponding monitoring and surveillance activities which may provoke irregular frictions between China and India. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar will be crucial to maintaining the balance of power in the region in such a scenario.

**Chart 2: Potential Effect of China as Strategic Partner on the Asia-Pacific Region**

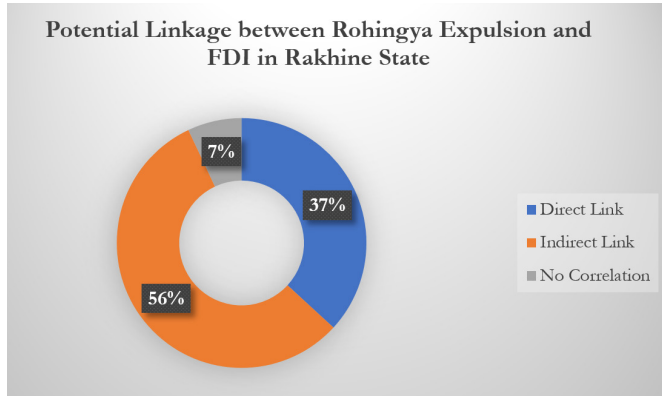


*Source: Prepared by author based on survey*

### **Regional Interests in Myanmar vis-à-vis Rohingya Crisis**

Myanmar has been maintaining a very balanced relationship with both India and China. Myanmar’s pursuance of development has a potential linkage with the recent expulsion of Rohingya from Rakhine State where these regional superpowers have made significant investments. About 93% of the respondents viewed that expulsion of Rohingya has either direct or indirect link with regional interests in Rakhine State that was a driving factor for foreign direct investment (FDI) (please refer to Chart 3 for details). Myanmar needs to understand that the development and welfare goes hand in hand. If Rohingya issues are neglected, it can create vulnerabilities for Rohingya who can be exploited by interested groups and can turn the peaceful environment of the region into volatile, insecure position. Respondents of study mentioned that fear of uncertainty about future, lack of fundamental rights, denial of citizenship, lack of leadership, lack of education and skill and dependency on aids principally generate ground of exploitation against Rohingya. About 78% of the respondents suggested that this vulnerable group can be exploited through recruitment in the groups who are associated with the trans-national crimes. About 69% of the respondents commented that such possibility is “likely” if not properly addressed.

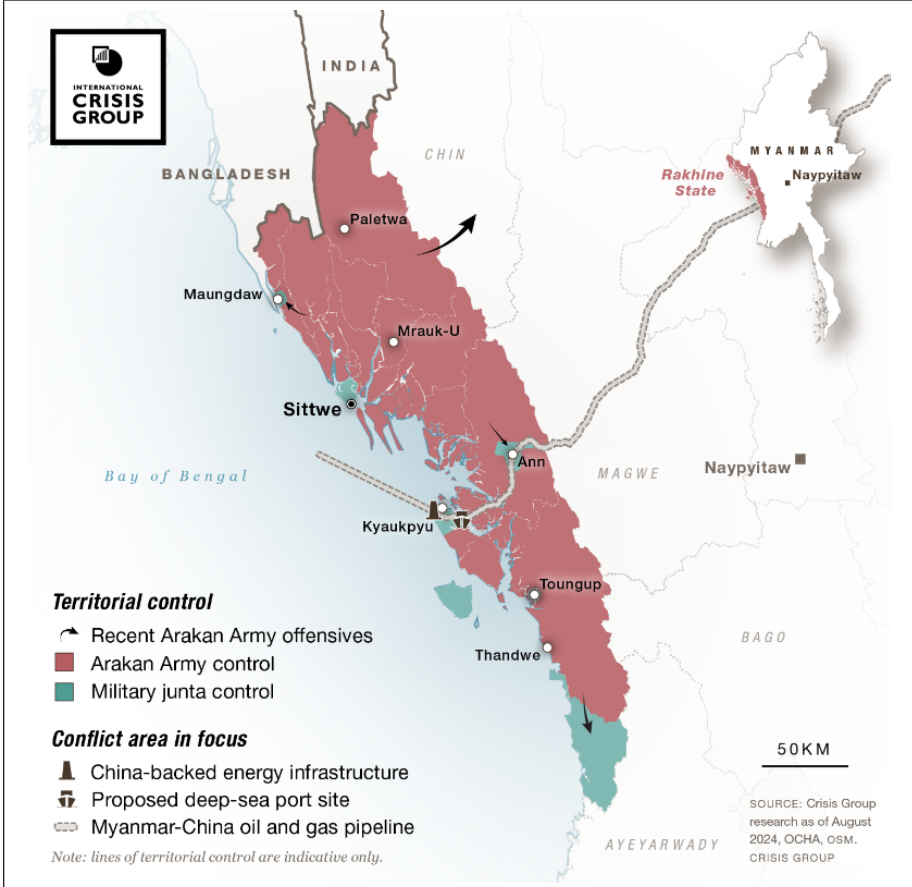
**Chart 3:** *Potential Linkage between Expulsion of Rohingya and FDI in Rakhine State*



*Source: Prepared by author based on survey*

So, it is imperative for the government of Myanmar to weigh out potential benefits that can be derived if the security environment in Rakhine State is improved. In the current context of Rohingya Crisis this is only possible if safe and dignified repatriation of FDMN is ensured. The presence of Arakan Army and the current situation suggest that GoM has limited or no control over this region. Figure 3 shows extent of areas under control of Arakan Army and military junta since 2023. In contrast the Arakan Army, who seem insensitive to FDMN's 'identity' issue, looks to local and regional actors for international legitimacy and support in order to protect themselves from being prosecuted by the ICJ for atrocities they have committed. The possibility of FDMN repatriation cannot be completely ruled out in such a scenario. In that stage, the valuable investments for ongoing development initiative can be grown in congenial environment where Rohingya community can safeguard the efforts for defending their benefits through employment and provide vibrant labour force. The regional superpowers need to recognise this critical issue and furnish supportive measures for safe and dignified repatriation of FDMN. Most influential state or non-state actor should take over the lead role in the peace process. Myanmar is a member state of ASEAN. ASEAN is strictly mandated not to interfere in member state's internal affairs and maintains a very strong cohesion and economic relation with each other. Indonesia and Malaysia maintain a friendly relation with Myanmar. Even if with global isolation, the diplomatic and economic cooperation is guaranteed for Myanmar from its other ASEAN member states.

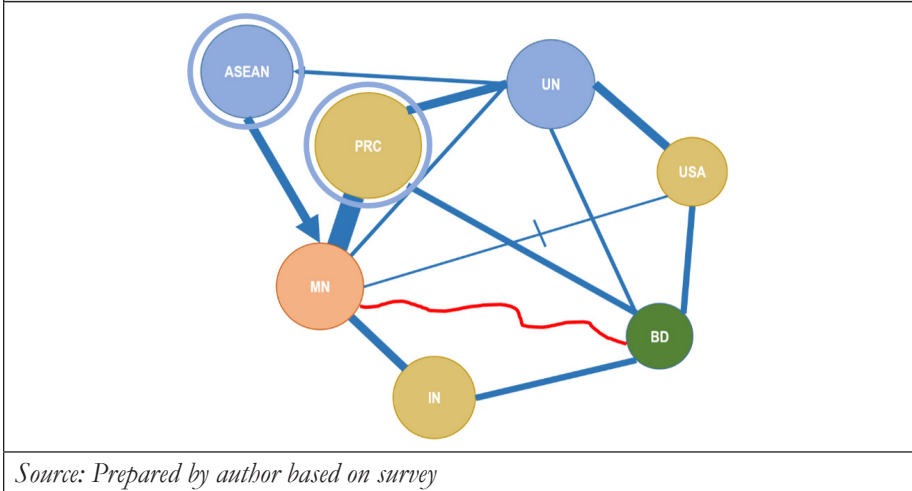
**Figure 3:** Area of Control by the Arakan Army in Myanmar's Rakhine and Southern Chin States in August 2024



Source: International Crisis Group (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/339-breaking-away-battle-myanmars-rakhine-state>)

Conflict mapping in Figure 4 indicates that ASEAN has greater influence on Myanmar and China has the greater link with Myanmar. The United Nations can influence on ASEAN to start mediation process. So the United States is in a position to convince the United Nations on this. Strategic point of entry should be through China and ASEAN.

**Figure 4:** Conflict Mapping in the Context of Rohingya Crisis



*Source: Prepared by author based on survey*

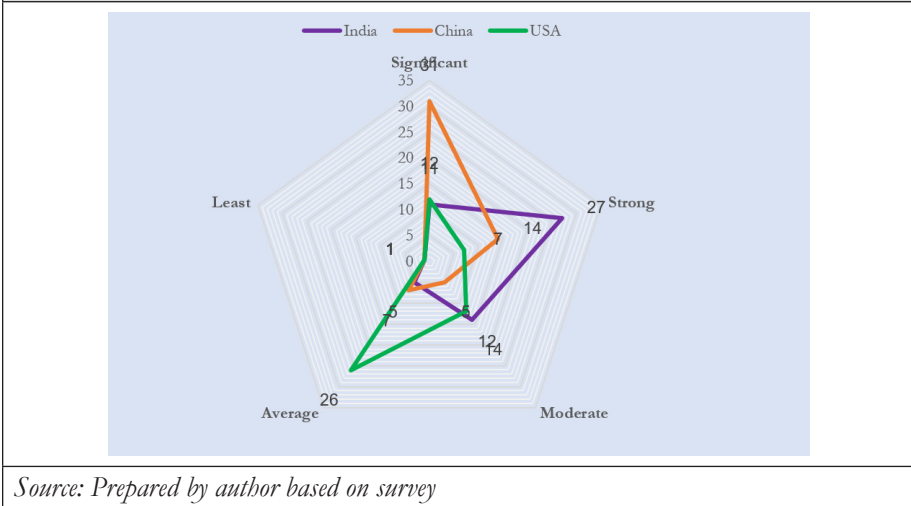
## ANALYSIS OF BANGLADESH’S STRATEGIC RELATIONS

Bangladesh has “robust ties” with the United States, “blood ties” with the USA-empowered partner India and “strategic ties” with the USA’s rival China (Harshan, 2022). Bangladesh’s engagement with India, China and the USA as strategic partnership are basically based on mutual economic benefits. Since Rohingya crisis does not affect China and India directly, it is obviously placed at low priority level in any bilateral agenda with Bangladesh. They maintain a very reserved approach in materializing respective national and strategic interests within the complex regional geopolitical context. China’s commercial and cultural influence on Bangladesh is particularly noticeable. Chinese products are very popular, affordable and made available to almost everywhere in the country. China does not interfere in the internal politics of any country in the process of expanding her economic influence. This brings forward Bangladesh and many other countries to develop good relations with China. China renders highest business priority in establishing maritime silk route although there are controversies about “Chinese debt-trap”. China has captured the geopolitical importance of Bangladesh and considers Bangladesh’s sea port as one of the defined pearls. China’s aggressive economic march is quite progressive. Through offering robust and lucrative financial packages, China became popular ally and systematically progressing forward. India is unable to make such a mammoth

investment across the region. Obviously, India does not want China's dominance in her sphere of influence. The ever expanding strength of Chinese maritime force infers that China needs to establish Sea Control in the Indian Ocean. This will pose significant threat to India's freedom of action and will create conflict with the Quad's strategic interests in the India-Pacific Region. Therefore, India and the United States will have the same interest in Bangladesh as China. Due to Bangladesh's strategic partnership with China as a development, defense cooperation, and trade partner, it should make a balanced approach with all her allies. At the same time Bangladesh needs to maintain her robust export-import relationship with the United States. So, Bangladesh will have to render thoughtful and balanced approach for maintaining regional harmony as well as addressing FDMN issue in a productive manner.

China maintains a transactional approach in its self-reliant foreign policy, and interested in expansion of economic sphere through nurturing business. China has been actively involved in many development projects in Bangladesh and made considerable investment. Since China has sound business interest in Myanmar, Bangladesh may highlight the impact of political unrest due to unaddressed Rohingya issue on the China-run projects in Rakhine State. India is interested in land, river and sea connectivity for alternative lifeline with its North-East States. Both China and India have generated significant popularity of their products in Bangladesh. Bangladesh may utilize these trustworthy relations to find viable solution on FDMN issue with the support of China and India. Bangladesh, India and China can jointly exercise diplomatic pressure on Myanmar in Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar (BCIM) forum. In order to do that, Bangladesh needs to establish a mutually benefitting relation with India. Regarding the FDMN issue, the escalating refugee crisis poses a challenge to both Bangladesh and India's transnational security. Therefore, both nations must cooperate to find a long-term solution in order to maintain regional stability.

**Chart 4: Potential Power-Influence Relation for Resolution of Rohingya Crisis**



Power-influence matrix in Chart 4 indicates that China is the most important actor in this issue and India is the next. But the involvement in United States will be crucial for the balance of power and positive contribution to the Asia Pacific regional stability.

## OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH

Bangladesh's Foreign Policy follows pragmatic and liberalistic approach for resolving FDMN issue. Economic and diplomatic strength should be blended appropriately in order to overcome the issue. Bangladesh's geopolitical advantages has to be played in a balanced way. These geopolitical advantages includes, provision of internal economic corridors and connectivity with regional economic corridors, transition corridor, regional integration and stability. Strategic partnership with development agenda will help to build-up infrastructure of key features like deep sea port, enhanced road, rail and riverine network with high speed communication system, value-added manufacturing and processing factories etc. This will encourage FDI from the strategic partners on the basis of low production cost and administrative structure. In all cases, FDMN issue has to be projected in the fore front. The strategic partners are to be made convinced on positive sum approach to speak and support in favour of Bangladesh. The strategic engagement with Bangladesh's close allies has to be managed very carefully so that Regional stability can be maintained.

## **STRATEGIES TOWARDS RESOLUTION OF FDMN CRISIS**

### **Bringing the FDMN Issue to World's Notice Uprightly and Frequently**

Current multilateral initiative apparently focuses on resettlement of FDMN in other countries. Some countries including the USA agreed to take share of FDMN at a very low scale. If it is successful in long term, then Bangladesh shall have to share the FDMN in a bigger scale that will not be a viable solution for a densely populated country. So Bangladesh should pursue on repatriation of FDMN to their homeland, Myanmar. Strategic analysts during interview reiterated that Bangladesh needs to speak aloud about FDMN issue. Currently, the government of Bangladesh is already doing that and it needs to be maintained until the resolution of crisis. World community needs to be informed that Rohingya are originally from Myanmar and the denial of their citizenship cannot be accepted in any way. Appearance of people in border area, their culture, life style are always similar and this is true across the world. So Rohingya case is no exception. Bangladesh may utilize its strategic partnership with the USA for this strategy who can eventually generate world view with the assistance from its western and Asia-Pacific allies.

### **Offering Plausible Connectivity Proposal to China**

China needs connectivity for establishing the String of Pearls. Bangladesh is a well within China's String of Pearls strategy. However Bangladesh needs to work out how best it can provide a meaningful and complimentary connectivity options for the region. A good number of study is going on and it is beyond the scope of this paper. Although Bangladesh may not be able to provide comparable connectivity options as that of Myanmar, but it may be viable secondary choice of China which China will be willing to utilize. The main challenge is bridging the gap in the Indian Territory. It is presumed that such connectivity will also serve the interests of India for its landlocked north-eastern provinces. Bangladesh can provide connectivity option through infrastructural development (road networking through Myanmar, development of deep-sea port, development of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) etc.). This is a complimentary approach and Bangladesh should deeply engage its regional strategic partners i.e. India and China.

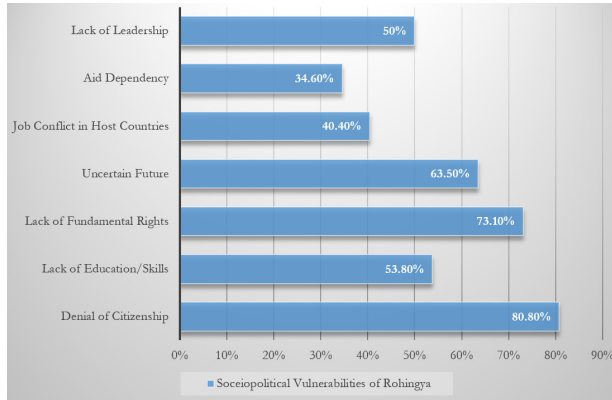
### **Prohibiting Military Use of Commercial Port**

China is a maritime nation and it is holding the second largest maritime force in the world (Bhardwaj, 2022). In order to maintain its large maritime force across the Indian Ocean, China needs to establish naval base in the Bay of Bengal. About 83.70% of the respondents commented that the presence of People's Liberation Army Navy in the Bay of Bengal is likely to heat up tension. Allowing China to seek military potential of Bangladesh's deep-sea port might annoy India and also it may invite problems in Geo-economics which will be detrimental for Bangladesh. So the policy makers need to keep in mind that Chinese commercial activities may be supported through Chattogram port and upcoming deep sea ports. But military use to be completely prohibited to ensure friendly relationship with India. Due to proximity, China might not press on the military use and utilize the port facilities for commercial and economic view point, as it serves a preferred option for her access to Indian Ocean. Since this is a sensitive issue, Bangladesh needs to discuss this directly with China. Such initiative can be helpful in the maintenance of mutual confidence with India.

### **Generating Confidence for Government of Myanmar on Security Matters**

Bangladesh needs to analyse the Myanmar perspective as to how the government of Myanmar views Bangladesh on the Rohingya crisis. Despite Bangladesh's approach and initiatives to open up an economic corridor, positive response from Myanmar was always absent as it maintained a cold posture. Amongst the various driving factors, the mistrust between Buddhist majority state of Myanmar and Muslim majority state of Bangladesh might be considered. Insurgency in Myanmar is its internal issue. Bangladesh has a security concerns about it as Myanmar is the close door neighbour. However, Bangladesh needs to clearly spell out its stance of non-cooperation with separatist movement and eradicate any scope of mistrust between the neighbours. Bangladesh may furnish security cooperation, establishing a liberalistic image, addressing transnational security threats jointly with Myanmar. If confidence building is successful, the conflict resolution process can become much progressive and Bangladesh can extend its cooperation to reintegrate FDMN in their community. Bangladesh may take support of both India and China to ensure that they furnish a supporting role in this approach.

**Chart 5: Socio-Economic vulnerabilities of FDMN**

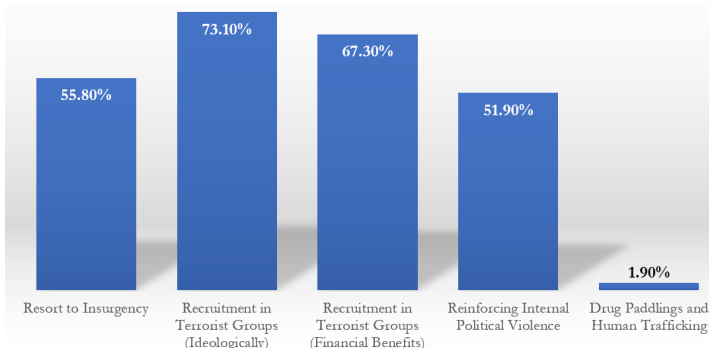


Source: Prepared by author based on survey

### Highlighting the Consequence of Unaddressed FDMN Crisis on Regional Security

FDMN are most vulnerable community in the region. The vulnerability basically stems from their stateless status. Respondents attending perception survey suggested that denial of citizenship is the main vulnerability of Rohingya and for this reason, Rohingya are extorted, their freedom of movement in Myanmar are restricted. Children cannot attend schools. As a result Rohingya lack institutional knowledge and technical skill for good and dignified jobs. The lack of leadership in the Rohingya community is another important aspect of vulnerability for which they are underrepresented in the global community.

**Chart 6: Potential Nature of Exploitation against Rohingya**



Source: Prepared by author based on survey

All these factors will lead to mental frustration. When FDMN issue remains unaddressed, they will continue to live in a state of uncertainty and it can be leveraged by the non-state actors who can exploit their vulnerabilities in favour of their terms and advantages. There could be a range of potential nature of exploitation by the non-state actors as derived through the perception survey. Most dangerous nature will be recruitment in terrorist groups. There can be two ways the non-state actors may utilize them, either ideologically or by offering lucrative salary in exchange of mercenary service. These will pose a significant threat to regional and global security. Other nature of exploitation can be indulgence into insurgency and domestic/ internal political violence. All these factors will create unfriendly environment for Myanmar's internal and regional stability. Bangladesh needs to highlight this crucial aspect in global forum and convince Myanmar's development partners (China and India) that their valuable investment in the Rakhine State is likely to face severe challenges in volatile security environment. Similarly, government of Myanmar will have to be convinced that in a long run, all foreign investments in Myanmar will likely to get suck off. Bangladesh should engage all of its strategic partners to generate a world view on to this subject for proactive and integrated support and attention.

### **Engaging Myanmar's Allies of China and India Simultaneously**

Both India and China, who are the development partners of Myanmar and maintained a silent posture on FDMN issues, are needed to be engaged very strongly. It is necessary to involve them simultaneously. Unless it is done, Myanmar may still get political, economic, diplomatic or moral support from one state in case the other state agrees to exert pressure on Myanmar on Rohingya issue and seize investment as contingency. In such case, the diplomatic effort will lost synergy and will not be effective. The main diplomatic challenge in simultaneous engagement is that if China temporarily halts, India will possibly choose to move on in order to exploit gap and fill up with full range investment as a development partner. India, being a democratic nation and regional superpower, should not opt for pursuing national interests while compromising state sponsored violation of human rights and humanitarian disaster in Rakhine State in an authoritarian state. The country, unwilling to lift up support, should be approached bilaterally and government narrative should indicate that it has moral responsibility to contribute to global peace as a superpower and should fully explain how the 'in-action' or sympathy towards undemocratic government can impact its rapport and confidence.

### **Create International Pressure on Myanmar**

International pressure on Myanmar for accepting Rohingya as its citizen can ensure a sustainable solution. Although failed to see any light, under Bangladesh-Myanmar Refugee Repatriation Deal 2017, Myanmar agreed to accept repatriation of FDMN. It indicates that Myanmar government does not have very strong basis to establish the controversial Citizenship Act. So if current approach of taking Rohingya issue to ICJ continues together with a strong International pressure on Myanmar, the decade long crisis can see a viable result. Economic sanctions is an important instrument to enforce and pursue a decision. Several sanctions on Myanmar from the USA and the UK are in vogue for its political approach. Economic sanctions are more effective when it is directed along with international legal framework. So, the current progress of legal proceedings should be taken forward alongside the instruments of shaping up economic decision. For this Bangladesh needs to go all out to create global view with the support of the USA who can influence views of the UN and western allies. The key actors of conflict and their interrelationship were portrayed in Figure 4.

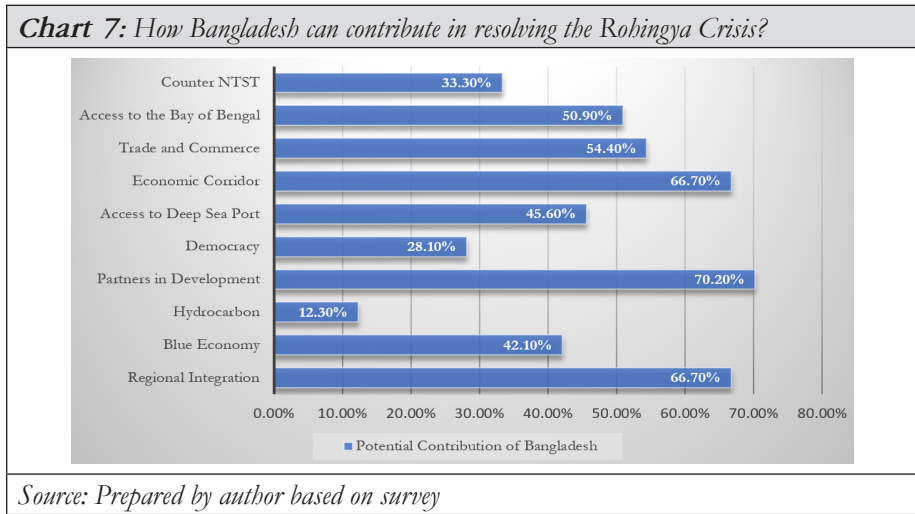
### **Maintain Dialogues with Myanmar**

Bangladesh's diplomatic efforts should accommodate a window of mutual discussion, negotiation and agreement. FDMN crisis should be viewed as a regional issue where Bangladesh needs to pursue for a viable solution, i.e. recognizing Rohingya as citizens by Myanmar and safe, dignified repatriation in a multilateral integrated approach. Each discussion should be preceded by bilateral discussion with Bangladesh's strategic partners with a view to ensure moral support in Bangladesh's favour. Government narrative should focus on security threat concerns emanating from Myanmar's internal conflict management methods. Bangladesh must strongly say that Bangladesh cannot take the load of FDMN while it is only Myanmar who should proactively seek positive solutions because Rohingya are not Bengali although their appearance gives such impression. In this connection, Bangladesh may offer modalities for repatriation following the global standard. Such modalities should include skill development training which can be beneficial for them in employing in the Economic Zones. This is a very difficult strategy because the Arakan Army does not prioritize the repatriation of FDMN, and neither does the current Myanmar regime support it. For that matter establishing mutual trust with Arakan Army and patience are two most important preconditions. Accordingly, Bangladesh should keep on engaging Myanmar with dialogues and keep communicating over this while keeping each other's concerns

in mind so that they can find ways to start substantial repatriation process as soon as possible. Bangladesh need to seek support advice and support from its common strategic partners to Myanmar, i.e. India and China

### Public Diplomacy

Along with different strategies, Bangladesh should also start public diplomacy involving people of Myanmar, with a view to eradicating persistence of Islam phobia from the mindset of people. People should be made clear that insurgency in Myanmar is an internal issue and that religion does not promote any extremism. It is only the Government who needs to address the root causes of insurgency. Extensive nature of information operations as well as media campaign in favour of Bangladesh should be organized to establish that the perception of Myanmar government about Rohingya as Bengali nation is wrong. Bangladesh may take support from the USA and India to establish this.



### Internally Displaced Person (IDP) Camps inside Myanmar and Subsequent Refugee Camps in Third Country

Bangladesh should persuade the United Nations, through its strategic partnership with the United States, to set up IDP camps along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, given that the country’s refugee camps are overcrowded and that neither local integration nor resettlement is an option. If humanitarian situation aggravates to the extent requiring further relocation, then a third country should be selected for accommodating new refugees.

## **Rethinking Strategic Partnership of Bangladesh**

Bangladesh's strategic partnership with India, China and the USA encompasses three complimentary aspects. These are economic development, security cooperation against non-traditional threat and cultural exchange (MoFA Bangladesh briefing). FDMN crisis does not fall under this agenda. Bangladesh can contribute significantly for regional integration and stability. About 66% of the respondents reacted positively to this view. In this connection, Bangladesh should attempt to come up as a "Strategic Negotiator" under the supports from the USA, China and India and include in its strategic partnership agenda for peace and stability in the region. Bangladesh has established peace model through its success in counter insurgency campaign in Chittagong Hill Tracts though "win the hearts and mind" policy and contribution in various UN led peacekeeping operations. Acceptance as a "Strategic Negotiator" may be still challenging and the Government needs to eradicate corruption at public domain, utilize national experts and enhance negotiation skills to get a firm foothold.

## **OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH**

### **Strengthening Current Relation with China for a Positive Sum Result**

Bangladesh may establish strategic partnership with China for the development of infrastructures. The string of pearls strategy may be of interest to China. In order to avoid upsetting other superpowers, Bangladesh should refrain from playing China's political realism in the strategic alliance, which would be founded on mutual economic progress. Bangladesh should take advantage of this chance to make clear its position on Myanmar and persuade China to put pressure on Myanmar about the FDMN repatriation issue. If violence is stopped and FDMN are repatriated, it will establish a congenial environment for China and Myanmar to resume development initiatives.

### **Pursue Deeper Trade Ties with Myanmar for Creating Venue for Negotiation, and with the USA for International Pressure**

Bangladesh needs to pursue deeper trade ties with Myanmar, for mutual economic benefits and confidence building, and with the USA, who is a reliable trade partner. Enhancing deeper trade ties with the USA will caution China and draw more attention of both India and China, who may be interested to engage Bangladesh bilaterally. China does not want that Quad to prosper so that her dominance can

be maintained in Asia Pacific region. Trade agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar will establish trust and confidence. This would facilitate Bangladesh to project adverse effect of FDMN crisis over region. The USA wants democratic reform of Myanmar who is expected to exert diplomatic pressure multilaterally.

### **Maintain the Non-Aligned Policy and Support Peaceful Coexistence for Acceptance of Bangladesh as ‘Strategic Negotiator’ on FDMN Crisis**

Although it is too early to comment on Trump’s foreign policy intentions in relation to Quad’s ability to fulfill its agenda, the US may take action to expand Quad in order to counter China’s influence along the littorals by engaging Bangladesh. Bangladesh needs to take careful steps in selecting agenda that will help her to prosper in technological and health domain without creating tension in the region. Recent development of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) seems to benefit Russia, who is under economic sanction, China, who is coming up as the global top economy, and India for prospering individual national currencies. It may not benefit other countries. So Bangladesh also need to analysis judiciously, not motivated politically, and must not antagonize other superpowers.

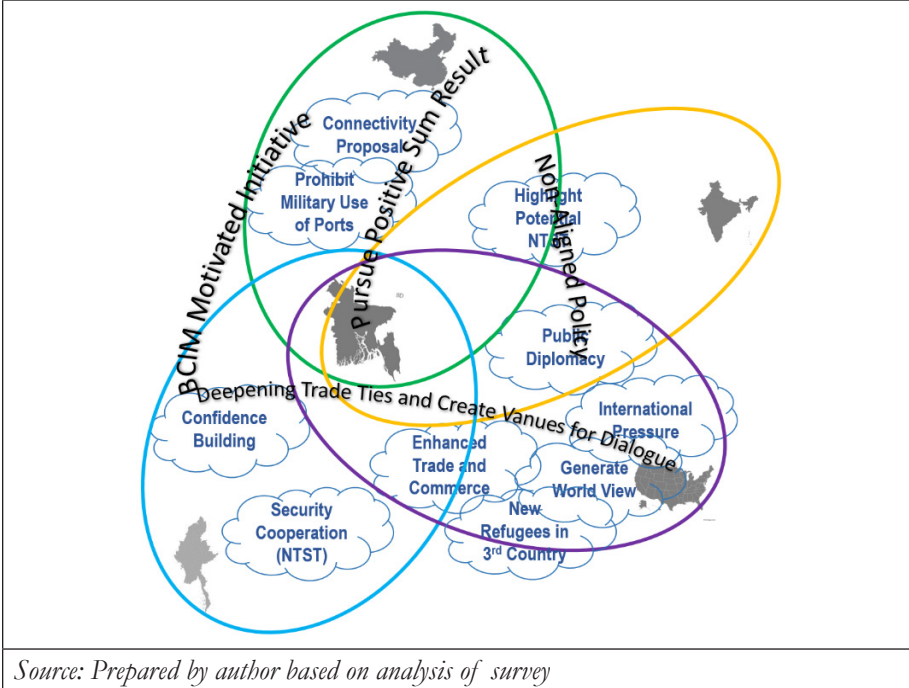
### **Engage in Strategic Partnership with India and China Simultaneously and Resolve FDMN Issue through BCIM Motivated Initiative**

China, which protected Myanmar in the UN Security Council using its veto power, believes implementation of the BCIM economic corridor can solve the FDMN problem.

## **CONCLUSION**

Myanmar’s certain geopolitical advantages drew attention of global and regional superpowers who are interested in energy resources, access to deep sea port in the Bay of Bengal, extending economic corridor and Myanmar’s political activities. On the other hand, Myanmar also wants to prosper utilizing its geopolitical advantages. Myanmar’s aspiration for development has a potential linkage with flight of FDMN from Rakhine State where regional superpowers have made significant investment. Current military regime’s outlook on Rohingya as threat to development in Rakhine State needs to be changed for internal stability and for the greater interest of the country. Regional actors are expected to create pressure on Myanmar to address FDMN issue and may engage Myanmar in peace process with the active participation from China and ASEAN.

**Figure 5:** Options for Bangladesh for Resolving FDMN Crisis through Strategic Partnership



The geopolitical importance of Bangladesh has been well recognized by global and regional superpowers. Although Bangladesh maintains good strategic relations with the USA, the current growth of economic influence of China on Bangladesh, may create a lot of tension in the Bay of Bengal region. Under this circumstance, Bangladesh will have to render thoughtful and balanced approach for maintaining regional harmony and renew BCIM motivated initiatives for mutual economic benefits. This trustworthy relationship with all actors will facilitate Bangladesh in addressing FDMN issue in a productive manner where Bangladesh, India and China can jointly exert diplomatic pressure on Myanmar in BCIM forum.

Under the complex geopolitical setup in the Bay of Bengal region, Bangladesh needs to make pragmatic and liberalistic approach for repatriation of FDMN to Myanmar. Bangladesh's diplomatic and geopolitical strength should be blended appropriately in order to overcome the issue while ensuring regional stability. Strategies for Bangladesh are versatile that includes, bringing the FDMN issue to World's notice highly and frequently, offering plausible connectivity proposal to

China in one hand and restricting military use of port on the other, generating mutual confidence with Myanmar, highlighting the consequences of unaddressed Rohingya issue in regional forum, public diplomacy, rethinking strategic partnership of Bangladesh etc. Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the Honorable Chief Advisor to the interim Government of Bangladesh, said during the 79th Session of the General Assembly that Bangladesh is ready to work with the international community to create an environment for dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingyas to their homeland. Considering all, Bangladesh may adopt a four-pronged option, that includes strengthening current relationship with China for a positive sum result, pursue deeper trade ties with Myanmar for creating venue for negotiation and with the USA for creating international pressure, maintain the non-aligned policy and support peaceful coexistence for acceptance of Bangladesh as ‘Strategic Negotiator’ on FDMN issue and, finally, engage in Strategic Partnership with India and China simultaneously and resolve FDMN issue through BCIM motivated initiatives.

Acceptance of Bangladesh as “Strategic Negotiator” is a great challenge for Bangladesh which it needs to establish. Bangladesh has very successfully resolved its insurgency in Chattogram Hill Tracts though “win the hearts and mind” policy and demonstrated remarkable success in peacekeeping operations. However, it needs to utilize national experts and enhance negotiation skills.

Myanmar, being a member state of ASEAN, draws guaranteed diplomatic and economic support from its other ASEAN member states. As such, ASEAN holds greater influence on Myanmar who can be very useful in addressing FDMN Crisis. Bangladesh, in collaboration with the USA, may urge the UN to persuade FDMN issue with Myanmar through ASEAN.

Every challenge comes with possibilities. Bangladesh government’s approach to the humanitarian issue like FDMN is deeply appreciated by global communities. What Myanmar is doing in tackling internal ethnic issues, are also evident. This is can be exploited to create a world view though bilateral discussion with Strategic Partners with simultaneous application of public diplomacy.

In case of religious dimension of Rohingya issue, Bangladesh is in a good position to strategically communicate that Myanmar needs to win the hearts and minds if it wants to win counter insurgency. So it needs to stop atrocities and address ethnic issues including that of Rohingya. A suppressed group can turn into violent if they continue to remain suppressed. For investors, country’s peace and regional stability is foremost requirement for safe and credible outcome.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Bangladesh needs to move beyond comprehensive partnership, rethink the focus of its strategic partnership with China, India and the USA by incorporating regional peace and harmony in the partnership agenda. Preconditions to provide credible opportunities for dialogue with the Strategic Partners about repatriation of FDMN are needed to be achieved through initiatives associated with regional economic corridor for a positive sum result, deepening trade ties with the USA for creating global influence on Myanmar, judicious employment of public diplomacy for generating world view and confidence building with Myanmar and India for establishing Bangladesh's pragmatic view on regional peace and stability.

Strategic Partnership with the USA needs to be played judiciously to pursue United Nations for dynamic multilateral initiatives. Firstly, the United Nations may utilize the influence of ASEAN on Myanmar for exerting a renewed pressure on Myanmar for addressing Rohingya and other ethnic issues. Secondly, any further surge of FDMN should be accommodated in the IDP camps in Bangladesh-Myanmar border under arrangement of UNHCR. Should the situation deteriorate to the extent warranting further relocation, then a third country should be chosen to accommodate them.

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## **AUTHOR**

**Brigadier General Ahmed Zamiul Islam, ndc, afwc, psc, MPhil** is a graduate of National Defence College, Mirpur and Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur. The officer was commissioned from the Bangladesh Military Academy on 20 December 1992. He attended several professional courses both at home and abroad. He is a graduate of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Dhaka and obtained Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering. He also obtained Master of Arts in Defence Strategy from National University, Bangladesh and completed Master of Philosophy in Strategy and Development Studies from Bangladesh University of Professional (BUP), Dhaka. He is pursuing his PhD in International Relations from BUP. Currently, he is serving as a Project Manager of Construction Supervision Consultant, Padma Bridge Rail Link Project.

E-mail: [azislam72@yahoo.com](mailto:azislam72@yahoo.com)



## **A STUDY ON BANGLADESH AIR FORCE (BAF) PREPAREDNESS IN ACCOSTING CHALLENGES OF ONGOING UN MISSIONS**

**Air Commodore Md Reza Emdad Khan, GUP, BUP, ndc, psc, GD(P)**

National Defence College, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh

*(Received: 10th October 2023; Accepted: 12th September 2024; Published: 22nd December 2024)*

**Abstract:** Bangladesh has a constitutional obligation to support global peace and security initiatives under the United Nations umbrella. In that pretext, Bangladesh Air Force started supporting the United Nations since 1993. The continued effort in supporting the United Nations mandate heightened the competency of Bangladesh Air Force in the international arena and glorified the image of Bangladesh as a whole. However, over the years, the nature of the employment of forces by the United Nations in different conflict-prone areas has undergone evolutionary changes. These changes demanded more capable and technologically advanced aviation platforms, both manned and unmanned, and sensors to compensate for additional manpower requirements to reduce cost and enhance the capability to respond to the pandemics. Moreover, restructuring field missions and introducing advanced technology in the mission area demand that the nominated United Nations Military Observers and Military Staff Officers adapt to the operational environment through formal Pre-Deployment Training. Besides, Bangladesh Air Force's participation in the United Nations missions has positive impacts on operational, moral, and psychological aspects of its personnel. Unable to meet the mission requirements in due time may have ramifications in terms of repatriation or reduction in force. Such ramifications will have greater impacts on reputation, morale, and relevancy as a future United Nations force. Therefore, Bangladesh Air Force should proactively strategise for future United Nations' needs, focusing on advanced platforms and sophisticated sensors, without needing transformational changes. This mixed-method study aims to enhance current studies on the challenges faced by ongoing United Nations missions. It also examines the Bangladesh Air Force's readiness to accost the evolving challenges, thereby lionising its already established esteemed reputation within the United Nations framework.

**Keywords:** *Peacekeeping, Preparedness, Accost Challenges, Lionising Image*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In restoring international peace and security under the United Nations (UN) umbrella, Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) maintained its relevance in the past. Now it needs to prepare to accost the challenges and remain relevant in the future. The transformation of UN operations in cost, scale, and scope, as well as capability of fighting diversified threats, and crises is becoming increasingly multifaceted. Responding to new conflicts, advanced weaponry, tech-savvy actors, and health crises are some of the emerging trends. BAF has historically contributed to UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO). However, emerging trends are now challenging BAF's force planning and deployment strategy in the PKO. Besides, it has now become a critical requirement for United Nations Military Observers/ Military Staff Officers (UNMOs/MSOs) to adapt to the evolving high-tech operational environment of the mission area. Pre-deployment training (PDT) has become an important issue. To remain relevant, BAF must address and promptly respond to the emerging challenges posed by new conflicts, health crises, advanced weaponry and tech-savvy actors of the ongoing<sup>1</sup> missions. Repatriation or reduction in force may result if the emerging challenges are not addressed timely. Such ramifications may adversely affect the overall reputation, morale and relevancy of BAF in future UN participation. This investigation will assess BAF's preparedness and strategise for future UN mission requirements, considering global trends and the evolving nature of UN operations.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Several peacekeeping literature, authored by both local and international researchers, were studied at length. Previous studies have predominantly focused on operational capacity, coordination efforts, and the role of peacekeepers in conflict mitigation (Jones & Brown, 2019). Almost all the local literature focused on the tactical-level challenges faced by BAF contingents. Kamal (2015) and Ahmed (2017) made a humble effort regarding operational aspects in their work, which added value to the previous works. However, a gap remains in research, particularly in the integration of technological advancements and the evaluation of long-term sustainability (Jones & Brown, 2019; Rahman, 2018). Theoretical gaps are evident due to the insufficient investigation into BAF's context as such disability to adapt to the evolving demands of peacekeeping missions. Lack of

<sup>1</sup> *By ongoing missions, this study refers to missions in which BAF participated between 2019 and 2021 since this study is being conducted by the author in 2021 as a course member of NDC-2021.*

a cohesive theoretical framework impedes a complete understanding of the BAF's readiness. Practical gaps arise from the absence of tailored strategies specific to the operational demands of peacekeeping, particularly in complex, diverse environments. Furthermore, the under-examined role of time, evolving threats, and global geopolitical changes demonstrate the need for more extensive, multi-layered studies. The major contribution of the reviewed literature is its identification of the critical components of military preparedness in peacekeeping, particularly for the BAF. This research will, therefore, make a holistic approach to cement the theoretical and practical gaps at all levels of operations and stakeholders. The study will add value by elaborating the preparedness of BAF and the consequences of incremental changes<sup>2</sup>.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary research objective is to “address the research gap and add value to the existing research works in respect of the challenges of the ongoing UN missions and to study the preparedness of BAF in accosting these challenges so that she can reinforce her already established excellent reputation in UN environment”. Based on primary research objective, the following specific research objectives were formulated:

- To study the existing challenges of the ongoing UN missions from the viewpoint of deployed forces/personnel and decision-making<sup>3</sup> level.
- To study the preparedness of BAF to address the challenges.
- To recommend measures to accost the challenges and lionise BAF's already established good reputation in the international arena.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

- What are the challenges faced by the BAF in ongoing UN missions?

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<sup>2</sup> In strategic leadership literature, incremental change refers to small alterations that an organization makes by changing components or activities in increments over time.

<sup>3</sup> Air headquarters (AirHQ), Armed Forces Division (AFD), Permanent Mission of Bangladesh, New York (PMBNY), Force Generation Section (FGS) of UNHQ.

- What measures can the BAF implement to enhance its effectiveness in future UN missions to lionise its already established good image in the international arena?

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis (posterior) of the research is “Timely preparedness of BAF in accosting the challenges of ongoing UN mission will lionise the already established good image of BAF in the international arena”. The independent variable of the hypothesis is “Timely preparedness of BAF” while the dependent variable is “lionise the already established good image of BAF” The indicators of the independent variable and dependent variable are illustrated below:

- Independent Variable. ‘Timely preparedness of ‘BAF’. Table 1 depicts the indicators of this variable.

<i>Table 1: Indicators for the Independent Variable</i>	
Independent Variable (Causal Variable)	Indicators
Timely Preparedness of BAF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS)</li> <li>• Adaptation to Changes (Elimination of Capability Gap through delivery of High-Tech, Sophisticated Platforms both manned and unmanned air vehicles)</li> <li>• Regeneration Process and Human Resource Development (Pre-Deployment Training, Embedded Training)</li> <li>• Balance of Operational Requirement versus Welfare for Selection of BAF personnel for UN mission</li> </ul>

*Source: Developed by the Researcher*

- Dependent Variable. ‘Lionise the already established good image of ‘BAF’. Table 2 depicts the indicators of this variable.

**Table 2: Indicators for the Dependent Variable**

Dependent Variable (Caused Variables)	Indicators
Lionise the Already Established Good Image of BAF	• Increased Tasking & Employment in New Roles
	• Representation of BAF in Armed Forces Division (AFD), Permanent Mission of Bangladesh in New York (PMBNY) and in UN Headquarters (UNHQ)
	• Intangible factors such as Morale and Psychological aspects of BAF personnel; Tangible Factors such as Enhancement or Degradation of Operational Competencies and Capabilities of BAF
	• Public Diplomacy

*Source: Developed by the Researcher*

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Design and Sampling.** The study employs a mixed methods research approach which include a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Key Informant Interview and quantitative survey questionnaires). According to Almeida (2018:137), mixed methods'combine into a single study in order to provide a broader and more complete vision of a 'problem'. Mixed methodologies are undertaken to analyse a problem more comprehensively. Almeida (2018:137) further asserted, 'the use of mixed methods turns possible to overcome the limitations of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, allowing the researcher to get rich information that could not be obtained using each method 'alone'. Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007:282-283) stated 'sampling decisions typically are more complicated in mixed methods research because sampling schemes must be designed for both the qualitative and quantitative 'research' and 'both random and non-random sampling can be used in quantitative and qualitative 'studies'. Patton (1990:169) asserted 'that many mixed methods studies utilize some form of purposeful sampling. Here, individuals, groups, and settings are considered for selection if they are 'information-rich'. As such, the sampling scheme and class<sup>4</sup> employed in the research included key informants (KIs) such as contingent commanders, contingent members, MSOs/UNMOs, concerned directorates

<sup>4</sup> Class refers to random sampling versus non-random sampling schemes (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007, p. 283).

from Air Headquarters (Air HQ), Director General Operations (Armed Forces Division), Defence Attache (DA) of Permanent Mission of Bangladesh, New York (PMBNY) and Chief Force Generation Section (FGS) of UNHQ. The participants were chosen to address the current issues involving the last three years of UN participation by BAF. A total of 10 KI interviews were conducted for the qualitative study. The sample size was deemed sufficient as data saturation was reached after taking the 10th interview (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). A sample size of over 100 is often considered sufficient for carrying out a quantitative survey, especially when aiming for generalisability. Again, recommendations for “minimum” sample size for most common quantitative and qualitative research designs vary between 3 and 82 participants (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007, pp. 288-289). Considering the above and ‘information ‘rich’ KIs of ongoing missions and COVID-19 restrictions in 2021, the researcher was guided to use a sample size of 100. In the end, a total of 107 participated in the survey, of which 12% (i.e. a total of 13) were female, and responses of all 107 participants were addressed in the research. The sampling strategy was concurrent. Table 3 lists the rank, gender, service age, and number of participants of the survey.

**Table 3:** *Participants’ Category and Number*

Rank	Gender	Service Age	Number of Participants
Air Commodore & Equivalent	Male	>25	13
Group Captain & Equivalent	Male	>25	14
Wing Commander	Male	15-25	25
	Female	18	1
Squadron Leader	Male	7-15	32
	Female		12
Flight Lieutenant	Male	6	10

*Source: Developed by the Researcher*

**Data Collection.** The research is based on the collection of data from the primary (i.e. Key Informant Interviews and survey questionnaires) and secondary sources (i.e. previous research, journals, websites etc. through a comprehensive literature review). According to Cossham and Johanson (2018), the Key Informant Interviews (KII) technique helps a researcher to minimize data overload and make the research faster. The KII included in the data collection involved 30 KIs who responded to 19 key questions, had in-depth knowledge of the subject, and had



## ON-GOING BAF UN MISSIONS AND ITS ADAPTATION TO THE ‘UN’S EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

**‘UN’s Evolutionary Process and Requirement of Airpower.** Due to the lack of a description of Peacekeeping Operation (PKO) in the charter, PKO had to be developed through multiple evolutionary processes and had to improvise several acceptable mechanisms<sup>6</sup> to respond to conflicts. The new global order and the rise of regional powers had a profound effect on the evolution of peacekeeping after 1990 (Islam, 2021). The change of world order morphed the UN Security Council (UNSC) from a traditional peacekeeping role to peace-building and conflict prevention<sup>7</sup>. As the scope of UNPKO increased, so did the use of air power—primarily in its non-kinetic supportive roles. Bash (1994) remarked that just like any other traditional military operations, air power provides added value and capability to any PKO while delivering the overarching advantage of improving efficiency and effectiveness.

**BAF under UN Umbrella.** BAF started supporting PKO since 1993 by contributing UNMOs to the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia Herzegovina<sup>8</sup>. Later, in 1995, BAF contributed her air assets to the UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM). Presently, BAF’s contribution to the UN can be divided under three major categories: firstly, aviation contingent comprised of fixed and/or rotary wing asset(s). Secondly, the Airfield Services Unit (ASU), and thirdly, assignments of UNMO and MSO. Till 2021, 7,500 BAF personnel participated in 28 UNPKOs (Anower, 2021).

**Ongoing UN Missions.** At present, a total of 515 BAF peacekeepers are deployed in six different missions around the globe (Anower, 2021). One helicopter contingent is deployed in each location in DR Congo and CAR. BAF has also assigned one C-130B medium-lift transport aircraft in DR Congo. In addition to the contingents, 23 MSOs and UNMOs are deployed in six different UN missions around the globe (Anower, 2021).

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<sup>6</sup> *Military presence, Oversee or Supervise compliance of ceasefire/armistice, negotiations or serve as buffer.*

<sup>7</sup> *Conflict prevention refers to different peacebuilding activities and strategies to pre-empt and neutralize potential violent conflict triggers.*

<sup>8</sup> *Article 25 of the constitution of Bangladesh obliges the country to support the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Besides, national grounds behind our liberation war acted as motivational factor to commit troops to UN for restoring global peace and security.*

## IMPACT OF UN AFFAIRS AND CHALLENGES OF ONGOING UN MISSIONS

**Impact of Changing Nature of UN Missions on BAF Participation.** The Daily Star (2019) quoted Ameerah Huq<sup>9</sup> “every time troop-contributing countries get a briefing of what the UN requires, they are being told that we need more sophisticated equipment, better aviation units, and better intelligence and analysis units”. Therefore, it is pretty clear that the UN requires a stronger and more versatile aviation force due to the expansion of “The UN’s roles, scopes, and objectives.

### Challenges of Ongoing UN Missions

- **Complexities due to Budget Cut.** The budget cut led to the downsizing of strength while the integration of high-tech equipment by replacing manpower affected the participation of BAF in UNPKOs (Rahman, M. 2021).
- **Competition amongst the Deployed Contingents Reduces Employability and Reimbursement.** Differences in capabilities<sup>10</sup> exist among the similar platforms in the field missions (Sharif, 2021). The lack of mission-specific capabilities creates competition amongst the deployed contingent and reduces the employability of the deployed assets resulting in reduced reimbursements. Reduced employability has ripple effects on unscheduled maintenance, the reputation of the contingent, aircrew efficiency, morale, and operational readiness (Ali, 2021).
- **Managing Uncontrolled Airspace.** Rashid (2021) from MINUSMA, Mali revealed that the lack of modern flight monitoring sensors and equipment created flight safety hazards in a vast uncontrolled airspace without radio coverage in the deployed locations.
- **Consideration of Welfare Aspects in Personnel Selection Process Creates High Task to Manpower Ratio in ASU.** Abedin (2021) asserted that different sections of ASU have varied standard of professional skills, training and dedication since the unit has common vacancies from all trades

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<sup>9</sup> Former Under Secretary General (USG) for Department of Field Support (DFS) of UNHQ.

<sup>10</sup> Capability in terms of radius of action (ROA), payload, engine performance, higher cruising speed, avionics, night operating capability and armament capability. In the simplest term ROA is determined by the inflight unrefueled maximum distance covered by an aircraft to and from a particular airfield.

of airmen. M. N. Khan (2021) and Siddique (2021) opined that the major areas that need review/rethinking in the selection process are for ASU, especially in the MOVCON and Fire Fighting sections. Rashid (2021) from MINUSMA, Mali, opined that high Task to Manpower ratio creates huge psychological pressure on human resources, resulting in potential efficiency loss, fatigue, flight safety hazards, low morale, and reduced confidence in the leadership.

- **Operational Difficulties due to the Absence of Synergistic Efforts due to Repatriation of ASU in United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).** A.S.M. Khan (2021) asserted that response time by local MOVCON has doubled owing to the repatriation of BANASU. The absence of required ASU facilities in CAR is seriously hampering flight operations and causing safety hazards (Karim, A.M. 2021).
- **Operationalising Night Vision Goggles (NVG) Operation.** Both the helicopter contingents in MONUSCO and CAR are facing difficulties with NGV operation at night due to helipad security, terrain, weather, and coordination with local government and other agencies (Ali, 2021).
- **Existing Capability Gap Vis-a-Vis UN Requirements.** Chowdhury (2021) and Sadequzzaman (2021) identified that a capability gap exists in the mission area regarding the requirement of long-range platforms, Attack Helicopters (AH), Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. 77% (n=88; 4~5 on a 5-point scale) of the respondents suggested that BAF should contribute UAVs to the UN.
- **Inadequacy of Formal PDT.** 60% of the deployed MSO/UNMOs expressed that only a few of them underwent little training before deployment. 83% of the cohort emphasized that formal training is necessary. Karim (2021) remarked that there is a requirement for formally trained Forward Air Controllers (FAC) to support the operation of armed helicopters in the mission area.
- **Supply Chain Management.** Simultaneous management of the supply chain for different types of aviation units (fixed and rotary) at different mission areas and managing the home country's needs is a daunting coordination task at the AirHQ. Such endeavours put pressure on the maintenance schedule and operation of the air assets.

- **Lack of Physical Security and Maintenance Facilities in the Deployed Locations.** Key informants from all the field missions apprised that the physical security of runways in the deployed locations is fragile and that the major equipment is vulnerable to hostile action. Besides, petty thefts and infiltrations in DR Congo have been found as common phenomena.
- **Impact of COVID-19.** Shams (2021) and Sarker (2021) apprised that six months of mission quarantine between March 20 and July 20 vastly reduced the operational activities and forced the contingents to confine themselves in a small area without any recreational facilities. The major challenges the contingents faced were a lack of medical supplies, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and other COVID-19 protective measures (Sarker, 2021). On the financial aspect, the reimbursements were reduced significantly from the previous years (Anower, 2021).
- **Non-Representation of BAF Personnel in Decision Making Level.** Despite being one of the significant contributors to different UN missions around the globe, BAF has very little or no representation at the decision-making level in the mission area and in the offices above AirHQ (Ahmed, 2021). While it is possible to accommodate BAF representatives in the Armed Forces Division (AFD) and PMBNY, it is not an easy venture to position a representative in the UNHQ due to the selection process by the UN (Chowdhury, 2021).
- **Coordination Challenges.** Islam (2021) apprised that planning and coordination amongst the directorates in respect of mission-related acquisition, regeneration, and selection vis-a-vis home country requirements is severely affected since multiple directorates simultaneously deal with bits and pieces of similar issues

## **PREPAREDNESS OF BAF TO ACCOST THE CHALLENGES**

### **BAF Preparedness**

- **Commitment to Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS).** Anower (2021) apprised that BAF put up a pledge for one ASU, three Bell-212 helicopters, and one C-130B since 2015 in the UN's PCRS process. The Bell-212 and ASU (currently in level 3) have been accepted by UNHQ and as such,

its major equipment underwent VV by the UN in 2019. UNHQ has agreed in principle to upgrade the Bell-212 pledge to Rapid Deployment Level (RDL). In 2018, Air HQ put up a pledge for four Mi-17 series helicopters for UN deployment. Russel (2021) confirmed that these helicopters were deployed to CAR in 2020 directly from RDL. Islam (2021) posited that last year, BAF informed UNHQ of the deployment of an embedded Aero Medical Extraction Team (AMET) to carry out Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) missions more efficiently.

- **Elimination of Indifferences in Capability.** KIs from MONUSCO and Air HQ have commented that BAF has already replaced two aged helicopters with 24/7 NVG-capable helicopters with long endurance and longer ROA. The rest four helicopters are planned to be replaced in due course of time. Islam (2021) asserted that the acquisition of Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR)<sup>11</sup> is underway. It is also planned that C-130B, currently deployed MONUSCO, is expected to be replaced by a more capable C-130J.
- **Regeneration Process.** 48 pilots (including 18 deployed) are engaged to maintain the helicopter to crew ratio of 1:3 for MONUSCO's six helicopters (Rahman, A.T.M.H. 2021). The deployment of three armed helicopters in CAR makes the process even more complex. Thus, balancing and prioritizing between home country requirements and the UN requirements is a complex undertaking by the planners.
- **Human Resource Development (PDT and Embedded Training).** Islam (2021) remarked that BAF meets the NVG training requirements. In addition, the training for C-130J is also underway to meet the proficiency requirement.
- **Balance of Operational Requirement versus Welfare of Selected Personnel.** 72.82% (n=70, 3~5 on a 5 scale) of the respondents to the field survey opined that BAF is adequately maintaining the balance between operational requirements versus the welfare of BAF personnel during the selection process. Respondents comprising 27% of the survey primarily indicated that the imbalance exists in the selection process of 'ASU's firefighting and Movement Control (MOVCON) sections.

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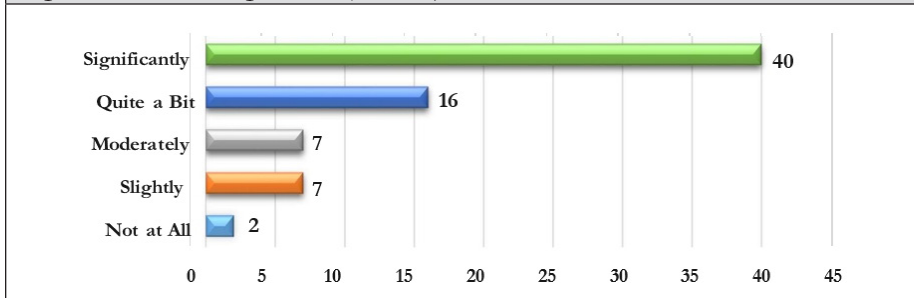
<sup>11</sup> In the simplest explanation, FLIR is an infra-red sensor that enables a pilot to observe the environment in the dark clearly, thus reducing the limitations of the human eye in the darkness. FLIR also helps to enhance daylight observation of the environment through its digital image processing capabilities.

- **Planning and Implementation Process.** Despite several coordination ordeals, Air HQ generally prioritizes its planning and implementation process adequately.

## LIONISE THE ALREADY ESTABLISHED GOOD IMAGE OF BAF

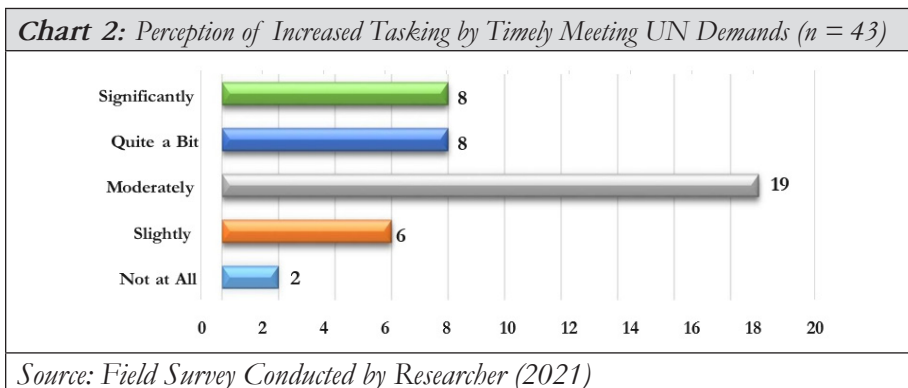
- **Elimination of Capability Gap.** Researcher's field survey reveals that 71.42% of the respondents for ASU agree that there is no capability gap in ASU (now repatriated). However, 47.9% of the respondents from the flying contingents along with AirHQ and higher offices in the chain (AFD, PMBNY, and FGS), believe that there is a slight capability gap existing in the deployed areas in terms of platforms, avionics, and sensors. These capability gaps need to be overcome in the future by offering the UN more capable platforms.<sup>12</sup>
- **Increased Tasking by Meeting UN Demands.** The field survey results (Charts and 2) and key informants strongly believe that enhanced capability in regard to timely deployment of sophisticated sensors and platforms in the mission area with well-trained operators and support crews will allow the tasking agencies more flexibility in employing BAF air assets.

**Chart 1:** Perception of Meeting UN Demands versus Enhancement of BAF Capabilities and Competencies (n = 72)



Source: Field Survey Conducted by Researcher (2021)

<sup>12</sup> UAV, AH, air ambulance, integrated AMET, inter theatre flight by fixed wing air assets, NVG capability of C-130J and refitting the platforms with modern sensors like FLIR, Ground Proximity Warning System (GPWS), Helicopter Terrain Awareness and Warning System (HTWS), Electronic Counter Measures (ECM), Mine Resisted Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles and AMET for conducting Casualty Evacuation (CASEVAC) and MEDEVAC.

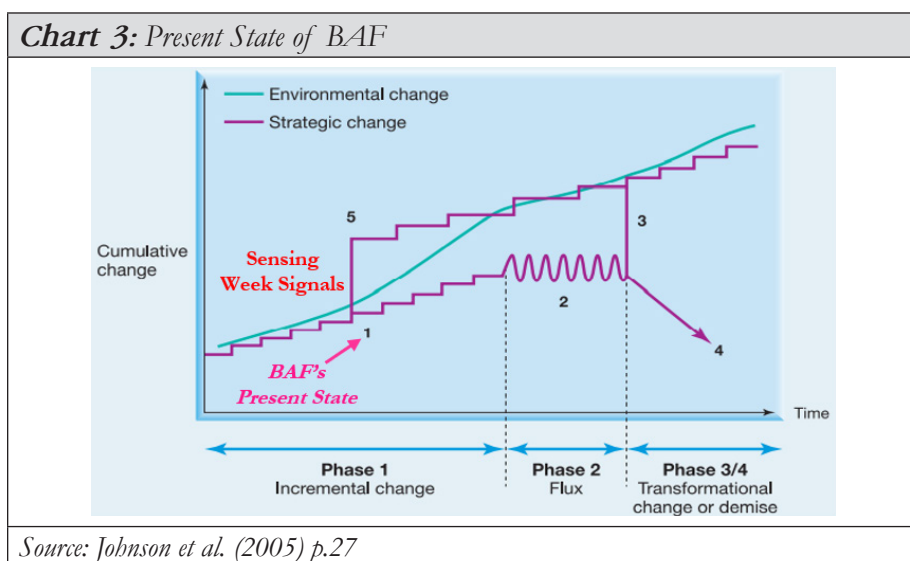


- **Employment in New Roles and Operational Convenience.** 18% (n=50) of the survey respondents strongly believe that the sophisticated platforms and sensors will add new air power roles to the contingents, while 32% (majority) sided with a slight increment.
- **Reducing Dependability on Main Operating Bases (MOB) to Enhance Employability.** 26.52% (n=49) of the respondents feel that reducing dependability on MOB will “slightly” enhance employability. Islam (2021) added that composite team operation will reduce dependability on MOB since most of the respondents (33.33%) feel that BAF contingents moderately depend on MOB for maintenance.
- **Representation of BAF in AFD, PMBNY, UNHQ and Key Appointments in the Mission Area.** 84.04% (n=94) of respondents of the survey feel “significantly” that BAF should have equal or proportionate participation in AFD, PMBNY, and FGS in the planning level for looking after BAF’s UN-related interests. Islam (2021) agreed that BAF needs to prepare more for meeting future requirements through meaningful participation in AFD, PMBNY, UNHQ, and key decision-making aviation appointments in field missions.
- **Embedded Female Engagement Team (FET) with BAF Contingents.** Begum (2021) and Khundker (2021) advocated that female participation by BAF needs to increase in the mission area to support the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative of the UN by embedding FET with BAF contingents.

- **Intangible Factors (Morale and Psychological Aspects)**
  - **Branding.** The flags of Bangladesh and BAF are portrayed as a brand in the international arena through 'BAF's meaningful participation in the UN (Islam, 2021).
  - **Impact on Morale.** 82.41% (n=91, 4~5 in 5 Scale) of the survey respondents believe that UN participation increases the morale of the BAF personnel.
  - **Self-Development and Command Experience.** Most survey respondents opined that participation in UN missions plays a vital role in self-development in terms of confidence-building, developing a strong psychological upbringing, excelling interaction capability and command experience, etc.
- **Tangible Factors (Enhancement/Degradation of Operational Competencies and Capabilities of BAF)**
  - **Force Projection.** The 24-hour window for positioning a C-130J in Bunia, DR Congo in November 2020 bears the testimony of BAF's force projection capability during COVID-19 pandemic (Islam, 2021). In addition, 2020's troops rotation to CAR and DR Congo by Bangladesh Biman is a good example of airpower projection by Bangladesh.
  - **Enhancing Capabilities through Meeting Eventualities.** M. M. Rahman (2021) and 64.4% (n=92, 2~1 on 5 scale) of the respondents believe that UN requirements pushed BAF to acquire and enhance the capability of the BAF helicopter fleet.
  - **Public Diplomacy.** 68.35% (n=95, 2~1 on 5 scale) of the respondents opined that BAF is not doing significant public diplomacy to lionise its image.
  - **Ramification for Inability to Accost the Challenges of Ongoing UN Missions.** 88% (n=50) of the cohort collectively believe that unable to accost the challenges through incremental changes will result either in repatriation or reduction in force.

### Assessment of Present State of BAF by Using Strategic Drift Concept<sup>13</sup>

The researcher undertook a notional analysis method by using Johnson/Scholes/<sup>7</sup> Whittington's Curve to assess the current state of BAF. The field survey strongly echoed with KII that BAF is not in a "flux" at this point of time and as such, it does not need a transformational<sup>14</sup> change at this stage. The survey and KII further revealed that BAF is in "Phase 1"(Chart 3) - undertaking incremental changes but started to sense weak signals for a need in strategy change. Islam (2021) opines that presently BAF is adapting through a reactive state that needs a proactive adaptation to the changes.



## STRATEGISING FUTURE BAF PARTICIPATION IN PKOS

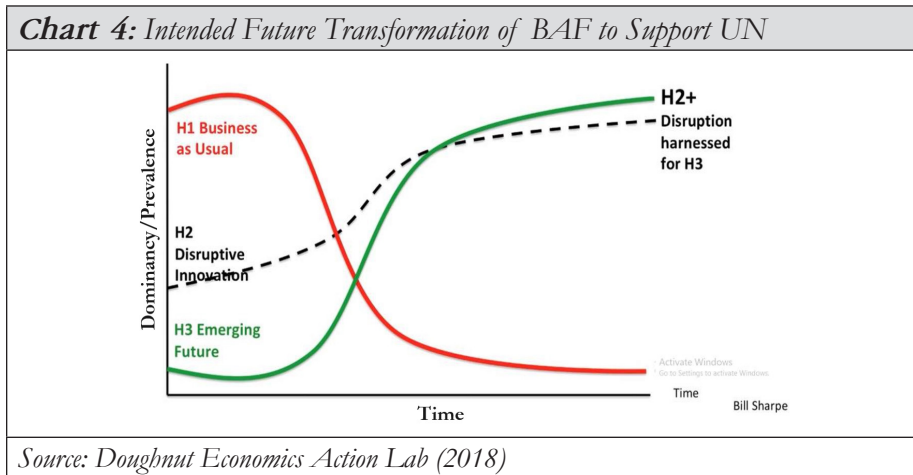
Having analysed the qualitative and quantitative data, and current state of BAF, it is concluded that BAF will require a futuristic strategic "horizon scanning".<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Strategic drift refers to a situation where non-time adaptive strategies charted by an organisation over a period fails to meet the contemporary time sensitive requirements and ultimately becomes invalid.

<sup>14</sup> Miller (2013) explicates that transformational change is a process designed to create significant change in the culture and work processes of an organization and produce significant improvement in performance.

<sup>15</sup> Horizon scanning is a systematic search that focuses on "weak signals" in the current environment that can disrupt the forces of change in the future. The weak signals have the potential to become threats, opportunities, technological developments, requirements or even develop conflicts in the future (Fargnani, 2020).

Chart 4 depicts the three-horizon framework<sup>16</sup> and how BAF needs to harness H2+<sup>17</sup> in the future by dispensing with the H1 (business as usual) path and securing H3 (emerging future).



BAF must be able to look into the future in line with Vision-41. The future and foresight scanning effort will help to visualise the importance of the UN requirements (weak signals) in the strategic context. The futuristic scanning effort will also help to define the trend dimensions<sup>18</sup> and as to how those will reflect in terms of plausible, alternative, and probable outcomes. The end state can then be clear and reachable through developing means and designing ways.

The “means” would be reflected through BAF’s increased engagement with the UN bodies, enhanced coordination effort and good public diplomacy. The “ways” could be reflected on BAF’s planning initiatives for meeting the UN requirements that are popping up now as “weak signals” The “weak signals” are identified as “acquisition need” and capacity enhancement.<sup>19</sup> The strategy will

<sup>16</sup> Y axis of the chart depicts Dominancy/Prevalence. X axis of the chart depicts time. H1 depicts existing situation which will tend to lose dominancy with time if forces of changes (UN’s evolutionary requirements) in the environment is not addressed. H3 is our intended trajectory by addressing the weak signals (i.e. requirement of sophisticated platforms with sensors). H2 are the disruptive innovation (High-Tech edge-appropriate automated platforms and sensors to imitate the weak signals).

<sup>17</sup> H2+ is what the projection of BAF’s participation in UN - a relevant and hugely acclaimed UN contributor through harnessing technology.

<sup>18</sup> Strategic Trend analysis process identifies availability of resources, social aspects, political will, technological advancement and economic conditions as the trend dimensions to determine divergent outcomes of the future.

<sup>19</sup> UAV’s, AH/ Armed Helicopters capable of conducting 24/7 operation and air ambulance, refitting platforms with sophisticated sensors (i.e. GPWS, HTWS, FLIR, ECM, TCAS, LRFT etc); formal PDT, BAF branding, increased female participation, language proficiency, digitisation of supply chain, increased public diplomacy, timely augmenting UN’s airlift capability by replacing C-130B with C-130J, preparation to meet probable pandemic of the future and projecting UN requirements in BAF forces goal, embedding AMET with aviation contingents etc.

continue to assess cost, risk and results while revisions will be necessary in a regular basis. With that approach BAF would be able to remain relevant and lionise its already established good image in the international arena.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are recommended:

- BAF may carry out an immediate horizon scanning for appropriate strategy formulation.
- BAF may plan to reduce the capability gap by acquiring and replacing platforms as needed.
- BAF may institutionalise PDT for MSO/UNMOs, FACs, and contingent members to meet mission-specific requirements.
- BAF may pursue for equitable representation in AFD, PMBNY and UNHQ.
- BAF may extend its public diplomacy initiatives.
- BAF may prepare modalities to keep the supply chain active during the pandemic.

## **CONCLUSION**

The practice by the UNSC in PKO originated from Chapters VI and VII of the charter. Over the years, the UN has undergone evolutionary changes from traditional peacekeeping to peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and peace enforcement. Pursuing a constitutional obligation, from 1993, BAF started to participate in the UN by contributing to UNMOs in UNPROFOR. Later, in 1995, BAF contributed its air assets to UNIKOM, and in 2003, BAF contributed to ASU in MONUSCO. Since then, the participation of BAF in PKO has been a regular phenomenon. The evolutionary process of the UN, especially its structural changes, did not impact much on BAF contribution. However, its requirements to support the deployed forces have a profound influence on BAF as to how she should address the issues. Currently, the UN is looking for meaningful aviation participation with highly capable multi-role, technologically advanced, high-tech platforms and sensors to reduce manpower costs. In that pretext, several hurdles were identified. The preparedness of BAF to uphold its

commitment is a continuous process although planning for new platforms and sensor acquisition involves multifarious coordination efforts and lead time. It was revealed that except for new acquisition needs and re-equipping as required, BAF needs to emphasise HRD for operating sophisticated high-tech platforms and sensors. The effort must make a good balance between operational requirements and welfare during the manpower selection process, especially for ASU. At the same time, formal mechanisms need to be introduced to train the contingent members and MSO/UNMOs alike. The survey also suggested that embedding FET with BAF contingents and increasing public diplomacy is the demand of the time.

Despite cementing the gap and adding value to the previous research works, this study faced several limitations. One key limitation of this research stemmed from time and resource constraints, which limited the breadth and depth of the study. A more detailed analysis could have been achieved through a focus on either qualitative or quantitative research methods. Additionally, the purposive sampling method might have limited the study's ability to reflect the broader range of perspectives within the BAF. These limitations highlight the future research directives and apply the findings to other contexts or settings.

In the end, it was revealed that BAF does not need a transformational change but needs to look a little further into the future proactively and strategise based on the weak signals. These weak signals were identified as the UN's requirements of day-night capable platforms and sophisticated sensors. BAF needs to predict the UN requirements and act upon it in time to lionise its already established good image in the international arena.

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## **AUTHOR**

**Air Commodore Md Reza Emdad Khan, GUP, BUP, ndc, psc** was commissioned in GD (P) branch on 9th March 1991 from Royal Malaysian Air Force. He is a fighter pilot by profession. He attended various courses both at home and abroad. He has undergone Staff College at Mirpur and Wellington, India. During his service career he has served in various operational, instructional and staff appointments in BAF. He commanded 25 Squadron and 5 Squadron BAF. He has also served as Directing Staff at DSCSC, Mirpur. He has also served as Station Commander of Shamshernagar, Officer Commanding Flying Wing BAF Base Zahurul Haque and Officer Commanding Administrative Wing, BAF Base Bangabandhu. He served in the Air headquarters as Director Overseas Air Operations and a brief tenure as Chief Inspector. He has served thrice in United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The third and last UN assignment was BANAIR-17 Commander in 2020.

E-mail: *mebmil60@gmail.com*.



# FIRE INCIDENTS IN THE READYMADE GARMENTS (RMG) FACTORIES AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT IN BANGLADESH

Air Commodore Mridha Md Ekramuzzaman, BPP, ndc, afwc, psc, PhD, Engg (Retd)

National Defence College, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh

(Received: 25th August 2023; Accepted: 23rd September 2024; Published: 22nd December 2024)

**Abstract:** Fire risk in readymade garments (RMG) factories in Bangladesh has become a great concern both for the factory itself as well as for globally renowned buyers, trade unions and government monitoring agencies. As a result, despite the outstanding achievement of the RMG industries in Bangladesh, fire incidents have become a serious concern for the government as well as for regulatory bodies of the RMG factories. This study explores the impacts of fire by analyzing its socioeconomic impacts on the workers, on the country economy, the measures adopted by the factories and the regulatory bodies to minimize the fire risk and monitor whether these measures are successful in reducing negative socio-economic impacts. The study finds that frequent and repeated fire incidents in RMG factories have resulted in loss of human lives, labor unrest, economic and image loss, employment loss and reduction in foreign investments in Bangladesh. This study also finds that RMG factory owners and regulators have failed to ensure safety and security of the employees and also failed to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of fire in the RMG sector.

**Keywords:** *Readymade Garments (RMG), Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC), Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishment (DIFE).*

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## INTRODUCTION

All manufacturing factories have legal and financial consequences and obligations to maintain a safe working environment for the workers. There are specific Acts, rules, regulations, and laws that have provisions for occupational safety & hazards, industrial accidents, and protection of women and child labor in a risky environment (DIFE, 2018). The Readymade Garments (RMG) factories

of Bangladesh do not have any exceptions. The remittance earned by the RMG sector's product provides a significant contribution in the economic development of Bangladesh. It is one of the main sources of growth in the economy of Bangladesh, and to date, more than 4.4 million are being employed in this sector (BGMEA, 2019). In FY 2017-18, RMG industry in Bangladesh contributes 83.5 % of the country's total export with 11.2 % share of GDP (Hossain, 2021). The branding of Bangladesh is done by the RMG products and recognized as good quality garments products all over the world. The RMG industry is the only export and manufacturing industry in Bangladesh that contributes to different sectors of Bangladesh's economy such as banking and insurance, shipping, contribution to a government fund, engineering sector etc. (Hossain, 2021).

In Bangladesh, there are almost 4620 RMG factories established in different times and among them, around 3500 factories are at present in full operational status (BGMEA, 2019). One of the main weak areas observed in this sector is that the workers are not adequately paid, and their safety aspects are not properly taken care of (Claeson, 2012). The fire incidents in the RMG, factories are happening not only in Bangladesh but in many other countries in the world. As such, the RMG factory workers become more vulnerable to their safety, and the poor workers become the worst sufferer of any fire incident. In Bangladesh, many of the RMG factories do not follow the Bangladesh National Building Codes (BNBC) and other safety aspects of the workers. In many cases, it has been observed that a building has been converted into a garment factory, built for other purposes, and has been used as a garment factory. It has also been found that many of the factories do not have the required permits and legal papers from the relevant office. For quick business establishment, many factories have extended unauthorized levels in the factory building without taking into consideration of total load calculations in the foundation of the building, safe machinery operation, electrical wiring, overloading factor, and the like. It is worth mentioning here that, for short-term business benefits, the factory owners are continuing their operation round the clock, without taking into account the health & safety of the workers.

In the year 2020, around 383 industrial fires occurred in Bangladesh, while 273 of those were in RMG factories (BFSCD). In 2017, there are at least 20 fire incidents that took place in different RMG factories in Dhaka city. Reportedly, most of the fire incidents occurred due to electrical short circuits, boiler explosions, sparks from welding combined with chemical stores nearby, candle fires, faulty machines, chemical fires etc. (Accord, Accord on Fire & Bldg. Safety in Bangladesh, 2018). In

2016, 34 fire incidents took place in different RMG factories in Dhaka city. From 2005 to 2013, a total of 1512 workers were killed due to industrial fire, factory building collapses, boiler blast etc. in RMG sector in Bangladesh (Mobarok, 2021). From 2012- 2018, among 5,178 workers, 1,303 were died/ killed and 3,875 were injured in the fire incident in RGM factories in Bangladesh (Fire and Other Health and Safety Incidents in the Bangladesh Garment Sector, 2018). In spite of contributing tremendous support to the economy and GDP in Bangladesh by the poor workers, still the safety of the workers and safe working environment could not be ensured by the factory management and it remains a gray area in RMG sectors in Bangladesh. For this series of fire incidents, different socio-economic problem like labor unrest, loss of worker's trust in the workplace, loss of confidence in RMG sector, reduction of foreign investment, reduction of skill laborers and similar social issues are encroaching in this industrial sector. Now, the time has come to look into these problems seriously and the management responsibility is to ensure the safe and healthy and hazard free workplace for the workers.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Around 3500 RMG factories are functional in Bangladesh, and almost 4.4 million workers are being employed in this sector. The RMG product is exported for more than 83% of all the products in Bangladesh. However, these RMG industries are passing through a perilous time with repeated fire incidents in recent years. The fire incident at Tazreen Fashions in November 2012, which killed 112 workers, and the Rana Plaza collapse incident, which killed around 1100 workers in 2013, raised the safety management in this sector in a controversial position. These types of incidents result in many workers' injuries and death. The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitting Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), international law enforcing agencies and the end buyers became very concerned regarding the unsafe conditions. They also imposed various embargoes on the RMG sector the industry (Dutta, 2017). These frequent fire incidents created serious socio-economic impacts in society, such as loss of human lives, labor unrest, financial loss, and hindrance of FDI. crisis for the sector, loss of employment and so on.

This study intends to discuss the major fire incidents in RMG sector in Bangladesh and its socio-economic impact in the country and address joint approaches the owners and government are taking to mitigate the issues.

The objective of this paper is to find out the socio-economic impacts of fire incidents in Bangladesh's garment industry and discuss the policies and measures taken by the garment industry together with the government to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of fire. Based on the objective, the research questions are as follows:

- RQ1. What are the socio-economic impacts of fire incidents in the Bangladeshi garments industry?
- RQ2. What policies and practical measures are adopted by industry and the government to mitigate the socio-economic impacts?
- RQ3. Are these policies and measures sufficient to bring success in the mitigation?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The RMG sector plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. This sector created a scope for employment generation, income generation, foreign earning, and of course for the growth of the economy of Bangladesh. The annual revenue of the RMG industries of Bangladesh has increased from \$19 billion to \$34 billion in the last 07 years, by which it is understood that this sector is contributing a huge amount to the economic development of the country (Md. Mamun Habib, 2022). As per the statistics given by BFSCD that in 2020, 383 industrial fires occurred in Bangladesh; while as many as 273 were in RMG units (Amin, RMG, 2021). In 2017, at least 20 major fire incidents took place in different RMG factories in Dhaka city. Reportedly, most fire incidents occurred due to electrical short circuits, boiler explosions, sparks from welding combined with chemical stores nearby, candle fires, faulty machines, chemical fires, etc. (Accord, Accord on Fire & Bldg. Safety in Bangladesh, 2018). In 2016, 34 fire incidents took place in different RMG factories in Dhaka city. From 2005 to 2013, 1512 workers were killed due to building collapses, factory fires, and other incidents in the RMG sector in Bangladesh (Mobarok, 2021). From 2012 to 2018, a total of 5,178 workers, 1,303 were killed, and 3,875 were injured in the fire incident in RGM factories in Bangladesh (Fire and Other Health and Safety

Incidents in the Bangladesh Garment Sector, 2018). The impact of the fire incident in the RMG factories is seriously negative. During a fire incident, there are losses of man and materials. The material cost can be minimized by doing business but the human losses are irrecoverable. If a worker dies in a fire incident, then his/ her whole family is suffering from the loss of a life of an individual. Maybe the family was dependent on his income, so deceased of a person in a fire incident may bring a great disaster to that family member, as he/ she might be an only earning source of a family. As a result, any fire incident is giving a serious negative message to society people, especially to the workers. At the same time, the owner or investor is likely to lose a lot of investment or become bankrupt by a single fire incident in the factory. Moreover, repeated fire incidents are also bringing the image down to the whole world, by which we might lose our potential markets

## **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

### **Methodology**

The Methodology involves using more than one method to gather data, such as primary data from surveys through questionnaires and observations, Interviews of KII (Key Informant Interviews), secondary data from reports, previous research data, and documents. The study has been conducted mainly by Data analysis through primary data collection, secondary sources, observations, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). For using multiple datasets, methods, theories and/or investigators, databases, etc. to answer the research questionnaires. These different methods help to validate data and the integrity of the sources of data. It also helps to enhance the legitimacy and credibility of the findings. The triangulation method is mainly used in Qualitative Research and it is usually applied in quantitative research. The triangulation methodologies are used for mixed methods research. In Triangulation methods are used in different types of research:

- **Qualitative Research:** Conducted through in-depth interview with different groups of stakeholders, such as management, workers, and regulatory.
- **Quantitative Research:** Conducted through experiment and involves researchers in analyzing the data.

- **Mixed Methods Research:** Conducted through a quantitative survey, followed by a few (qualitative) structured interviews.

### **Data Collection**

During the research work and the data collection period, the researcher consulted with the Experts/engineers of DIFE, BFSCDA experts, factory owners, and fire service workers. face-to-face Interviews were also carried out to find out the reasons and impact of fire in the RMG factories and their plan to reduce the impact. The researcher also developed a list of evaluation questions that served as the basis for the evaluation. The questions were used to develop guides and protocols for the key informant interviews, focused group discussions, and document reviews. A few literature and inspection reports and evaluation reports related to fire incidents in RMG factories were studied and reviewed by the researcher. The researcher has also formed a focused group with factory managers at various levels of responsibility, union leaders, victims of fire incidents, and garment workers in general. The focus group consisted of around a dozen of members.

### **Sample Size**

During the data collection period, the researcher consulted with the Experts/engineers of DIFE, BFSCDA experts, Factory owners, and Fire Service workers in different Fire Stations and collected data to analyze the fire hazard to quantify the hazard as per the assigning the values of the variables. Face-to-Face Interviews (Key Informant Interview-KII) with at least Twenty Five (25) Key Informants were also carried out to find out the socio economic impact due to the fire in the RMG factories.

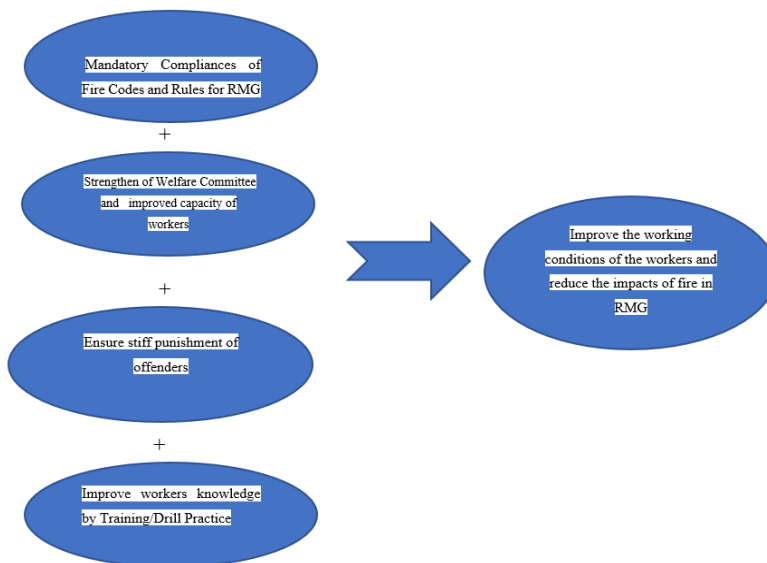
### **Data Analysis**

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the collected data. qualitative data were obtained from the focussed group discussion and interview. The qualitative data were also generated from the literature reviews. Finally, the researcher used qualitative data analysis methods, using triangulation method, synthesize, and summarize the raw data captured from the interview notes.

### **Conceptual Framework (The Theory of Changes)**

After the incident of Rana Plaza in 2013 and following the pressure from the public, international buyers, foreign investors, and international humanitarian

organizations, different initiatives were taken to reduce the fire incidents and improve the health & safety conditions of the workers in the factories. The major initiatives were mandatory compliance with fire codes and regulations, strengthening of trade /labour union participation, training to employees fire authority and experts, introducing reward and punishment, fire drill practices. Based on the objectives of the paper, the conceptual framework has been made as per the following Theory of Change (United States department of labor cooperative agreement, 2018):



Enforcing mandatory compliance with fire codes in RMG factories is essential for protecting workers, enhancing economic stability, and improving the overall socio-economic landscape in Bangladesh. It requires collaboration among factory owners, government agencies, and international stakeholders to ensure effective implementation and monitoring. Improving working conditions not only benefits the workers but also has a positive ripple effect on their families and communities. Healthier, safer workplaces can lead to better economic conditions and quality of life for workers' families. Implement skill development and training programs that focus on both technical skills and soft skills like communication and teamwork. This will empower workers and improve their efficiency. By implementing these strategies, RMG factories can create a more supportive and productive work environment, benefiting both the workers and the organization as a whole. By investing in these strategies, RMG factories can significantly reduce the risk of

fire incidents and ensure a safer working environment for all employees. Ensure that management is actively involved in training and drills, demonstrating a commitment to safety and encouraging a culture of awareness. Regularly review and update fire safety protocols and training materials to keep up with any changes in regulations or factory operations

## **FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH**

### **Socio-Economic Impact of Fire Incident in the RMG Factories in Bangladesh**

The RMG sector plays a significant role for the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. This sector created a scope for employment generation, income generation, exporting in US, EU and Australian apparel market, and of course for the growth of the economy of Bangladesh. The annual revenue of the RMG industries of Bangladesh has increased from \$19 billion to \$34 billion in the last 7 years, that shows this sector is contributing to the economic development of the country (Md. Mamun Habib, 2022). As per the statistics given by BFSCD that in 2020, that 383 industrial fires took place in Bangladesh; while 273 were in RMG units (Amin, RMG, 2021). In 2017, and about 20 major fire incidents took place in different RMG factories in the capital Dhaka city alone. In 2016, about 34 fire incidents took place in different RMG factories in Dhaka city. From 2005 to 2013, 1512 workers were killed due to fire in the factories, building collapses, boiler blast, generator explosion etc in the RMG sector in Bangladesh (Mobarok, 2021). From 2012 to 2018, a total of 5,178 workers, 1,303 were killed, and 3,875 were injured in the fire incident in RGM factories in Bangladesh (Fire and Other Health and Safety Incidents in the Bangladesh Garment Sector, 2019). The impact of the fire incident in the RMG factories is seriously negative. In an interview, a Director expressed his concerns by saying,

*“When a fire incident occurs, the production gets delayed, ultimately we are facing problems in delivering items and by which we are likely to lose some potential buyers which is directly related to our economy.”*

During a fire incident, there are losses of man and materials. The material cost can be recovered later but the human life losses are irrecoverable. If a worker died in a fire incident, then his/ her whole family is suffering from the loss of a life of an individual. Most of the time there is only one bread earner in a family and totally dependent on his/her income. So losing a person in a fire incident

may bring a great disaster to that family. As a result, any fire incident gives a serious negative message to society, especially to the workers. At the same time, the owner or investor is likely to lose a lot of investment or become bankrupt by a single fire incident in the factory. Moreover, repeated fire incidents are also bringing the image down to the whole world, which we might lose our potential markets.

### **Loss of Human Lives**

From the fire incident between 2012 to 2018, a total of 5,178 workers were effected ( Killed 1,303 and 3,875 injured) in the fire incident in RGM factories in Bangladesh (Fire and Other Health and Safety Incidents in the Bangladesh Garment Sector, 2019). It happened due to non-compliances of the safety rules and building codes. The high death toll from these incidents reflects not only substandard buildings but poor emergency procedures, inadequate and blocked fire exits and overcrowded workplaces. Locked exits, poor direction by floor managers and unused fire extinguishers resulted in this tragic outcome. Lack of water and traffic congestion made the work of the Fire Service very slow. Legislative standards are probably quite reasonable, but fire protection is not a matter of simply having equipment, but rather is process based including training, knowledge by plant staff of their responsibilities, and inspection to insure functioning equipment for fighting fires.

### **Labor Unrest**

There is usually labour unrest manifesting in the forms of strikes because of fire incidents in the RMG factories in Bangladesh. The strike by the workers creates an unrest and volatile situation in the country and become unfriendly and unstable environment for investment. It also results in an immediate hindrance to faster economic growth. For any fire incidents, the garments worker's violence took place and that led to pitched battles between police and workers (The Daily Star, 2012). In this situation many of the garments owners closed their factory and stop the production due to labour unrest. As a result, there is a gap created between factory management and the workers and by which uncertainty prevails both in worker's life and in the RMG factory management. It has been observed that due to fire incident in a single factory, other co-located factories are being affected due to labour unrest. Due to the labour unrest and safety of the workers, the major buyer countries like the USA, the EU puts a 'magnified negative impact' on Bangladesh's garment exports (Ahmed, 2012).

### **Economic Loss (Materials, Types of Machinery/Equipment and Buildings)**

Fire incidents in a garments industry result in direct economic losses in terms of building infrastructure, equipment, materials, and valuable documents that are destroyed, which could also lead to other losses. This is because the replacement of such facilities would cost lots of financial resources. As we know the fire incidents happened in the RMG sector maximum in 2012 and 2013, as a result in revenue fall to 6% from 6.3 % in FY 2012 due to weak reduced exports and investments as a result of labor unrest in the country. Hence, it is necessary to improve safety in the RMG sector to sustain its growth and economic growth of the country.

### **Discouragement of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**

The safe and secure environment is a pre-requisite for any FDI. No investor will want to invest where the profit of the investor will be at risk. After any fire incident, that factory is either destroyed by fire or attacked by the victim workers and local populations. As a result, foreign investments will be absolutely discouraged in the absence of OHS ensured environment in RMG factories. The foreign investor will be in a fair in absence of unsafe conditions and labor unrest during any fire incident in the factories.

### **Image Crisis for the Sector**

The fire incidents that took place in the RMG factories of Bangladesh from 2012 to 2019 lot of lives of the workers of RMG industry. In that period, a total of 1,303 were killed, and 3,877 workers were injured in the fire incident in RGM factories in Bangladesh (Fire and Other Health and Safety Incidents in the Bangladesh Garment Sector, 2019). It happened due to non-compliance of the safety rules and building codes. After the incident of Rana Plaza, in May 2013, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh started a five-year program under which signatory companies committed to ensuring health and safety measures, mainly through undertaking factory safety assessments. The accord has inspected around 1700 RMG factories in Bangladesh. The impact it had on the overall export earnings was positive.

### **Loss of Employment (Increasing Unemployment)**

More than 4.4 million workers are employed in all RMG factories in Bangladesh where around 80% workers are women. The majorities of the workers are economically poor and poverty-stricken women folk. Millions of workers are earning their livelihood by working in this sector. But the fire incidents took lot of human lives and creates fear and anxiety among the workers. In this situation, some of them are leaving their jobs or some of them are continuing with lot of fear and anxiety of fire incident or building collapse etc. Though this sector showed the path of a dream of the poor women workers which helped them to change their socio- economic condition. However, this gain could be reversed by fire hazards because a factory destroyed by fire can no longer employ workers, furthermore, other employments linked with the industry directly or indirectly could also be lost. Overall, it would result in increased unemployment which would be bad for Bangladesh's economy and socio-economic development.

### **Socio-economic Impact on Women Workers of Fire Incidents in the RMG Factories**

Many women fear losing their jobs due to factory closures following fire incidents. The RMG sector is a significant source of employment for women, and job loss can lead to economic instability for their families. Fire incidents highlight the lack of safety measures in factories. Women workers often express concern over their health and safety, emphasizing the need for better training and emergency protocols to protect them in case of such incidents. Many women are the primary breadwinners in their families. An incident can have ripple effects on their families' economic conditions, pushing them deeper into poverty if they lose their income. Women often consider the broader community impact, as many rely on the RMG sector for their livelihoods. Fires can affect not just the workers but also their families and local economies, leading to a collective sense of vulnerability. Incidents can also raise awareness among women workers about their rights. Many become more informed about labor laws and begin to demand better conditions, which can empower them in the long run. Overall, the socio-economic impact of fire incidents in RMG factories is multifaceted for women workers, intertwining their personal experiences with broader industry and community dynamics.

## **REMEDIAL MEASURES TO MITIGATE THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS**

### **Ensuring Mandatory Compliances of Fire Codes and Rules for RMG Factories**

All factories need to maintain certain compliances when are constructed or designed. There are certain codes like BNBC codes, and the compliance codes related to the development and standardization of different safety-related issues of the workers. Though the compliances of the factory codes are considered the prime requirement for all global buyers, the small factory owners do not maintain all the compliances due to huge initial investments. The big and renowned brands are more concerned about the compliance issue of their contracted factories. However, after the incident of Rana Plaza in 2013, it has become a global issue to maintain the compliance of the RMG factories for the buyers, especially from the USA and EU countries. After that incident, the Accord and Alliance started their job in BD and submitted their report in regard to the compliance of code in the RMG factories and ensuring maintenance safety standards of the factory.

### **Strengthen of Labor Welfare Committee**

Incidentally, on the very day of the Smart factory fire, participants at a CPD dialogue strongly pleaded for the introduction of labor welfare committee in RMG factories to protect workers and ensure their rights including occupational and workplace safety. A senior labor leader asserts the need for workplace safety to increase productivity. labor welfare committee or associations, as these might be called, are expected not only to strengthen the bargaining powers of RMG factory workers to uphold their dignity but also to help stop frequent incidents of unrest and accidents that have afflicted RMG factories in the country for so long. These effective bodies could also serve as a strong platform for launching a joint drive by both workers and owners to ensure safety measures in factories as well as boost productivity. It is normally demanded from the labor unions that they correct the fire protection shortfalls by bargaining with the factory owners and management. It is expected that the Labor Welfare Committee would be a strong organization and would play a positive role to ensure workplace safety and would work like a bridge and also ensure the demand of the poor workers, by which the fire impact can be reduced.

## **Ensuring Stiff Punishment of Offenders**

There is widespread public demand for punishment for those responsible for fire hazard catastrophes. There has been little punishment for the owners of the factories that in the past have experienced fires where the rules and regulations related to fire control were violated. The failure to punish persons who allowed their factories to operate without proper fire protection simply encourages other factories to skip the expenditures and effort required to protect the factory and the workers from fires. In a highly competitive industry if one company can avoid the cost of fire protection systems then it has an advantage over a firm that does provide fire protection. (2012, Clean Clothes Campaign,). There should be a system of exemplary penalties for the defaulters so that it works as a deterrent to all the owners, stakeholders, and retailers in the apparel sector. The offenders must be prosecuted in a constituted court of law or by a special tribunal backed by an appropriate bill enacted by the parliament. The penalty could also be banning or blacklisting that particular factory and major shareholder(s). While interviewing, one of the Director of an RMG factory told,

*“The government or BGMEA must ensure more severe punitive actions are taken against the defaulters depending on the gravity of the offense committed”.*

In an interview, one of the senior officials of BGMEA expressed his concern by saying,

*“Serious disciplinary actions would be taken against any RMG factories in case of not taking any corrective actions against observations by Accord or Alliance”.*

## **Improving Workers Knowledge through Training/Drill Practice**

It is the responsibility of the management body of the factory to ensure a safe and healthy workplace for the workers. The management needs to be ensured a zero-tolerance culture at all levels through their chain of command. If any individual is found that is engaged in risky behavior after being warned, then he/she must be removed from the factory immediately. Generally, the new employees are being trained upon new hiring. They need to be trained in the workplace potential hazards and likely actions they need to carry out during an emergency. The evaluation of human factors and proving training is a continuous process. If human factors can be understood and evaluated, then the risk with substitute measures could be reduced and occupational safety can be ensured by preventing accidents before they occur. Fire drills should be carried out intervals regularly,

and all workers must be properly trained in different aspects of firefighting. A designated worker/ supervisor must be detailed in carrying out tasks like in case of an electrical fire immediately switching off the main Circuit Breaker. If there is a case of other types of fire, use appropriate fire appliances and guide the workers on what to do in an emergency. The new employee/ worker needs to be trained and a database needs to be maintained to check the status of training. (Mariusz, 2019)

## **ARE THESE MEASURES EFFECTIVE IN MITIGATING THE IMPACTS?**

The Accord and Alliance completed their assignment in 2018 as per the agreement and submitted inspection reports to the concerned agencies with recommendations. The BGMEA and BKMEA, and other related agencies are trying to ensure mandatory compliance with rules and regulations in the garments factories where fire safety issues have been given significant emphasis (Dutta, 2017). After the inspection carried out by the Accord and Alliance, they recommended a specific time bar to rectify the problems that exist in the RMG factories. As per the recommendations, the factory owners are taking different measures to rectify those problems. But the President BGMEA mentioned that all the RMG factories could not fulfill all the observations given by ACCORD and thus sometimes failed to comply with the Accord standard. He also mentioned that those factories have already been expelled and recommended closing their factory operations. (Faruque, 2022).

It appears that despite having time limitations in the Accord report, many of the garment factories could not fully fulfill all the observations, and Bangladesh has yet to comply with all the terms and conditions despite having financial and foreign agencies support including ILO ( (Fairouz, 2017)). This might happen due to a lack of political will, failure of concerned agencies/ departmental coordination or giving not due importance to the incident like Rana Plaza incident of Tazreen fire incident unlikely to not happen in future ( (Fairouz, 2017)). It is also found that virtually, a significant improvement has been observed in the garments factories after the inspection done by the Accord and Alliance. There was another initiative taken by the government to recruit more fire Inspectors under DIFE and BFSCDA within the given stipulated time. So far it is known that the deadline given by the government has been crossed. Moreover, after the Accord inspection is over, there is no such extra initiative taken by DIFE or

BFSCDA to undertake corrective follow-up actions on labor safety and ensure labor rights (Fairouz, 2017).

In this regard, the DG, BFSCDA, was asked about the progress of the recruitment of Inspectors. He mentioned that,

*“BFSCDA only approved with 268 Fire Inspectors. Additional establishment of the Inspectors is in the process of approval in the ministry. After the approval, the recruitment process will start.”*

He also mentioned that,

*“Due to shortage of Inspectors, it was not possible to carry out all follow-up actions of the Accord and Alliance, however, BFSCDA is concerned and taking actions against the defaulters”.*

It is also learnt that DIFE database contains general information like violations of BNBC rules or regulations, fines, sanctioned administered, factory close records or relocation etc. (Fairouz, 2017). Moreover, if the fire incidents are not controlled and labor rights are not ensured then Bangladesh may face serious consequences in the RMG sector business. If the donor's or buyers' terms and conditions are not followed, then it might have either a short-term or long-term effect on RMG firms or a combination of both these effects.

It is also learned that two projecting alliances are working to improve factory safety and ensure labor rights in RMG industries. The president of BGMEA has agreed that there should be a regular safety assessment in the factories by safety assessment professionals and as per the assessment necessary precautionary measures need to be taken. In an interview with President BGMEA, he mentioned that,

*“A robust and sustainable fire safety assessment and management system needs to be developed and implemented with the help of BFSCDA, DIFE, and other stakeholders for all the country's garment factories” (Faruque, 2022).*

The BGMEA, the BKMEA, DIFE and other related stakeholders are trying to ensure mandatory compliance with rules and regulations of the garment factories where fire safety issues have been given due emphasis. It is also understood that if the fire incidents in the RMG factories can be reduced then the loss of human lives, labor unrest, economic loss, discouragement of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), image crisis in this sector, and increasing unemployment etc. can definitely be improved.

## CONCLUSION

The RMG industries play a vital role and provide a significant contribution in the economic development of Bangladesh. Around 4.00 million workers are directly involved in the production job and contributed to developing the country's economy to a great extent. But one of the weakest areas in this sector has been observed is the lack of safety of the workers. The RMG factory workers become more vulnerable for their safety and the poor workers become the worst sufferer from any fire incident. In Bangladesh, many of the RMG factories do not follow the BNBC codes and other safety aspects of the workers. In many cases, a building has been converted to a garment factory, built for other purposes has been used as garment factory. The findings are alarming for the garment industry and the country too. The fire incidents in this sector are creating socio-economic impact in society and in the country as well. For the socio-economic development of Bangladesh this sector has created a scope for employment generation, income generation, foreign earning, and of course for the growth of the economy of Bangladesh. At the same time, frequent fire incidents have created socio economic impact like loss of human lives, labor unrest, economic loss, discouragement of FDI, image crisis, loss of employment etc.

As it is one of the most important export-oriented industries in Bangladesh and a major portion of the export income of our country is earned by the RMG segment, any fire incident will jeopardize the reliability of supply to the customers of the developed world. Too many fire-related incidents will shift the eyes of the clients towards other countries and hence, impede the growth potential as well as important foreign currency earnings of Bangladesh. Strict compliance measures can reduce and prevent fire incidents, but most importantly the honest and positive intention of the management body can reduce the incidents a lot. To safeguard valuable human lives and to protect man and materials, the use of modern technological equipment like an early warning system, auto sprinkler system, auto fire siren, etc. must be used to get the pre-fire warning and post-fire management. The contribution of RMG sector is enormous in the total GDP of our economy, directly and indirectly, millions of people's livelihoods are dependent on this sector, so we all must take special care to ensure a safe and healthy working environment for the poor workers and uphold the image of the country to the international arena.

In the meantime, all the workers must be trained in the fire safety aspects while their intake and the workers are also must be aware of the human errors likely to

be made while working in the factories. The workers must be made more aware of fire safety through proper training and fire drills in a regular interval. As RMG products of Bangladesh has made their remarkable progress all over the world, so by ensuring fire safety and compliance of factory codes and international regulations, we can look forward to controlling the share of the global RMG market.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author would like to express his gratitude to the BFSCDA, BGMEA, DIFE for sharing various fire incident-related data. The author is also grateful to the management of RMG factories for sharing their experiences and views on fire incidents and its socio-economic impact in Bangladesh. He would like to present his appreciation to the Editors, and anonymous NDC E-JOURNAL reviewers for insightful comments and suggestions to improve the manuscript's contents.

## **AUTHOR**

**Air Commodore (Retd) Mridha Md Ekramuzzaman, BPP, ndc, afwc, psc, PhD** was commissioned in Engineering branch in Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) in January 1988. He is an Electrical & Electronics Engineer (EEE) by profession. He attended various professional courses both at home and abroad. He has undergone Air Staff Course at DSCSC, Mirpur and Armed Forces War Course and National Defence Course at NDC, Mirpur. During his service career, he has served in various staff and instructional appointments in BAF. He served as Officer Commanding Airmen Training Institute (ATI, BAF) and Officer Commanding of Maintenance Wing, BAF base Kurmitola. He served in the Air Headquarters as Director of Armament and Weapon, Director of CW&IT and Director of Projects. He also served as Director of Engineering and Material Management at Biman Bangladesh Airlines on deputation. He did M.Phil & Ph.D from BUP in 2017 and 2023 respectively. He has served in United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo as Military Observer (MO) and BAF Air Contingent at Ivory Coast. He retired from BAF on 30 September 2023. He is married to Mahmuda Zaman and happy father of two lovely son. He enjoys music, travelling and playing golf.

E-mail: [ekramzaman8374@gmail.com](mailto:ekramzaman8374@gmail.com)



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## CYBER SECURITY: PROMOTE AWARENESS FOR BANGLADESH ARMY

Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Masudur Rahaman, Signals

National Defence College, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh

*(Received: 04th March 2023; Accepted: 17th July 2023; Published: 22nd December 2024)*

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**Abstract:** Today's cyberspace, computers, laptops, smartphones, and other portable internet-connected devices have transformed the entire world population into a global village, eradicating all physical barriers to communication. Information and communication technology played a dominant role in all these domains. This digital dependency is rising every day. Digital connectivity has, on the one hand, made life easier and on the other hand, introduced a new risk phenomenon where tracking down the perpetrators poses serious challenges to law enforcement agencies. This new group of interconnected people gives scope to manipulate ideas, form opinions, circulate rumours, contest judgments, cause confusion, and obstruct the execution of commands. The dark side of the cyber world or the cyber underworld is expanding in size and speed more than anyone could imagine. Militaries of the world have already started using this cyberspace to gather intelligence, spread propaganda, and recruit soldiers and Bangladesh Army is not an exception. Thus, Bangladesh Army needs progressive efforts to create cyber awareness among all members and develop experts in the arena of cyber security so that it can secure its interests in cyberspace for sustaining in the future. Therefore, the paper is focused on the analysis of the dynamics and trends of recent cyber threats and cyber security strategies of Bangladesh. The recommendations provided in this paper could assist Bangladesh Army to develop effective strategies for combating cyber security and ensuring a safe and secure online environment.

**Keywords:** *Cyberspace, Cyber security, Cybercrime, Cyber underworld, Vulnerabilities, Cyber-attack, Communication technology.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Governments, including the military, became reliant on cyber systems as a result of the growing use of information technology (IT) systems for both personal and professional purposes. Together with the advantages provided by cyberinfrastructure, new risks associated with this area of activity emerged. Nations view cyber security as an essential component of both economic development and national security in order to manage the dangers and difficulties of the cyber domain and take advantage of its benefits. Cyber security encompasses technologies, processes, and practices. The misuse of technology and communication resources has made data vulnerable to loss of confidentiality, integrity, and availability. These are the prime concerns of cyber security. Cyber security, synonymous with information technology security, focuses on protecting data, computers, networks, and users from unauthorized access.

All modern world countries fortified their cyber security as time demands. Budapest passed the Cybercrime Convention, the first international pact addressing crimes perpetrated through the internet and other computer networks. It deals specifically with copyright infringements, computer-related fraud, child pornography, and network security violations. Hungary took this action toward cyber security back in 2001, which demonstrates the widespread concern for cyber security. Developing countries are particularly vulnerable to cybercrime due to inadequate cybersecurity infrastructure, limited resources, and a lack of awareness among the general population. As a result, cybercrime has become a major challenge for these countries<sup>1</sup>.

To maintain harmony with the ever-changing world, the Government of Bangladesh has already published several statutory documents. To prevent abuse of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Infrastructure, the ICT Act 2006 has been circulated which may be pointed as the first such initiative in Bangladesh<sup>2</sup>. Both at the national level and within the Armed Forces, there have been considerable advancements in the creation and application of policies. To date, Bangladesh Army has done some admirable work on general cyber-related concerns including various works on progress. However, these efforts can be made and pursued with the necessary synergy and in a coherent direction. In today's cyber world, Bangladesh Army needs progressive efforts to create cyber

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<sup>1</sup> UNODC. (2015). *The United Nations Global Programme on Cybercrime: An overview* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/cybercrime/global-programme-cybercrime.html>, (Accessed on 22 April 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Anon., October 2018. *Digital Security Act, Dhaka: s.n.*

awareness among all members and develop experts in the arena of cyber security so that it can secure its interests in cyberspace. Militaries around the world have already started using this cyberspace to gather intelligence, spread propaganda, and recruit soldiers.

Bangladesh Army, being the most vital national organization, should take proliferation steps to ensure cyber security at all levels. To ensure cyber security of Bangladesh Army, the key areas that need to be emphasized are awareness raising, education with practical training, implementation, cyber auditing, and research<sup>3</sup>. Hence, it is important to find out the very essentials of cyber security for all members of the Bangladesh Army including soldiers in the context of evolving cyber threats around the world. Considering the threat in cyberspace, this paper will focus on a detailed understanding of the cyber environment and cyber threats perception in cyberspace and suggest the required cyber security efforts needed for Bangladesh Army.

In this paper, an endeavor has been made to discuss the cyber security issues and to promote security awareness from the Bangladesh Army's perspective. Firstly, an overview of the present cyber scenario, cybercrime statistics and cyber security environment are highlighted in short. Secondly, challenges, awareness and threats perception are discussed. Finally, the suggested measures to mitigate cyber threats to address the Bangladesh Army cyber security threats are discussed in terms of global, national, and Bangladesh Army outlook with few recommendations.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT CYBER SCENARIO**

In this era of communication technology, cyber scenario encompasses every dimension of our daily lives. The communication network has reached our offices, banks, schools, and hospitals everywhere. The number of people online is gradually increasing and the internet economy is growing and will continue to grow in a wider perspective. For better assimilation of cyber scenarios, we need a clear understanding of some aspects. This paper intends to address the cyber security awareness issue with the required details only:

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Ahmed Khurshid, (2016), 'National Cyber Strategy: Bangladesh Perspective', Keynote Speech, NDC Seminar, 06 May 2016.

## Cyberspace

Cyberspace is a virtual area created by the links of millions of devices connected to the internet, not a physical location. Cyberspace is described as “the imaginary place where electronic messages exist while they are being sent between computers” in the Oxford Learners Dictionary<sup>4</sup>. Cyberspace is an “amorphous, supposedly “virtual” world created by links between computers, Internet-enabled devices, servers, routers, and other components of the internet’s infrastructure,” according to Encyclopedia Britannica<sup>5</sup>.

### Layers of Cyberspace

Cyberspace contains many interdependent and interconnected networks, IT infrastructures and end-user devices. Starting from the root to the user, it contains different elements. As per the United States Army’s “Cyberspace Operations Concept Capability Plan 2016-2028”, Cyberspace is viewed to have followed three layers (Figure 1):

- **Physical Layer.** The physical layer includes the geographic component and the physical network component. The geographic component is the physical location of elements of the network. The physical network component includes all the hardware and infrastructure (wired, wireless, and optical) that supports the network and the physical connectors (wires, cables, radio frequency, routers, servers, and computers)<sup>6</sup>.
- **Logical Layer.** Technical in nature and made up of the logical connections between network nodes, the logical network component is a part of the logical layer. Any computer network node is a connected device. Computers, PDAs, mobile phones, and other network appliances can all function as nodes. Any device with an IP address is a node on an Internet protocol (IP) network<sup>7</sup>.
- **Social Layer.** The human and cognitive characteristics, as well as the persona and cyber persona components, are included in the social layer. A person’s online identity or persona (such as their email address, computer IP

<sup>4</sup> *Cyberspace: [Online]. Available at [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/cyberspace](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/cyberspace), (Accessed on 11 February 2022).*

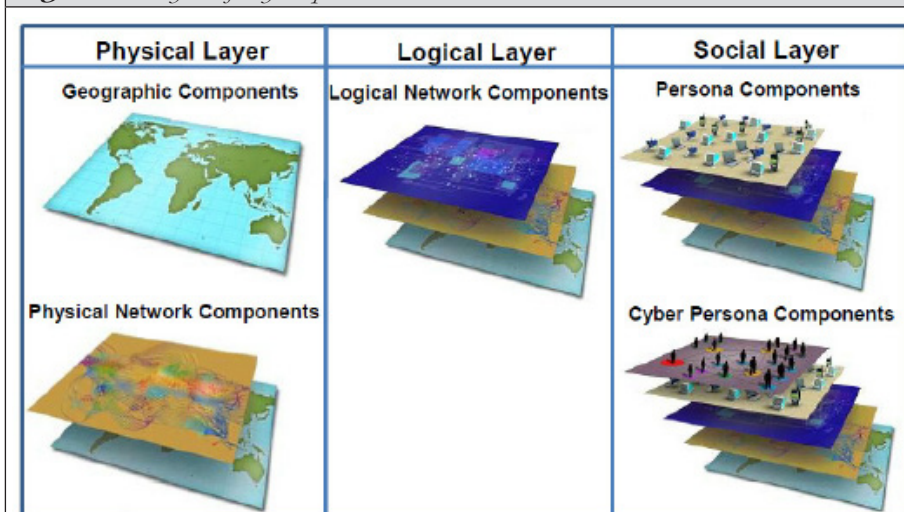
<sup>5</sup> *Cyberspace [Online]. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/cyberspace>, (Accessed on 11 February 2022).*

<sup>6</sup> *“Cyberspace Operations Concept Capability Plan 2016-2028”, The United States Army, 22 February 2010, p-9 [Online], Available at: <http://www.acqnotes.com/Attachments/Cyberspace%20Operations%20Concept%20Capability%20Plan%202016-2028.pdf>, (Accessed on 14 March 2022).*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid, p 9.*

address, mobile phone number, and others) is included in the cyber persona component<sup>8</sup>.

*Figure 1: Layers of Cyberspace*



*Source: Cyberspace Operations Concept Capability Plan 2016-2028 of US Army*

## Cybercrime

Cybercrime denotes the crimes that are committed via internet. According to the Council of Europe (Anon., 2004), “Any criminal offense committed against or with the help of a computer network is identified as cyber-crime”. It exploits the risks & vulnerabilities and consists of various forms of illegal activities conducted on a computer. Cybercrime has a far-reaching impact on society, affecting individuals, businesses, organizations, and governments at all levels. One of the most significant impacts of cybercrime is financial losses. According to a report by Cyber Security Ventures, cybercrime is expected to cause \$10.5 trillion in damages annually by 2025<sup>9</sup>. These losses can result from a variety of cybercrime activities, including theft, fraud, and extortion. Cybercrime can have significant impacts on national security, particularly in the areas of defense, intelligence, and critical infrastructure. Cyber-attacks can disrupt or damage critical infrastructure, such as power grids, transportation systems, and financial institutions. They can also be used to steal sensitive government information or disrupt military operations.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p 9.

<sup>9</sup> Cybersecurity Ventures. (2020). Cybercrime damages to hit \$6 trillion annually by 2021 [Online]. Available at: <https://cybersecurityventures.com/cybercrime-damages-6-trillion-by-2021/> , (Accessed on 26 January 2022)

## **Cyber Security**

Cyber security can be defined as the effort to impose and ensure security to the digital devices connected to internet<sup>10</sup>. Cyber Security can be imposed in individual level, where an individual tries to save his data from theft. It can also be done at the organizational level, where an organization, both big and small, tries to save its data from theft or mishandling. The cyber-criminal world and Hostile Intelligence Services (HIS) look for opportunities to exploit the weaknesses of innocent users. Cyber security includes all aspects of people, processes and technologies (PPT) designed to protect computers, networks, programs, data and their users from attack, damage or unauthorized access. While cyber security is ensured mostly by experts, every individual user must be habituated to good cyber practices to protect themselves and their organization from cyber threats.

Many computers, mobile phones and hand-held devices are connected to the cyberspace of Bangladesh Army through internet. Moreover, at least two computers of almost every army unit and headquarters are also connected to the cyberspace of Bangladesh Army. The cyber security of these computers and mobile phones may be breached at any time if people, processes and technologies of these networks are compromised. Such breach of security, if any, will have implications on the security of the men, material, and information of Bangladesh Army. Dependence on information technology through computers, mobile phones and hand-held devices in almost every sphere of military activities vis-à-vis the threats within cyberspace make the cyber security of Bangladesh Army as significant as its conventional security.

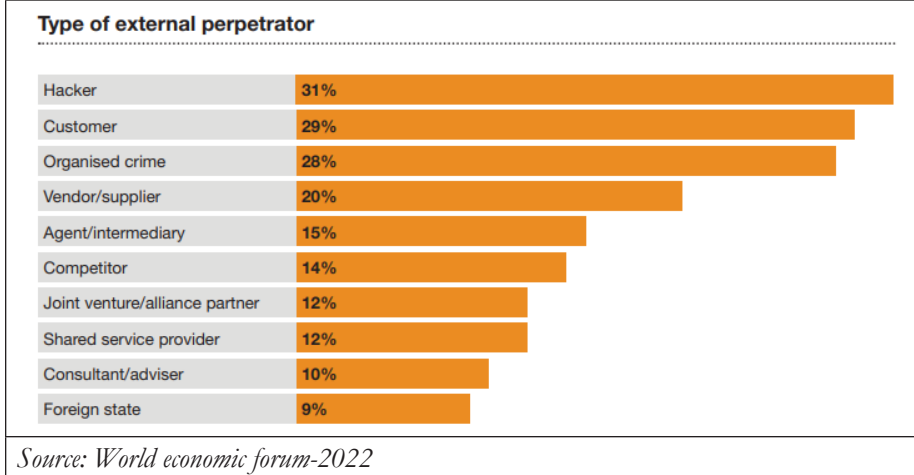
## **Cyberspace and Cybercrime Statistics: Global Perspective**

Before we embark on our journey to the cyber security elements of Bangladesh and, in particular, the Bangladesh Army, let's have a look at some of the global exponential growth of internet users about cybercrime. As of January 2023,

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<sup>10</sup> *Cyber Security [Online]. Available at: <https://www.itgovernance.co.uk/what-is-cybersecurity>, (Accessed on 11 February 2022)*

**Figure 2: Hackers and organized cybercrime groups pose the biggest external threats to organizations**



there were 5.16 billion internet users worldwide, which is 64.4 percent of the global population. Of this total, 4.76 billion, or 59.4 percent of the world’s population, were social media users<sup>11</sup>. The typical user uses the internet for 6 hours and 43 minutes daily. There were 153 million new malware samples from March 2021 to February 2022 (AV-Test), a nearly 5% increase from the previous year which saw 145.8 million<sup>12</sup>. These figures reflect the Internet’s widespread use and the everyday involvement of the global population.

The growth of e-commerce and digital platforms “opens the door to various fraud and other economic crime threats that most organizations are just starting to grasp. According to the poll, one of the major external threats which businesses faces is from organized cybercrime groups and hackers. According to Figure 2, hackers were responsible for 31% of external fraud incidents, while 28% were carried out by organized crime organizations.

**Cyber Security and Cybercrime Environment: Bangladesh Perspective**

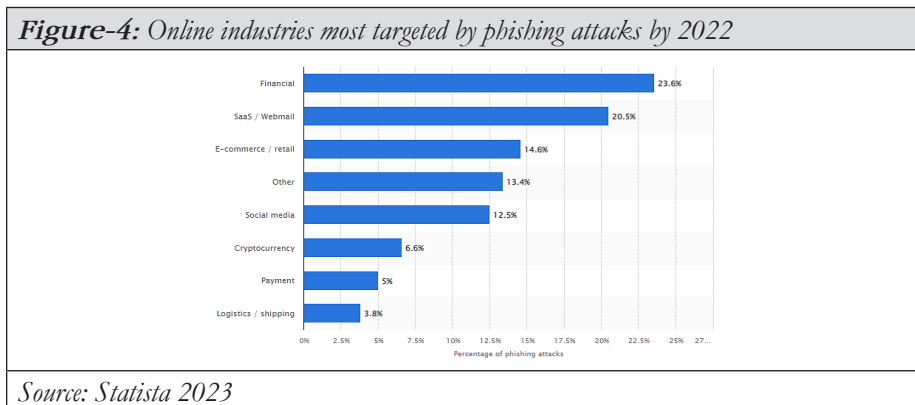
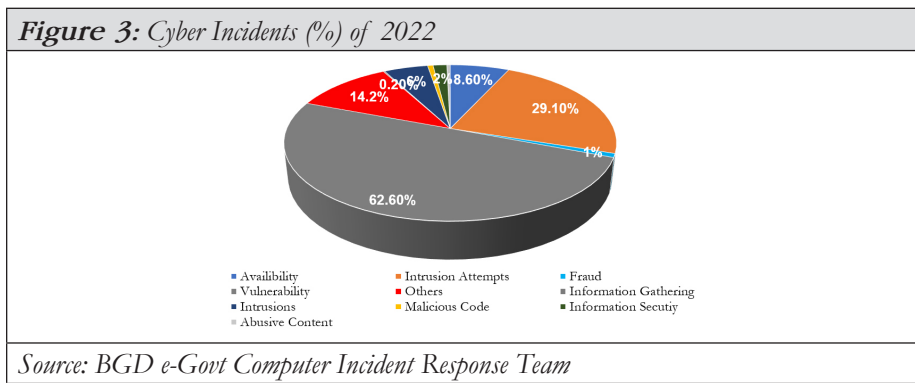
Bangladesh has embraced digital services across all sectors at an unprecedented rate. Very few countries in the world have witnessed such a massive digital

<sup>11</sup> Internet users worldwide [Online]. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/>, (accessed on 15 January 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Cybercrime and Cyber security Statistics [Online]. Available at: <https://www.comparitech.com/vpn/cybersecurity-cyber-crime-statistics-facts-trends/>, (Accessed on 16 March 2022).

orientation of their populace in a short period as Bangladesh<sup>13</sup>. According to the Horizon Scanning Report for Bangladesh Telephone Operators created by the cyber threat intelligence experts of Bangladesh e-Government CIRT (Computer Incident Response Team), consumers of the four telecom operators in the nation have a startling 5,25,820 counts of malware infestations. The first quarter of 2022 has been used to account for these malware infection counts.

Online industries most targeted by phishing attacks by 2022 around the world are explained in Figure 4. The Bangladesh Bank robbery, also known colloquially as the Bangladesh Bank cyber heist, in February 2016 was well known. Along with these, there are several incidents of smaller capacity and magnitude. The CIRT also found that most of the incidents are either information gathering, exploiting the vulnerability of computer systems, or intrusion attempts. The pie chart in Figure 3 illustrates percentage-wise cyber incidents of 2022 in Bangladesh:



<sup>13</sup> Uddin, M. R., December 2017. *The National Cyber Security Strategy of Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis*. *Journal of International Affairs*, 21(1 & 2), pp. 155-157.

## **Cyber Security Policies in Bangladesh**

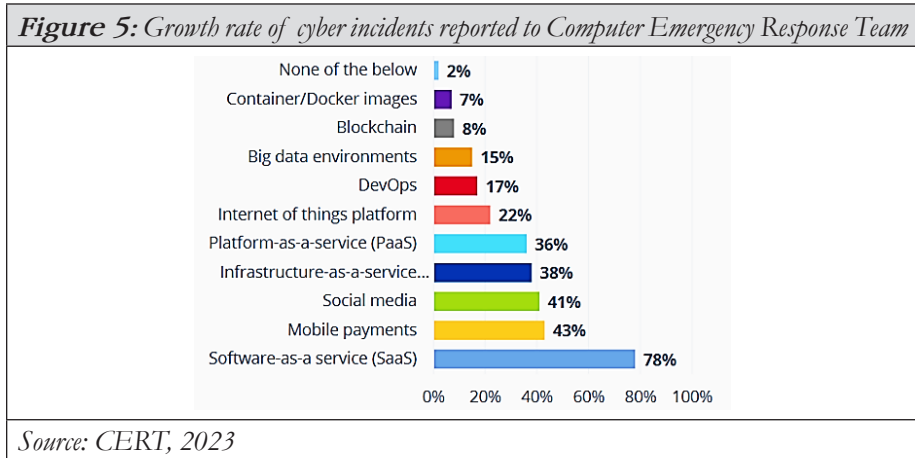
At present, the Bangladesh Government has promulgated several policies and acts concerning Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and cyber security. The first mentionable act is the Telecommunication Act 2001 which was reviewed in 2006. Bangladesh Government declared its first National ICT Policy in 2002 which was reviewed in 2009. However, the first cyber-related document is the National Cyber Strategy – 2014. Bangladesh Government also promulgated its Digital Security Act in 2016. A few important documents related to cyber security are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs. GD e-GOV CIRT receives information regarding cyber security incidents, triage incidents and coordinate response. The incident handling unit provides the following services:

- Vulnerability Assessment
- Penetration Test
- Incident Analysis
- Security Threat Notification
- Incident Coordination
- Computer Forensic
- Mobile Forensic
- Network Forensic
- Provide training to increase cyber security workforce in the government sector
- Introduce and conduct Table Top Exercise
- Arrange to Capture the flag (CTF) to assess the current capability of the workforce.
- Organize various cyber-security events, viz. security conferences, workshops and seminars.

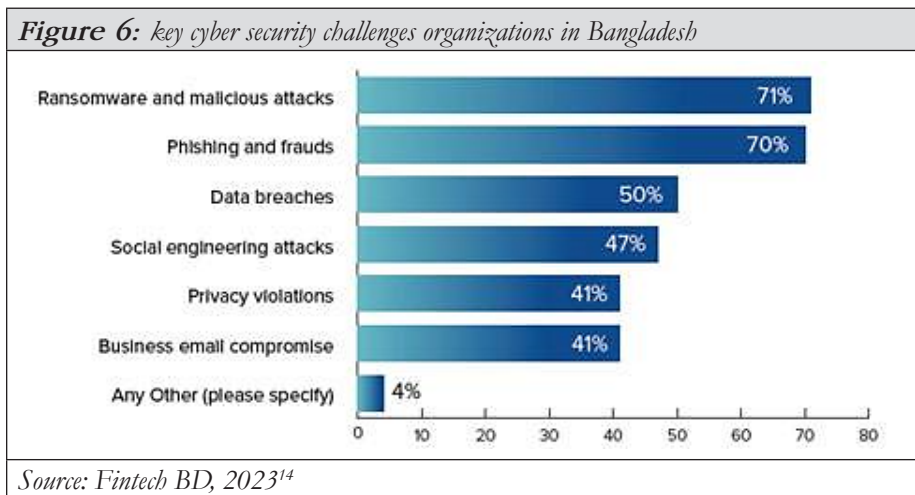
## **National Cyber Security Strategy**

National Cyber Security Strategy- 2014 is a comprehensive document that outlines a framework for prioritizing efforts to manage risks to our critical information infrastructure. It emphasizes the requirement of having public-private and international efforts. It identifies cyber threats for Bangladesh at the strategic level and sets priorities in line with the Global Cyber Security Agenda (GCA).

Most importantly, it recommends cybercrime legislation that is interoperable and applicable globally. Accordingly, Bangladesh has established the National Cyber Security Council and Cyber Incidence Response Team (CIRT) as shown in Figure 5.



Ransomware, phishing, and data breaches, according to survey respondents, are the main cybersecurity challenges enterprises in Bangladesh face (Figure 6).



<sup>14</sup> The Future issues of Cyber security in Bangladesh [Online]. Available at: <https://fintechbd.com/the-future-issues-of-cybersecurity-in-bangladesh/>, (Accessed on 19 September 2022).

## **Digital Security Act – 2016**

Digital Security Act- 2016 is based on National ICT Act 2001 and 2006. However, it is more elaborate and internationally operable as it defines cybercrimes following international standards. It is the most important document for the Bangladesh army in the sense that chapter two, serial 13 of this act provides the legal basis for the Bangladesh army to have its own Cyber Incidence Response Team (CIRT) and Cyber Emergency Response Team (CERT).

## **CHALLENGES AND PROSPECT OF CYBER SECURITY AT NATIONAL LEVEL**

The cyber security concept is relatively new in Bangladesh and has started getting focused on in recent years. However, Bangladesh is yet to be completely prepared to fight against such threats and cyber-related crimes. Bangladesh ranked 35th among 180 nations in the National Cyber Security Index (NCSI) of 2022<sup>15</sup>. It is quite evident that lawmakers are taking the matter of cybercrimes seriously to provide safe and secure cyberspace to the populace. But these laws alone are not enough. The strict implementation of such laws through technical and legal measures is also mandatory.

Another important aspect is to know about the intention and motives behind cybercrimes by forensic experts. It is felt that there is a lack of expertise, such as forensic experts available in this field. Thus, it may hinder the effective investigation and subsequent production of evidence after a crime. Above all, to combat cybercrime, all the concerned agencies need to adopt a coordinated approach by establishing a joint monitoring cell which still does not exist in the country.

## **CYBER SECURITY AWARENESS IN BANGLADESH ARMY**

Awareness consists of one's knowledge, experience, and realization about what is good and what is bad in cyberspace. Cyber security awareness relates to identifying threats, responding to threats, and knowing the consequences of one's negligent behavior in cyberspace. It also encompasses one's ability to renounce oneself from clicking on an alluring link/attachment credentials. Results obtained on the

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<sup>15</sup> NCSI report [Online]. Available at: <https://ncsi.ega.gov.bd/ncsi-index/>, (Accessed on 12 March 2022).

state of awareness of the members of Bangladesh Army regarding cyber security are furnished in the following paragraphs:

- **Awareness of Cyber Security Responsibility.** The responsibility of cyber security lies not only on the experts but also on the individual cyberspace users.
- **Ability to Identify Threats.** Most of the Military personnel do not have knowledge of the common threats and they don't know how to identify phishing, malware, email scam, virus, firewall, etc.
- **Awareness of Cyber Security Good Practices.** Bangladesh Army circulated some cyber security policies and instructions. However, many of the members of Bangladesh Army do not have detailed ideas about the policies and instructions. Many of the members do not follow the policies and instructions even though they are aware of it. Very few of the users understand the policies and follow them. Unfortunately, most users are completely unaware of the policy matters. Though most of the members of Bangladesh Army are aware that they are forbidden from uploading any photos in uniform and photos of military installations on social media, many of the users post photos in uniform regularly, while few of them do it occasionally.

### **Concerns on State of Cyber Security Awareness**

Bangladesh Army members are mostly aware of cyber security but they do not adhere to cyber security norms and they are yet to be serious enough to take individual responsibility on cyber security issues. While it is found that Bangladesh Army members generally know about virus attacks in a computer, they don't know about other methods such as phishing, email scamming, etc. This makes them potential targets of cyber attackers. Users are likely to continue using a compromised device if they do not know what symptoms to look for when their device is infected. These users expose themselves and the Army to potential threats. The clear understanding of the policy seems to be a problem for some of the respondents. But, there are also users who understand the policies but are too negligent to follow them.

## **THREAT PERCEPTION IN THE CYBERSPACE: BANGLADESH ARMY PERSPECTIVE**

Analyzing the present cyber infrastructure of Bangladesh Army and the policies involving the IT domain, we can conclude that Bangladesh Army has already established a fairly secured IT network through BANet for conducting official correspondences. But the user end has lots of loopholes. Despite having relatively secured BANet, most of the members of Bangladesh Army use commercial internet and various social media applications for official and personal correspondence. More so, the casual mindset of the users in dealing with confidential information acts as an impediment to ensuring cyber security.

Bangladesh Army and its outfits, although started to adopt automation and digitization, are yet to be hundred percent reliant on the cyber domain, unlike many Western countries, for all its administration, supply chain management, intelligence, personal/official data, operational plans, weapon system, defense mechanisms or other confidential documents<sup>16</sup>. Hence, the probability of any large-scale cyberattack on Bangladesh Army in the form of Cyber Warfare, targeting to devastate and cripple down the entire organization is quite remote as of the current scenario<sup>17</sup>. Hence, the bulk of the cyber threat still emanates from the hackers and petty cyber criminals who exploit the speed of social media platforms or manipulate casual and ignorant browsing or net-based working of our officers and men of all ranks.

Nevertheless, threats targeted at the organization or any other institutions of Bangladesh Army should not be undermined. The progression of our outfits into an automated domain will simultaneously invite hackers and cyber criminals toward it<sup>18</sup>. CMH management system, all types of demands in our supply chain management, our salary through IBAS ++, personal data or PID, etc. are uploaded, processed, and managed in digital and/or internet-based mode. All other Human Resource Management, Intelligence Analysis as well as Service Delivery aspects are also going to be added to the list sooner or later. Hence, we must scrutinize the threats facing our beloved Army through a holistic approach.

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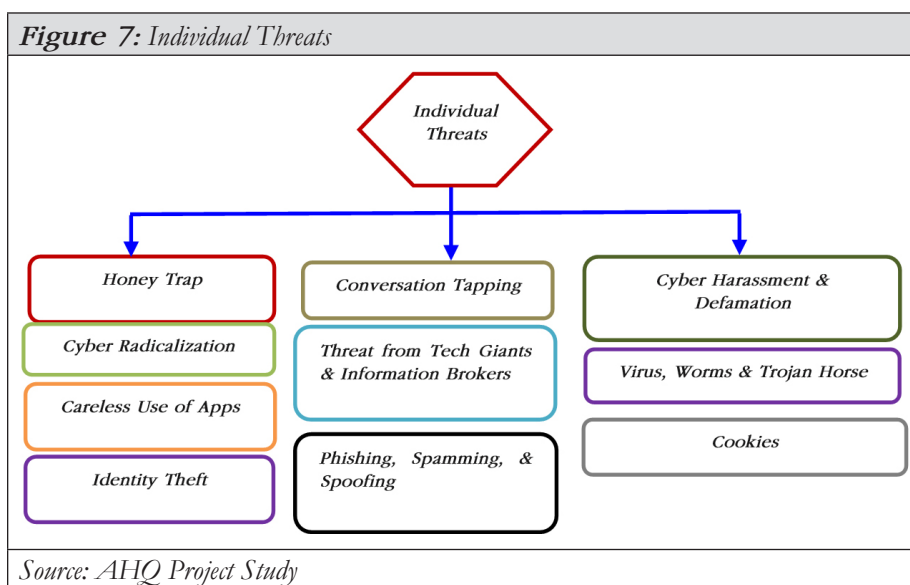
<sup>16</sup> Brigadier General Md Zakir Hossain, (2016), 'Cyber Security in Bangladesh – A Critical Analysis', National Defence College.

<sup>17</sup> Army Headquarters Project Study on 'Cyber Security: Concerns for BD Army and Required Efforts,' by 24 Infantry Division, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Brigadier General Tamjid, 'Information Security in Digital Era, 2019.

### Threats against Individuals of Bangladesh Army

Members of the Bangladesh Army have many concerns about cyberspace. Cybercriminals and the enemy’s cyber intelligence agents may launch many kinds of attacks against an individual. Most notable and probable individual threats considering the present day’s context are covered in subsequent paragraphs (Figure 7).



### Cyber Radicalization

Radicalization by ideological motivation is one of the most prominent individual threats these days for the Bangladesh Army. Easy and cheap access to the internet makes us easy prey. Personal email used by officers; corporate numbers associated with their Bangladesh Army number usually get such emails/ texts. These sorts of incidents destroy individuals and their families and also tarnish the hard-earned image of the Bangladesh Army. Cyber has been the most effective tool for the terrorist groups for propaganda. Bangladesh also experienced a few such cases where the extremist groups used cyberspace for recruitment, training and motivation. It mostly starts by helping the victim during some crisis or by fulfilling his financial or intellectual needs. The serving members of Bangladesh Army and their families are also highly vulnerable to such indoctrination by the terrorist groups.

## **Honey Trap**

Any member of Bangladesh Army responsible to deal with confidential information, if honey trapped, may be forced to disclose the Operational plan, Campaign plan, personality profile of senior-level leadership, etcetera which may be catastrophic both for the individual and Bangladesh Army. Members of Bangladesh Army may also fall into honey traps set by the Hostile Intelligence Services (HIS) in disguise of well-wishers over social networks.

## **Threat Due to Careless Use of Apps**

Careless use of various apps with smart and other electronic gadgets has triggered a massive cyber threat for members of the Bangladesh Army. Decryption at the server end and compromised handset at the user end are two of the ways, these messaging services pose vulnerability and can glean data on sensitive issues Bangladesh Army deals with.

## **Identity Theft**

Identity theft, these days, is one of the most common forms of cyber threat for Bangladesh Army personnel in which personal information is stolen using cyberspace<sup>19</sup>.

## **Conversation Tapping**

Conversation tapping is an age-old yet in-vogue cybercrime against an individual or organization. Any smartphone may be remotely accessed by cybercriminals to control the camera and microphone to tap conversations.

## **Threat from Tech Giants and Information Brokers**

At present, tech giants and information brokers collect millions of users' data for financial gain, which is one of the greatest businesses on earth today. Facebook data scam-2018 attracted global attention when it was fined \$5bn by the US Federal Trade Commission over inappropriate sharing of users' personal information<sup>20</sup>. As discussed earlier, Bangladesh Army members are getting connected to the virtual world through social media faster than ever before and hence threaten vital information.

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<sup>19</sup> Army Headquarters Project Study on 'Cyber Security: Concerns for BD Army and Required Efforts,' by 24 Infantry Division, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Facebook data scam, (2018), [Online]. Available at: <https://techcrunch.com/2020/01/06/facebook-data-misuse-and-voter-manipulation-back-in-the-frame-with-latest-cambridge-analytica-leaks/>, (Accessed on 26 May 2022).

### **Phishing, Spamming, and Spoofing**

Phishing, Spamming, and Spoofing are three self-triggered cyber threats fixed by perpetrators. Bangladesh Army members are very lucrative targets for all three of these threats as almost all members have access to the internet through more than one device.

### **Cyber Harassment and Defamation**

Cyber harassment and defamation imply defamation with the help of computers and the internet. A usually defamatory matter about someone is published on some website. In some cases, emails containing defamatory information may be sent to the victim's friends.

### **Virus, Worms, and Trojan Horse**

Bangladesh Army members generally know about virus attacks on a computer, but they don't know about other methods such as Worms, Trojan Horse, etcetera; this makes them potential targets of cyber attackers. Unfortunately, the lack of precautions and safety measures against them are still missing at our level, making Bangladesh Army members highly susceptible to viruses, worms and Trojan Horse while using the internet<sup>21</sup>.

### **Cookies**

Cookie by itself is not a threat. A cookie is a small piece of information but may contain the user's identity<sup>22</sup>. It is not capable of harming a user's computer and cannot act as a virus or worm. Cookies are created and used to allow the server to store and retrieve state information. However, this small text file may include IP address, username, email address, password, preferred language, and any strings that can be linked to user identity. Therefore, it can track user activities within the site and it poses some threat as members of Bangladesh Army have sketchy knowledge about these cookies..

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<sup>21</sup> Zakir, *Cyber Security in Bangladesh*, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Commodore Rabat Ahmad Awan, 2017 *'Cyber Crime and Prevention – A Way Forward for Bangladesh,' National Defense Course.*

## Organizational Concerns of Bangladesh Army

Bangladesh is one of the top 10 countries which are least secure in cyberspace<sup>23</sup>. Cyber threat actors are continuously trying to tarnish the image of or cause harm to Bangladesh Army. Organizational concerns of the Bangladesh Army are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

- **Cyber Subversion.** Hack activists sponsored by states or vested groups can spread rumours and propaganda via social media to ill-motivate officers/soldiers and create unrest, disloyalty, or even mutiny. Some cyber activists and bloggers are still spreading distorted information to defame Bangladesh Army. Some cyberactivists, with their ill intentions to create hatred against Bangladesh Army, tried to make some photos and videos viral. If not handled properly, cyber subversion might become unmanageable for Bangladesh Army in the future.
- **Cyber Espionage.** Stealing files from computers using cyber espionage tactics or getting pictures of documents/equipment/facilities through Device Trade off by insiders has made the Hostile Intelligence Service (HIS) less reliant on double agents.
- **Cyber Sabotage.** Bangladesh Army network systems can be infiltrated by cyber agents of HIS. Geographical Location Services used in smartphones, notebooks, computers, and other devices by the members of the Bangladesh Army can divulge the location of high-value targets to HIS. This can be exploited by the enemy to send a bomber or a missile to that target. Sabotage on a high-value installation can also take place using cyber weapons; the enemy would stealthily insert malware in any of the computers of that installation to achieve certain interests.
- **Fraud and Money Heist.** The ransomware attack is more common against organizations for financial gains. Cybercriminals can hack the websites of the Bangladesh Army and ask for ransom. The hackers can do it on the websites of Bangladesh Army to defame the Army, pass some message, or simply deny the use of the website.

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<sup>23</sup> Least secure cyberspace [Online]. Available at: <https://www.comparitech.com/blog/vpn-privacy/cybersecurity-by-country/>, (Accessed on 19 December 2022).

## **Real Threats Imposed by the Cyber Underworld Impacting the Bangladesh Army**

Today, the internet is made up of innumerable computing devices, and cyberspace serves as their playing field. Threats evolve as a result of new technologies. Today, almost everybody can perform virtual communication in real-time through a plethora of social media programs, making cyberspace the new “freedom of the press” platform. Cyber attackers employ sophisticated processes and technologies which make them extremely difficult to trace. Threat actors change the scenarios very well. Cyber attackers can be attributed the light of the following discussions:

- **Types of Cyber Attackers.** Cyber attackers are very cunning and innovative people. They use sophisticated algorithms and technologies which make them extremely difficult to identify. They never follow the same process twice and are experts to hide their trails. Different attackers employ different targets, motives, tools, tactics, techniques, and procedures on different occasions. Any military person or device connected to the internet becomes a target.
- **Targets of the Cyber Attackers.** Cyber attackers may target an individual (any member of Bangladesh Army and their family member), a community, or an organic military entity.
- **Tools Commonly Used by the Cyber Attackers.** The most commonly used tools are phishing and inserting malware such as viruses, Trojans, and worms.

### **Technologies Used by the Cyber Attackers**

- **Advanced Persistent Threat (APT).** An advanced persistent threat (APT) is a prolonged and targeted cyber attack in which an intruder gains access to a network and remains undetected for an extended period of time. Threat actors infiltrate networks and deploy APT. APT attacks are initiated to steal data rather than cause damage to the target organization’s network. These APTs remain dormant in the target network to find out the vulnerabilities of the network and send feedback to the originator. It gets activated at the most opportune moment when one or more computers can be breached as per the motive of the originator.
- **Deep Web and Dark Web.** Deep Web refers to Internet content that is not accessible by search engines. The Deep Web resides in internet overlay

ecosystem zones composed of small peer-to-peer networks as well as larger popular networks operated by public organizations<sup>24</sup>. Again, a part of the Deep Web is known as the Dark Web. One study found that 57 percent of dark web content is composed of illicit pornography, finance, drug hubs, weapons trafficking, counterfeit currency, and terrorist communication.

### **Challenges for Bangladesh Army in Cyber Domain**

Bangladesh Army is yet to develop its capabilities in vulnerability/ threat assessment. Members of the Bangladesh Army have many concerns about cyberspace. A survey carried out amongst all ranks of Bangladesh Army, quite distinctly gives out the vulnerabilities and weaknesses prevailing in our IT as well as the cyber domain. The results of the survey, as already displayed, indicate the following challenges of our Army:

- Lack of awareness and casual mindset over a cyber domain.
- Indiscriminate use of wireless-based Access Point (AP).
- Dependency on 3rd party hardware and software vendors.
- Dependency on civilian-owned transmission network.
- Accessibility of portable hard drives/data transfer devices to computers.
- Absence of apex cyber body at the army level.
- Absence of an army-owned communication app.
- Vulnerability of mobile phones.
- Non-adherence to existing IT and social media policy.
- Misconception amongst users.
- Lack of synergy and isolated efforts by various stakeholders.
- Lack of cyber security policy at different levels.
- Absence of structured cyber security training and exercise.

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<sup>24</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Winston, Tracianna, "Scary Monsters: Dark Web and Cryptocurrency Threats to U.S. National Security", Strategy Research Project, United States Army War College, Class of 2018, p – 2.

## **WAYS FORWARD FOR BANGLADESH ARMY**

### **Remedial Measure at Organizational Level**

In this era of information technology, where the cyber underworld is becoming incredibly innovative, Bangladesh Army, like any other organization, is likely to be a target of the cyber underworld and HIS. Bangladesh Army, therefore, needs to have a sophisticated cyber security system in place, and methods to achieve it are:

- **Adherence to Policy.** Bangladesh Army would have a comprehensive cyber security policy enacted which needs strict adherence and practice by all members.
- **Awareness Building.** It is widely believed that most of the cyber security breaches take place due to users' lack of security awareness and careless behaviour. Periodic monitoring by authorities is in vogue. Enhancing cyber security skills and raising cyber security awareness among the members of Bangladesh Army is needed.
- **Cyber Training.** Education on cyber security may be introduced in the training institutions including MIST and BUP to develop cyber experts. A single online portal may also be set up to disseminate materials for educational curricula, ICT literacy courses and cyber security awareness programs.
- **Punitive Measures against Violation.** Punitive measures against the IT Policy, including social media, should be taken. A separate and dedicated regulation in MBML about cybercrime issues may be incorporated.
- **Reduced Dependency on Mobile Phones and Apps.** Blind dependency on the selected device and cross platforms instant messaging apps should be curbed with immediate effect. Instead, reliance on walky-talky and portable radio sets may be increased for passing orders at the unit level, and keeping aloof from using the same during exercises should be practiced.
- **Mitigating the Risk/ Vulnerabilities of Third-Party Vendor.** Despite initiatives by the army in terms of expertise development, it is less likely to overcome the complete dependence on the third party within the foreseeable future. A few plausible measures to mitigate the risk of third-party vendors are appended below:

- **In-House Software Team.** Many military outfits have enrolled civilian experts alongside the uniform personnel. While integrating civilian experts into the military outfits, the factor that matters most alongside their professional expertise is Mutual Trust and surveillance. Bangladesh Army should start Vulnerability Assessment and Penetration Testing (VAPT). This process will help organizations identify and fix security weaknesses before attackers can exploit them.
- **Development of Dedicated Transmission Network.** Bangladesh Army should develop its own Transmission Network. At present, Strategic Transmission Backbone in coordination with the Power Grid Company of Bangladesh (PGCB) and BTCL is in progress which should be pursued by the appropriate authority and completed soon<sup>25</sup>.
- **Develop a Pool of IT-Based Core Personnel.** The IT sector needs practical, hands-on expertise that needs to be perused continuously. Foreseeing the requirement and potential of the individual expertise may be developed.

### **Remedial Measures at Individual Level**

We need to change the perception and mindset of all ranks through motivation, training, awareness raising, and thorough supervision/checking with a view to creating a culture of undertaking the measures that are appended in subsequent paragraphs.

- **Adhere to Social Media Policy.** Ensure restrictions on using various social media.
- **Security of the Device.** Smartphones, laptops, and personal computers should be secured through security-hardening software that prevents malware or other exploits from manipulating the data.
- **Use Multi-factor Authentication.** An individual should use multiple modes of authentication to confirm the end user's identity to maintain the secrecy of the confidential correspondence.
- **End-user License Agreement.** Must read the end-user license agreement when signing up for personal/confidential work which might be subject to manipulation.

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<sup>25</sup> Brigadier General Tamjid, *Information Security in Digital Era*, p 5-10.

- **Public Wi-Fi.** Use of public Wi-Fi for official and/or sensitive personal work must be avoided/ limited.
- **Separate Devices for Official & Personal.** We should make a habit of using separate devices for official & personal purposes.
- **Adoption of Clean Desk Policy.** We should secure all sensitive/confidential information at the end of the workday and when we are expected to be away from the office for an extended period. We should guard against malware. We should make a habit of identifying and ignoring all kinds of phishing, spoofing, and spamming emails and not falling prey to these threats.

## CONCLUSION

Although the word ‘Cyberspace’ is no physical space, it is a network formed by millions of interconnected devices. As cyberspace is expanding, our day-to-day life has become substantially dependent on the internet; so is the situation in our army. The dependability of an entity on IT and the internet increases its risk of cyber-attack. Hence, cyber threats have become a serious threat in recent days for our army. More so, the increased amount of endpoint devices in cyberspace has offered more vulnerabilities to our information system, as just one device is enough for cybercriminals to exploit the data.

Bangladesh Army has several policies for using mobile phones, IT, and social media. Those policies should be consolidated and elaborated into a comprehensive cyber security policy. Internet facilities through which people are availing unlimited utilities of learning, emailing, messaging, voice calling, photo sharing, and viewing each other’s activities are not free. Those service providers preserve, analyze, use, and sell the information of their account holders. Once in the enemy’s hands, this information of the military members can be manipulated to influence the decision-making process of the army.

Cyber-attackers are individuals or groups of people who use technology to commit cybercrime with the intention of stealing sensitive information or personal data and generating profits. They employ sophisticated processes and technology to keep themselves untraceable. For both pro-active and reactive cyber security, it is important to know the cyber attackers, their targets and motives, and the methods and tools they employ. Although threats may be individuals, groups or organizations, they may also be state actors, non-state actors, or state-sponsored actors. Threat actors may be outsiders or insiders as well.

Bangladesh Army must have a sophisticated cyber security system in place to protect its men, material, and information. Education is to be imparted not only to the engineers and managers but also to all cyber users of the Bangladesh Army. It is not enough to have policies to protect us by legislation and regulations concerning cybercrime. In addition, one needs to invest and plan to make cyberspace more secure and build combined capacity amongst us so that we are ready and not caught off guard in the wake of future cyber threats.

The need of the hour is to shake off our mindset in favor of the cyber security needs and for the implementation of the core remedial measures, as deemed appropriate by the concerned authorities under unified direction. When the members of the Army, imbued with military ethos, have a natural inclination towards establishing an Army-wide security culture, the Army and its members will find the desired cyber security environment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this paper, the following are recommended:

- The Cyber Security Policy for Bangladesh Army should be followed by its strict adherence.
- A standard cyber training and exercise module should be provisioned by ARTDOC as part of regular training events in Bangladesh Military Academy, Officers' courses and all other training institutes of Bangladesh Army. Enhancing cyber security skills and raising cyber security awareness among the members of Bangladesh Army.
- Punitive measures against the violation of IT Policy including social media should be taken. A separate and dedicated regulation in MBML regarding cybercrime issues may be incorporated.
- Bangladesh Army should develop its own Transmission Network. At present, Strategic Networking in coordination with PGCB is in progress which should be pursued by the appropriate authority and completed soon.
- A pool of IT-Based Core Personnel should be developed. A single online portal may also be set up to disseminate materials for educational curriculum, ICT literacy courses and cyber security awareness programs.

- Bangladesh Army should start Vulnerability Assessment and Penetration Testing (VAPT). This process will help organizations identify and fix security weaknesses before attackers can exploit them.

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## **AUTHOR**

**Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Masudur Rahaman** was born on 3rd March 1982 in Dhaka. He was commissioned in the corps of Signals with 27th BMA Special Course in June 2007. Besides serving in Division Signal Battalion, he served as staff officer in Headquarter Director General and Forces Intelligence (HQ DGFI) and Headquarter Army Security Unit (HQ ASU). Presently he is serving as Commanding Officer, 22 BGB, Kurigram. Besides his mandatory courses he has attended Advanced Administrator Training on Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) & Wideband Code Division Multiple Access (WCDMA) Interceptor & Active Tracking System in Nederland and Germany, Arms Course in Australia, Digital mobile forensic course in Singapore, Big data analysis & Open Source intelligence (OSINT) training in Malaysia and Officer's Fundamental Intelligence Course in DGFI Training Centre and School. He also participated number of Information Technology related course/seminar in home and abroad. He has served in United Nation Mission in Ivory Coast and Mali.

E-mail: *masud\_05@yahoo.com*



# THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS: AN ACCOUNT OF THE REGION'S DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF THE 1997 PEACE ACCORD

**Mr. Mostakim Bin Motaher**

Associate Professor, Department of International Relations  
Jahangirnagar University

&

**Md. Farhan Intisher Khaled**

Postgraduate Student, Department of International Relations  
Jahangirnagar University

National Defence College, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh

*(Received: 31st January 2024; Accepted: 10th July 2024; Published: 22nd December 2024)*

**Abstract:** The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is diaphanously one of the most significant regions of Bangladesh, dominantly due to the diversity stemming from the multiple ethnic tribes inhabiting the region, namely the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Mro, Khumi and more. The CHT's abundance of natural resources such as oil, gas, and hydropower has rendered the region very prominent to Bangladesh's national economic policies. However, sustainable peace in the CHT has always been fleeting throughout its recorded history. Such aspirations made assimilation under the unitary "Bengali" nationalism very difficult, resulting in a 22-year-long insurgency by the hill tribe insurgents against the Bengali groups and the Bangladesh government. In order to end hostilities and ameliorate relations, the government signed the landmark Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord with the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) in 1997. Despite it being more than two decades since the signing of the peace agreement, full implementation of all the Accord's contents had not been realized at the time of conducting this research. This research pursues an in-depth field exploration of the status of development, growth, prosperity, intergroup relations, and perceptions held by the Pahari people and the Bengalis in the CHT. It also conducts a thorough review of the implementation of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord and examines the most recent status of its implementation.

The study records primary data derived from observing the region's physical conditions and developments as well as the opinions of the inhabitants, both positive and negative, from its field explorations. The study uses secondary sources to justify and supplement the primary data. Finally, after elaborate analysis and discussion, the research formulates and shares policy recommendations for the authorities concerned to expedite the process of the full materialization of the contents of the CHT Peace Accord.

**Keywords:** *Chittagong Hill Tracts; CHT; CHT Peace Accord; Jumma, Pahari; Ethnic group, Chittagong Hill Tribes, Bangladesh.*

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## INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) have been a region of immense strategic and political importance. In fact, even before the genesis of Bangladesh as a nation, the region had been deemed a place of great importance by both the Mughals and the British during their rule, the Pakistanis during their limited reign over the region, and now the People's Republic of Bangladesh. As time moves forward, the importance of the CHT to the nation continues to increase. Hence, to assuage the political and economic needs of the People of the CHT ethnic tribes, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord was signed between the government of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS). The Accord, which consists of 4 parts and a total of 72 articles, envisions a more just and equal representation of the hill tribes of the CHT, ending decades-long hostilities between the government and the CHT insurgents aspiring for regional autonomy. The Peace Accord was indeed ambitious with quite a number of promises. We aim to focus on the current status of implementation of the promises made in the Peace Accord more than two decades later, how much development has truly taken place in the CHT regarding the Accord, and what to do about the Accord's complete developmental manifestation.

The research aims to answer the following questions:

- How much of the CHT Peace Accord has been materialized?
- What policy approaches should Bangladesh undertake to ensure the Accord's absolute materialization?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Hossain (2015) focuses on the root causes behind the unsatisfactory Pahari-Bengali relationship dynamics. The author acknowledges the insufficiencies in the full realization of the CHT Peace accord, which has exacerbated the intergroup tensions in the region. Hossain meticulously discusses the evolution of politics in the CHT, its traditional laws and malignancy affecting harmony in the region. He then carefully crafts several measures that predominantly advocate for the full fruition of the Peace Accord through political and diplomatic means. He advocates for the reformation of the Land Commission and Land Dispute Settlement Act 2001. The author shows support for more government activity in the region, and particularly the deployment of Border Guard Bangladesh and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). However, his paper did not explore a more in-depth public-perception analysis from both the Bengali and Pahari perspectives regarding his recommended approaches.

Salam and Aktar (2014) explain the social connotation behind ethnicity, which is self-perpetuating with common features, values, cultures, and traditions. They touch upon the rate of implementation of the Peace Accord, and its accomplishments. The authors emphasize the role of Civil Society and NGOs to ameliorate conflictual conditions in the CHT and to pacify the ethnic minorities.

Dowlah (2013) approaches the Jumma vs. Bengali issue from a more empathetic perspective. He posits that the conflict between the two groups is understandable due to both having highly contrasting elements. However, the author did not justify intergroup tensions. Dowlah recommends taking note of other countries which have experience in dealing with conflictual dimensions concerning ethnic minorities and secession aspirations, such as Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan. The author advocates for pragmatic solutions, which should benefit both the Pahari people and the Bengali proportionally and eventually improve the intergroup relations.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this research was to comprehend and observe the actual conditions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, particularly after more than two and a half decades of signing the 1997 CHT Peace Accord. The situations under

observation were intergroup relations between the Pahari and the Bengali, the rate of development and growth, public opinions and perceptions, political situations on the grounds, and most specifically, the status of the implementation of the Peace Accord. The study attempted to observe how much of the Accord had been implemented to ensure tribal satisfaction and the efficacy of its implementation on the lives of the Pahari people. Although the research did find ample evidence of government-backed development and progress, the investigation also relayed tribal dissatisfaction due to the absence of the full implementation of the Peace Accord. Building on the collected data, the study imparts what it perceives as policy recommendations to supplement government initiatives in further improving the overall status of the CHT.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The researchers implemented both primary and secondary data, both qualitative and quantitative, in conducting the study. However, the study is dominated by the use of primary data. To collect the data, the authors visited the three CHT districts: Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban, for 7 days from the 1st to the 7th of November 2023. On the field, the researchers interviewed people of different backgrounds and careers, such as government representatives in the region, teachers, healthcare experts, attendants, shopkeepers, farmers, community center trainers, members of the law enforcement agency, and regular Pahari, as well as Bengali people to keep a record of their opinions and viewpoints. All the interviews were conducted in person and on a strict basis of anonymity for the use of such data. Most of the interviews were one-on-one, except for a few, where multiple subjects were interviewed collectively. Upon visiting different locations and witnessing versatile development, the authors kept a record of all that they had observed in the districts.

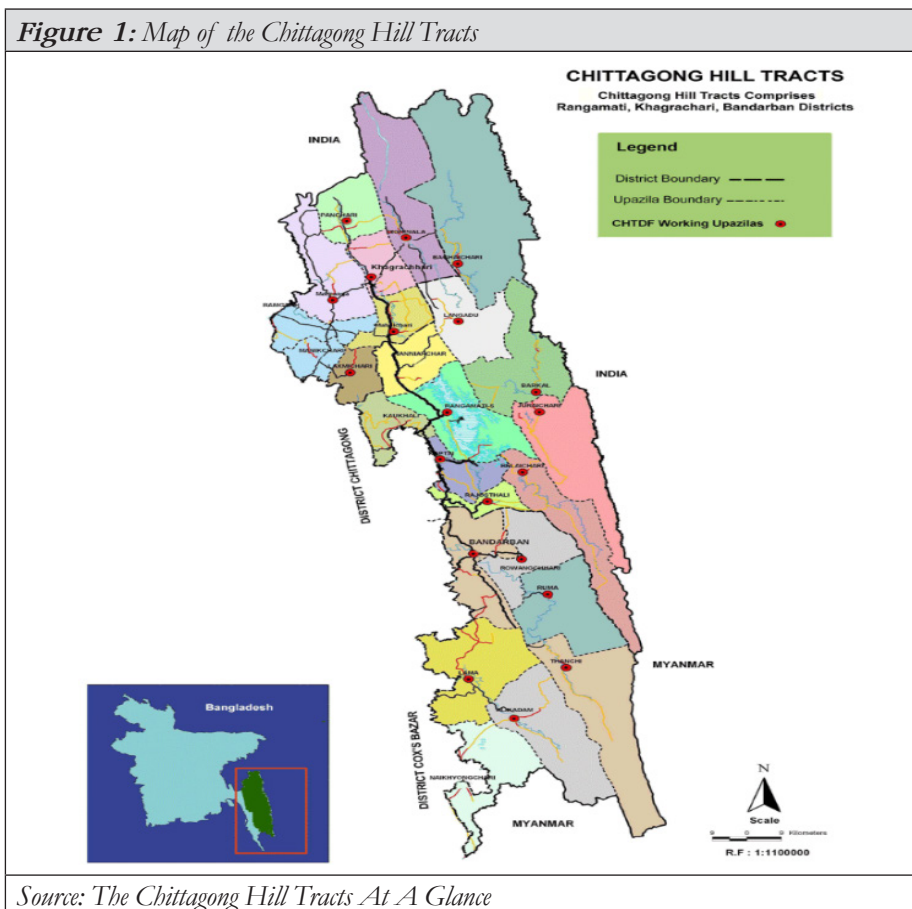
Regarding secondary data, this study implements the Abductive Method under the Desk Study Approach. This method entails “recontextualization” of existing phenomena in consistency with the topic of the study. The materials used to extract secondary data were academic and news articles, opinion editorials, research papers, academic journals, books, policy briefs, government agreements and accords, etc.

After finishing data collection and data processing, it was implemented into the paper as opinions, concerns, and recommendations.

## LOOKING INTO THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS; THE LAND, THE PEOPLE AND THEIR HISTORY

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is situated in the Southeast region of Bangladesh. The region comprises the hill districts: Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachari. The total land area of the CHT is 13,294 square kilometers. These areas are dominantly highlands (UNICEF, 2019).

*Figure 1: Map of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*



*Source: The Chittagong Hill Tracts At A Glance*

The CHT dominantly consists of people who are constitutionally considered the ethnic minorities of Bangladesh. In fact, the Constitution of Bangladesh has collectively mentioned such tribes as “Upajati” in Article 23(ka). The term Upajati was further affirmed in Section 1, Part-B of the CHT Peace Accord.

The people of the CHT call themselves the Jumma People, or High Landers, considering themselves the first to inhabit the CHT (UNPO, 2018). Other terms used to identify the hill tribes include “Pahari”, “Hill People,” or “Jhum People”.

According to the Underrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) the tribal people of the hill districts are Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Mro, Lushai, Khumi, Chak, Khiyang, Bawm, and Pangkhua. Presently, Bengalis make up nearly half of the region's inhabitants. Additionally, a small number of descendants of Ahamiya, Gorkha and Santal live in the region (UNDP, 2018). Although governmental estimates claim that the total number of tribal people in Bangladesh adds up to merely 1.6 million, according to a significant number of indigenous groups and organizations, the number adds up to nearly 2% of the national population, standing at 3 million and above (Faiaz, 2021).

### **The History of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the People**

The history of the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts is shrouded in mystery, and not much was able to be extracted about the hill tribes prior to the British rule, after it had annexed the region and had given the region its namesake “Chittagong Hill Tracts” (Salam and Aktar, 2014). However, according to the information available at the Chittagong Hill Tracts Corner at the Bangabandhu Military Museum, The Kukis are considered to have been the first ethnic tribe who had migrated to the then Bengal region from Mizoram in India and the Chin state in Myanmar in the 14th Century, followed by the Chakmas and the Arakanese from Myanmar in the 16th Century. The CHT became a part of the Mughal empire in 1666. Going forward, the region was declared as a district of Bengal through “Act XXII of 1860” by the British, after gaining hold of the CHT through a military campaign in 1776 (Hasan, 2014; p. 84). The Hill Tracts were given special status through the CHT Regulation Act 1900 by the British and The Government of India Act of 1935 (Adnan, 2007; p. 5), so that no encroachment onto tribal land was ever granted legitimacy. After Partition in 1947, the CHT was integrated into the then newly formed Pakistan.

During Pakistani rule, the CHT retained its special status in the 1956 constitution. And in the proceeding 1962 constitution, the region was recognized as a “Special Tribal Area”, which was subsequently repealed in 1965. After being integrated into Bangladesh after the Liberation War of 1971, the Jumma tribal people, led by Manabendra Narayan Larma (M.N. Larma), fought against integration within the country with a dominant “Bangalee” nationality envisioned by Bangabandhu

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This was inscribed into the first Constitution of Bangladesh as a fundamental principle in Article 6(2) (Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972). Such rigidity against CHT autonomy and Mujib's indiscriminate raids in the CHT against alleged tribal Pakistani conspirators gave birth to the party named Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) in 1973, led by Manabendra Narayan Larma. Larma's younger brother, Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, known as Santu Larma, established the insurgent group "Shanti Bahini" the following year (Dowlah, 2013; p. 775). Not long after, an armed insurgency had begun, which lasted for 22 years throughout multiple regimes after Sheikh Mujib. Notable was the rule of Major General Ziaur Rahman, who had initiated the militarization of the CHT, its infrastructural development, and the transmigration of Bengali people into the region. Then came General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, who was the pioneer behind dividing the CHT into three divisions: Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban. Ershad was the one who had granted a Carte Blanche to the armed forces against the insurgents. This was purportedly to ensure safety of foreign aid workers in the region (Dowlah, 2013; p. 776). His successor, Khaleda Zia, continued dialogue with the PCJSS through the creation of a CHT parliamentary committee. Such efforts were eventually met with the signing of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord with the PCJSS on December 2nd, 1997 under the Sheikh Hasina Administration.

### **The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord (1997)**

A historical moment in igniting CHT-Bengali cooperation, aiming to put an end to the Jumma insurgency, and attempting to meet the political needs and aspirations of the hill people was the signing of the CHT Peace Accord. The Accord was signed on December 2, 1997, between the ruling Awami League government and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), representing the collective hill tribes. Both the BNP and Ershad had denounced the Accord, deeming it "unconstitutional" (Rashiduzzaman, 1998; p. 656).

The Accord consisted of general provisions, provisions regarding the three Hill District Councils, the Regional Council, Rehabilitation for the surrendering Shanti Bahini troops, development, and other matters. More importantly, the Accord strived to set a precedent of mending ties between the ethnic minorities and the dominant Bengali population of Bangladesh by ensuring adequate rights for the Pahari people. One of the key features of the Accord was assigning the CHT as a "Tribal Inherited Area" (Dowlah, 2013; p. 777).

## **THE PRESENT STATE OF THE CHT PEACE ACCORD IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS**

Analyzing the contents of the Peace Accord in retrospect, the research comprehends that much of what had been promised had not been realized even after more than two and a half decades. Perusing the most recent data available on the Accord's accomplishments, it was found that only 25 articles out of the 72 have been realized, with 18 clauses fractionally implemented and 29 clauses have been left completely immaterialized. Standing juxtaposed, an inter-ministerial committee report biasing the government claims that 65 out of the 72 articles have been realized (Khisa, 2023). So, from this statement alone it is diaphanous that, despite being beyond two decades since the signing of the Peace Accord, the progress in its implementation has been perceived as inadequate. Moreover, many local tribal rights organizations and movements have voiced their opinion against the inadequacies and to expedite the Accord's implementation process.

However, it is not only government insufficiencies that are responsible for lax enforcement of the Accord's principles and articles. Walking along the CHT and collecting data, we spoke with law enforcement officers who chose to participate in interviews on the basis of anonymity. According to them, it is not due to a lack of efforts and attempts that law and order have not fully encompassed the hill tracts, but mainly due to objective physical stymies.

According to the officer in question, policing in the hill tracts is very difficult for the government law enforcement agencies. Given that the majority of the villages go much deeper into the thick, dense forests that may be out of the enforcement agencies' grasp. Moreover, there is reluctance among the more conservative group within the tribal people who prefer to trust and implement traditional panchayat-esque tribal ruling systems. These are practices that are more authentic to their own traditions. Most of the hill tribes in question prefer to entrust their tribal kings to enforce tribal laws, reach rulings, and to ensure justice.

From different interviews, our field data suggests that the more conservative groups of the CHT wish to remain untouched and isolated from government initiatives, which they often interpret as interventions. As a result, the limitations discussed above widen due to lack of communication, reciprocity, and substantial intergroup dialogue. The development projects, once realized, bring substantial results aiding the hill communities. However, it is the lack of adequate materialization, lack of fulfillment of ethnic aspirations, and political

autonomy that gives rise to their discontent. Going forward, we will discuss both the successes and failures of governmental actions in the CHT region.

## **DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN THE CHT: DO THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE TRULY BENEFIT?**

The Hill Tracts are characterized by thick, dense jungles of semi-evergreen forestry and mountainous terrains. Such a topography was neither easy to traverse nor sustainable for the hill tribes to commute back and forth from cities within adequate time. This section discusses such development projects, government ambitions, and ambitions of nongovernmental international organizations in the CHT.

During the Pakistan period, the country established the Chandraghona Paper Mills in the CHT region in 1953 along with other mills like rayon, plywood, and timber. These projects were materialized using loans from the World Bank. Such projects, especially the paper mills, were not only of no economic growth for the CHT tribes but ended up displacing the Marma people living there. (Nasreen and Togawa, 2002; p. 103). The same kind of displacement occurred with the creation of the Kaptai Dam in 1960, which displaced nearly 100,000 Chakma people and flooded 40% (54,000 acres) of fringe land for plough agriculture in the CHT. Moreover, only 10-20 ethnic people were employed in the mills during that era, and only for low, menial labor positions (Nasreen and Togawa, 2002; p. 103).

Analyzing in retrospect, such actions were somewhat exploitative of the CHT areas for the benefit of the dominant elites. It is rather obvious that those who were the tribal inhabitants of the lands at that time were not given ample opportunities. And so they chose to segregate.

However, some cases bore positive results for the hill tribes. One of the initial cases was the Soil and Topography Survey in 1964, which determined the classification of usable land for the tribal people. This helped determine the usable land for all-purpose agriculture, which at that time stood at a measly 3.2% of the total region (Nasreen and Togawa, 2002; p. 103). The Pakistan administration aimed to develop the CHT region as a peak tourist destination due to its rich cultural practices, lush forestry, and picturesque landscape. After the genesis of Bangladesh, the independent country focused on the same goal. The tourism sector of the CHT region has also developed manifolds over the years. We shall

discuss significant sectors and the quantity of progress or lack thereof in such sectors.

### **Agriculture**

Despite “Jhum Cultivation” or shifting cultivation being the most culturally significant method of agriculture in the CHT, diversification through implementing plough cultivation has been receiving a boost in recent years. During their rule in the subcontinent, the British were not very fond of Jhum cultivation, deeming it a “waste of valuable time”. However, its cultural significance supersedes all criticism.

Over the years, the Bangladesh government has emphasized and incentivized agricultural progress in the CHT through the CHTDB. To alleviate regional poverty, the Board initiated a project titled “Increase Cotton Production and Poverty Alleviation of Farmers in CHT” in 26 hilly upazilas. Furthermore, the Board had also incentivized another project for growing coffee on 800 farmlands and cashew nuts in 1,200 gardens. This project involved 200 farmer families with the goal to ameliorate their financial status (Dhar, 2023).

Upon visiting the three hill districts, we witnessed the mass production and cultivation of dragon fruits aside from Bananas. While speaking to local farmers, we were educated on the profitability of cultivating dragon fruits, which were in high demand for their high nutrition profiles and novelty in Bangladesh. The farmers generate a handsome revenue from each yield. Additionally, now dragon fruits can be cultivated all the year round, which has further increased the farmers’ interest in growing this fruit.

### **Education**

The education rate in the CHT region has only progressed over the years. The current estimation of the average education rate in the region is 71%. Among that estimation, 75% are Chakma, 25% are Bengali and 45% are from other ethnic/tribal groups (Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, n.d.; 10). In fact, the rights of quotas in education and higher education institutions were given forthright in Section 10 of Part D of the CHT Peace Accord.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) is primarily responsible for the development projects in the hill tracts. Created in 1978 (other sources claim 1976), the CHTDB has ushered in many economic, social,

infrastructural, agricultural, and various other successes including youth and women's empowerment, dissemination of IT education and so forth. The Board has provided preschool education to 120,000 children, brought 1200 youths under the wing of regular education, and provided scholarships to 15,546 students between 2009-2023 (Dhar, 2023).

Regarding higher education, 37 Bangladeshi government medical colleges reserve 30 seats for ethnic minority students (New Age, 2021). Public universities such as Jahangirnagar University provide tribal aspirants with quotas to pursue quality higher education. A total of 325 seats in different higher education institutions in Bangladesh are reserved for ethnic minorities (Salam and Aktar, 2014).

On the field, upon reaching a primary school at Deem Pahar's Runglen Tharba Mro Para in Bandarban, we had a glimpse of the proliferation of mass education in the district. We interviewed an educator of the institution as part of our investigation. She explained, "The living standards of the ethnic people in the CHT region have seen a substantial improvement over the last 20 years. In Thong Pong Para, nearly every child above the age of six attends primary school. The phenomenon of high-achieving students pursuing higher education in city universities, once nearly unimaginable in many ethnic communities two decades ago, has become a reality".

### **Electrification and Digitalization and Modernization Process**

The government of Bangladesh has taken a very proactive approach to digitizing the region by introducing 3G/4G mobile networks, state-of-the-art digital labs, and information centers at union, municipality, and government office levels (Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, n.d., p. 25).

As for progress with electricity, 80% of the hill tracts now receive electricity. Compared to the present, this number was very abysmal before signing the 1997 Accord. The region also experiences solar power electricity generation with 56,414 panels in operation (Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs n.d., p. 20).

Despite the discontent due to the insufficiencies in the Accord's implementation, there are cases of the government's success in the region. For instance, the implementation of high-speed mobile networks and the improvement in the IT sector led to a boom in communal progress in the three hill districts. We had the opportunity to interview a young man in Mohalchhari upazila of Khagrachari, who was praising the government endeavors to disseminate IT sector based

education and technology in the region. According to the young man, although the initiative has not fully penetrated the remote hill districts region yet, this has assisted a good number of young ethnic men in the CHT to create substantial job opportunities via entrepreneurship or seeking corporate job positions. This young man in question operates a computer-based training center. There he trains other young individuals in learning and working with Microsoft Office, internet browsing, and freelancing, a sector in which a lot of young individuals show great interest. The training center generates a monthly revenue of taka 20,000 on average. This stands as a testament to how significant government developmental initiatives have the potential to usher in success.

Additionally, the CHTDB had brought 1,340 youths under a computer training project. The project equipped them with knowledge of social media marketing, search engine optimization, affiliate marketing, graphics designing, animation, IT knowledge, web development and design, and other potent initiatives (Dhar, 2023).

### **Health and Healthcare**

Substantial progress in the health sector has been brought in the Chittagong Hill Tracts by governmental endeavors. Visiting a local community clinic in Rangamati, we were able to observe the quality of the healthcare provided from the center on that specific day. Additionally, we observed the frequency of patient visits and what kind of treatment they were being provided. Upon speaking with a healthcare provider at the clinic, we were provided with the following statement-

“Both Bengali and ethnic communities receive basic healthcare at this clinic, the nearest center in this area. Similar clinics are spread across the CHT region, even in remote hilly areas, which provide free medication. Operating six days a week, our center offers primary treatment for ailments like cough, fever, diarrhea, dysentery, and respiratory complications. The center also serves as a vaccination point. Over the past decade, there’s been a noticeable increase in healthcare awareness, with daily service recipients rising to 15-20, from a previous measly 5-6”.

After the signing of the Peace Accord, significant improvement in the healthcare sector has been witnessed in the region. The level of physical development achieved in healthcare is shown in Table 1.

<i>Table 1: Development in the Healthcare Institutions</i>			
Healthcare Institution (s)	Before the Signing of the 1997 Peace Accord	After the Signing of the 1997 Peace Accord	
District Hospitals (Sadar)	50-seater	100-seater - 150-seater (250-seater ones are underway)	
Upazila Health Complex	20-seater - 30-seater	50-seater	
Community Clinic	Data not available	336	
Nursing College	1	2	
Medical College (Hospital)	None	1	

*Source: Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, n.d., p. 11*

<i>Table-2: Achievements in Health</i>			
Health Indicator	2012	2022	Change in Percentage (%)
Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	75	55	-27%
Maternal Mortality Rate (per 100,000 live births)	312	185	-41%
DPT3 Immunization Coverage (%)	72%	90%	+18%
Measles Immunization Coverage (%)	85%	92%	7%

*Source: Islam, 2023*

Table 2 enumerates the progress Bangladesh has made in ensuring adequate healthcare in the CHT, with a study of the progress between 2012 and 2022. Furthermore, the government has shown tremendous dedication in eradicating Malaria in the hill tracts, and ensuring regular vaccination drives during the peak hour of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the CHTDB has provided anemia prevention and nutritional-related deficiency treatment to 260,000 families in the region (Dhar, 2023). Such endeavors showcase the government’s tremendous goodwill towards developing the healthcare sector in the CHT region.

### Infrastructure Development

Over the years, the CHT has witnessed much progress in its infrastructure. Examples would be the Mohalchhari-Sindukchari-Jaliyapara road in Khagrachari, and the construction of the 37-km Alikadam to Poamuhuri road in Bandarban by the Bangladesh Army. Both of these projects were highly appreciated for making travel concise and easy for the locals. Although the rate of infrastructure development is not on par with the rest of the country, the change is very significant regardless.

The CHTDB has been very successful in the implementation of a number of very notable projects. Table 3 shows below a list of development projects undertaken by the CHTDB in different sectors within the timeline of 2009-2023.

<b>Table 3: Development Projects Undertaken by the CHTDB (2009-2023)</b>		
Projects	Contributions (Numerical)	Hill Districts
Roads	509 km	All 3
Bridges	2204 km	All 3
Culverts	663 km	All 3
Irrigation Drains	29,048m	All 3
Embankments	450m	All 3
School Buildings	27	Rangamati
	64	Khagrachhari
	107	Bandarban
Religious Institutions	230	All 3
Para Centers	4800	All 3
Solar Panels	50,890 houses	All 3
<i>Source: Dhar, 2023</i>		

Interviewing locals in the region, we were made aware of the contentment felt by the locals towards the government for the construction of communication infrastructure such as the Mohalchhari-Sindukchari-Jaliyapara road, and especially the 500-meter-long and 10.2-metre-wide bridge over the Chengi river which has expedited travel for the people of Naniarchar Upazila in Rangamati with the rest of the country. Such ease in travel and communication has fostered a sufficient feeling of contentment for the government by such locals.

## **Tourism and Business**

Speaking to locals in the three hill districts, we learned that there was a very positive response from the local tourism, resort, and restaurant businesses regarding government efforts. They praised the proliferation of the tourism business in the CHT areas, which helps to rake in a very handsome revenue each year. According to the previous Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHA) data, average income from tourism has increased by 75% over the years. According to the most recent data by MoCHA, nearly 200,000 tourists visit the tourist attractions of the CHT each year, which creates jobs for 20,000 locals (Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs n.d.; p 15).

Our primary investigation found significant satisfaction among locals regarding boosts in the tourism sector. The locals appreciate government and army-related projects such as the Police-run Paulwell Cottages and the Bangladesh Army-run Aronnok Resort, which helps to expand the tourism industry in the region even further.

## **Presence of NGOs and INGOs**

Presently, 47 Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) and 8 International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGOs) are present in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. According to government data, the hill tribes have been found to be the majority beneficiaries from these organizations' presence, with their percentage of over 70% (Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, n.d.; p. 23). UNDP, the Asian Development Bank, and UNICEF are the most prominent actors present there. One of the most distinctive features of INGOs in the region is that the 4000 "Para Centers" were established by UNICEF to improve the lives and opportunities for the CHT women and children (UNICEF, 2019).

Upon witnessing the conditions and situations of the region first-hand and in-depth, it has been rendered indisputable that significant progress and developmental evolution have been observed in the CHT.

## **PERSISTENT CONDITIONS WIDENING THE GAP BETWEEN THE CHT TRIBAL PEOPLE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT AND THE BENGALIS**

Despite the progress in the CHT region, the gap between the CHT Pahari people and Non-CHT (Bengali) has not been properly bridged. Almost every publication conducted on the CHT region has expressed unanimously that the Peace Accord of 1997, which was supposed to be the saving grace for bridging the gap between the two, has not yet been fully implemented. There are multiple issues which have not yet been resolved.

Over the years, numerous issues have created significant mistrust between the hill tribes and the government. Innumerable scholarly works surrounding the CHT elaborate the primary reason behind the mass dissatisfaction harbored by the hill tracts people; which is the lax and insufficient implementation of the CHT Peace Accord. That is the ultimate reason behind the rift between the CHT and the government.

There also lies the issue of intergroup contentions between the Pahari people and the Bengalis. Despite a significant record of harmonious coexistence between the groups, intergroup conflict and incidents of hatred have also been recorded over the years. Furthermore, there have been multiple statements made by the conservative sub-divisions of both groups about the coexistence being solely out of convenience.

One of the most significant points of contention between the Paharis and Bengalis is the one attributed to land. The Chittagong Land Dispute Resolution Commission, created in 1998 was targeted to ameliorate disputes related to tribal land. However, that initiative itself produced meager results, mainly due to the purported failure of the government's implementation of rules of business for the Commission (Faiaz, 2021). The Pahari-Bengali violence gained a resurgence in May 2013, when the Hasina Administration approved the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Land Dispute Resolution Commission (Amendment) Act 2013 (Dowlah, 2013).

The following section of the research will elaborate the cruxes of the Pahari vs Bengali/Government disputes and collision with elaboration and essence.

## **LAND ACQUISITION VS LAND GRABBING IN THE CHT; FROM GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES TO LAND GRABBERS**

It is common knowledge for those with expertise in the Chittagong Hill Tracts that both the CHT Regulation Act-1900 and The Government of India Act-1935 played a pivotal role in granting the CHT area's much-needed autonomy and protection of indigenous rights. Even the Pakistan Constitution before Bangladeshi independence granted the region discernible tribal exclusivity. However, further developments surrounding the fate of the region quickly and easily changed the landscape of tribal land ownership amongst its original inhabitants.

There are two ways for CHT land to be distributed. One form is leasing to Government or Private entities willing to conduct development projects or establish industries. In that case, the Divisional Commissioner (DC) scrutinizes the appeal and reaches a verdict. Both the DC office and the local Headman (Para) keep identical maps of the lands.

The other form is the distribution of land amongst the indigenous people according to the common traditional laws of the CHT region. According to such laws, all land is socially owned and distributed equally among all. There can be no purchase of land, or transactions of any kind. The land owned by the people is based on verbal commitments and understanding between the local people and the local Karbaris (Hossain, 2015, p. 21).

To cite institutional provisions, according to the 1997 Peace Accord, the competence over land management and reforms, along with settlement of any disputes relating to land rights were handed over to the capabilities of the CHT Regional Council and Hill District Councils in the 3 Hill Districts: Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban (UNPO, 2018). Article 26(1)(2) of the Accord clearly stipulates that under no circumstances are the lands in the region to be sold, purchased, leased, given as settlement, transferred, or used in any way without the consultation of the Hill Districts Council (CHT Peace Accord, 1997). This sets a very firm stage, bestowing stronger authority to CHT tribes over their lands, which included the fringe lands of Kaptai Lake are to be returned to its original owners.

## **The CHT Land Rights for the Tribes have not been Fully Protected or Realized**

Realistically, the structures envisioned in the Accord have not fully materialized in essence, leading to unsubstantiated land being usurped from the tribes in the region. Such phenomena have led to multiple hate crimes leading to not only violation of the most basic forms of human rights, but the failure to fully realize the “peace” mentioned in the Peace Accord.

Although settlers in the CHT region were officially granted allowance to access the region in 1979, with the amendment of article 34(1) of the CHT Manual, gradual settlement had begun earlier. For instance, in 1959, the percentage of CHT population in their own region was 91%. However, by 1991, the number had decreased to 51%, with the number of settlers increasing to 48% (Nasreen and Togawa, 2002, p. 97-99, 103).

According to a study cited by Hossain (2015, p. 22), approximately 35% of the CHT tribal population had to change their place of residence at a frequency of 1.7.35% of the tribal households have to change their place of residence twice, and 20% of them once. In contrast, the Bengali settlers in the region only had to facilitate residence change 1.5 times.

To cite more recently established data, according to a report by Kapaeng Foundation, a nonprofit indigenous organization, has found that nearly 6,504 acres of tribal land were either fully occupied or under the process of occupation between March and June 2020 (Faiaz, 2021).

Lastly, according to a report published by the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), in 2022 alone, 40 violent incidents occurred regarding “illegal occupation of land, communal and arson attacks, filing of false cases related to land”, and “violence against women by non-CHT settlers and land-grabbers”. At least 448 people were victims in such incidents (Chakma, 2023).

The unjustified overtaking of tribal land is primarily because land based on tribal traditional laws (without proper documentation) is easier to engulf since the lands in question cannot be claimed through proper deeds and documents. And such phenomena are exactly what ill-intentioned groups have taken advantage of in the past and are still taking advantage of now. According to a 2019 report, nearly 22,000 land disputes cases, filed to the Chittagong Land Dispute Resolution Commission since its inception, had not been resolved (Faiaz, 2021). This has allowed the cycle of unjust acquisition of land leading to conflict to persist.

Groups/people labeled “Land Grabbers” tend to overtake tribal lands in the CHT by any means possible. Their ill attempts include lodging false cases against indigenous individuals, threats of violence, fear mongering, hiring hitmen for attacks on landowners among other tactics of intimidation.

The indigenous people are prone to suffering through excessive amounts of violence and injustice, with specific incidents of the filing of fictitious cases against them. Additionally, cases of arson with croplands set on fire, destroying abundant yields and causing excessive financial losses have become perennial (Faiaz, 2021). Such phenomena are not exclusive to the CHT region but are faced by indigenous groups all over Bangladesh.

Although the Regulation Act of 1900 had protected the hill tracts from transmigration from non-CHT nationals, that exclusivity was completely obliterated post-independence with the 1979 Amendment. The data cited above shows how much land has been lost to the transmigration process, which has led to mass dissatisfaction amongst the tribal groups in the region.

## **PERSISTING DISTRUST DUE TO UNFULFILLED PROMISES REGARDING REGIONAL AUTONOMY**

To understand the mindset of the Pahari people, we must keep in mind that these are the people who have witnessed mass atrocities, internal displacement, encroachment upon their own territory, killings, and insurgency, all within a mere few decades. And when aspirations of regional autonomy were finally realized through the Peace Accord, such hopes were soon shattered due to lack of implementation. It would not be unwise to assume that reluctance and withdrawal exist in the more conservative bunch of the hill tribes. This section expands upon the discontent felt by the Jumma people regarding unfulfilled promises of regional autonomy.

### **Autonomy in Regional Policing is Still an Unfulfilled Promise**

A very important point of contention between the Pahari tribes and the government is the presence of an Armed Police Battalion (APBn) instead of a Hill Districts Police Force with the powers vested in the three Hill District Councils by Section 24 (A) of Part-B of the Peace Accord. The same part consists of granting power to the three HDCs with the responsibilities of the “Preservation and Development of Law and Order,” and the “Police (Local)”

respectively, as per Section 33 (a) and 34 (b) respectively (Chakma, 2022, CHT Peace Accord, 1997). Local Policing authority has also not been realized by the HDCs, and further APBn personnel are purported to be transferred to the region (Chakma, 2022).

### **The Regional Council has become an Obsolete Idea**

According to Section 2 of Part-C, the Regional Council Chairman and its members shall be elected indirectly by elected HDC members (CHT Peace Accord, 1997). But no such elections have taken place so far, with the members being government appointees. As a bigger stymie, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh ruled the “CHT Regional Council Act-1998” as unconstitutional and illegal in 2010, rendering what little advisory power over the government the council had to affect legislation related to the CHT region (Dowlah, 2013, p. 778). The Regional Council has been deemed to violate the Articles 1, 27 and 59 of the Bangladesh Constitution, with claims that such a regional organization goes against the primary nature of a unitary government and equal rights before the law by all citizens within Bangladesh’ jurisdiction.

### **Tribal Dissatisfaction due to the Signing of the Peace Accord between the Government and PCJSS**

There is immense dissatisfaction among the tribal people about the Peace Accord itself. The Hasina government chose to sign the Accord with Santu Larma, the Commander of the insurgent group, the Shanti Bahini, representing the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS). This incident sparked outrage among the natives, who did not want Larma’s leadership. The Women’s Federation led by Priti Kumar Chakma, rejected the Accord and the Pahari Chhatra Parishad, both factions of the PCJSS. The latter soon formed the United People’s Democratic Front (UPDF) as defiance against the Accord’s implementation (Dowlah, 2013, p. 778).

These incidents, among others, have engendered an inescapable distaste for cooperation within the CHT tribes with the government. Given that the tribal people witnessed immaterialized promises made by authorities, such unfulfillment only persist over time. Not only has this fostered distaste for further synergy with the central government, but had given rise to defiance against it.

## **WHY THE US VS THEM MINDSET BY THE CHT TRIBES AGAINST BENGALIS STILL PERSISTS**

It is understandable that most of the tribes of the CHT region may not associate themselves with the non-CHT Bengalis since their ethnocentric identity differs greatly from that of the majority population. Mutual distrust between the CHT indigenous tribes and the Bengalis did not emerge out of a vacuum. The CHT tribes initially aspired to join India after the Partition in 1947, showing solidarity by hoisting the Indian flag on the 15th of August that year. This led to critical pessimism to trust the CHT tribes by the then East Pakistanis, as well as Pakistan as a whole (Salam and Aktar, 2014, p. 54).

But it did not end merely with that incident. Even more distrust was felt against the hill tribes when in 1971, the Chakma King, Tridiv Roy, who was a member of Parliament during the Liberation War period, sided with Pakistan, thinking of securing better interest for the hill tribes (Salam and Aktar, 2014, p. 54–55). This incident etched an indelible mark on the Bengali collective consciousness, perceiving the hill tribes as traitors. Even though many indigenous people actively participated in the Liberation War on the Bengalis' side against former West Pakistan.

### **Disparity in Religion, Culture, Education, and Openness has Widened the Gap between CHT Tribes and Bengalis**

Bangladesh, with its dominant Muslim population of over 90%, failed to share any similarities with the CHT tribes which, in 1947, comprised 93% non-Muslims in their region (Salam and Aktar, 2014, p. 54). Although religious disparity between the Pahari people and the Bengali played a pivotal role in the lack of similarities, ethnic identity was the dominant deciding factor that would make or break national unity between the two groups. Ali (2012), referring to the CHT tribes as “Paharis”, states that there has always been some division between the Pahari people and the Bengalis. The two groups practiced different religions and mother tongues. Due to such distinctions between the two groups, the division between the Pahari and the Bengali people only widened being a part of Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh.

Upon primarily gathering data from the field, it became obvious that the much older generation, who were (a) born during, before, or after the Partition, (b) during the Bengali transmigration of the 1970s, or (c) the conflict and of the

1980-90s, shared more conservative views regarding Bengali settlement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The younger and more modern generation born immediately before, during, or after signing the 1997 Peace Accord, has been found to be less conservative and more optimistic about governmental actions and national integration.

Using the data collected from interviewing selected people mentioned in the methodology, the researchers found that education played an independent variable in determining openness to government development initiatives in the hill tracts. And more importantly, it determined the mindset for peaceful coexistence with Bengalis in the region, and the mindset regarding national integration. The reactions to such government endeavors were found to be the dependent variable.

Upon traversing the districts, we observed that the more disconnected areas from the developed villages and the Sadar housed the most conservative tribal people. Such people looked at government presence in the region as unsolicited intervention. In juxtaposition, individuals and groups that had exposure to primary, secondary, and higher education (university), were more inclined towards being comparatively liberal and inclusive. The interviews suggested that the more educated the individual was, the more exposure they acquired about what lies outside of the confines of the CHT, and the more liberal their mindset was towards national integration, acceptance of the government and their projects, and held more positive views of non-Pahari Bengali people.

### **Discontent amongst the Bengali Inhabitants against the Pahari People is also Present**

On the Bengali end of the spectrum, we were made aware of the discontent felt by the Bengali people themselves regarding the political situation in the CHT. While visiting the Kotheen Cheebordan Utsob in the Naniyachar upazila, Rangamati, we met with a Bengali who informed us of the deep discontent felt by the Bengali inhabitants in the district. He explained how the government had incentivised the purchase of land by the Bengalis after the transmigration process began during the Ziaur Rahman administration. However, the conditions began to change as the decades went by. Incidents of land grabbing by the ethnic minorities themselves became an issue. The Bengali individual in question lamented how particular tribal groups would seize land in the hills legally owned by the Bengali people, do away with vegetation, level the ground, and build religious institutions such as temples and pagodas to mark their territory. The tribal people would consider

this as a legal move since land is non-transferable and communally owned in ethnic traditional law. The Bengalis were found to feel both distress and heavy dissatisfaction knowing their legally owned land was being overtaken.

### **Discontent among the Pahari People has led to Insurgent Aspirations by some of the Pahari Tribes**

Perhaps the most boisterous manifestation of the contentious tribal desire for regional autonomy in the CHT during recent times is the emergence of a separatist group called the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF), led by the Bawm minority group, with other groups such as Pankhua, Lusai, Khumi, Mro, and Khiang. The KNF has aspirations of a separate geographical Bawm entity consisting of Nine upazilas of the Rangamati and Bandarban districts based on the “second class treatment” precursor. According to the leader of the KNF, Nathan Bom, who himself was a member of the Parbatya Chatra Parishad, the CHT Accord only caters to the overall needs of the dominant Chakma and Marma groups while completely undermining the growth of other minorities in the hill tracts (Rumi, 2024). Upon visiting the districts, our local guide advised against going deeper within the jungles to avoid any exposure to such groups.

Upon analysis of the aspirations of the group, our deduction elucidated how mistreatment and insufficient growth-fostering by the government can result in an agitated emergence of separatists sprouting out of minority groups. In fact, the language of their demand shares similarities to the ongoing protracted social conflict surrounding the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency in India. Despite an array of developmental evidence in the CHT, not all groups perceive the developments being effective in their favor, especially the minority tribes.

### **Harmonious Coexistence is Possible; Precedence of Exists**

There is a strong precedence of harmonious coexistence between the Pahari and the Bengali. On our way back to Rangamati from Bandarban, we met two young gentlemen who were very good friends and business partners as well. One was an ethnic Pahari individual from Chimbuk Hill, and the other Bengali individual was from Chittagong’s Saktkania. Interviewing them, they expressed their immense satisfaction in working together in business, which has further strengthened their bond. The Pahari individual cultivates fruits and vegetables on the hills, while the Bengali individual sells them at Sitakundu, Chattagram. From where we were standing it was obvious that there was discernible satisfaction between them regarding their mutual collaboration. This can also be witnessed in other parts of

the country, especially in educational institutions where students of both ethnic origin and Bengalis coexist in harmony. Such harmony was particularly witnessed in the residential and educational atmosphere of Jahangirnagar University, the educational institution of which we are a part.

### **What Our Field Data Suggests**

Our own data supports the notion that the discontent persisting within certain groups of the region stems from the absence of the complete implementation of the Accord. This has led to mass distrust by the CHT tribal groups against both the government and the Bengali inhabitants in the hill tracts. The primary reason behind the reluctance of the older generation to engage with the government was due to the desire for a greater sense of autonomy over tribal land and resources. In retrospect, the aspirations of the Jumma people might be interpreted as secessionist by some scholars, most surely that of the KNF. However, none should discount the fact that these hill tribes held the sentiment of being “distinguishable” from the majority Bengali population long before the birth of Bangladesh as an independent nation. Greater India, undivided before the 1947 partition, was extensively diverse, with distinctive regions holding distinctive peoples and identities. However, upon the birth of Bangladesh, and the inclusion of the Chittagong Hill Tracts within its borders, rightly so that the tribal people became the minority within a newly formed nation with a vastly different majority national identity. With the emergence of successive national leaderships and, consequently, different policies of greater integration of the CHT areas to the Bengali nationhood, the original inhabitants perceived such unsolicited cultural assimilation and, to a great extent, infusion as unjustified encroachment upon their land, traditions, and culture. The deployment of the military and paramilitary forces and the consequent Bengali transmigration process since the late 1970s had only fueled that narrative further.

To conclude this section, it became obvious during the research phase that discontent was felt not only by the Pahari people against the Bengali inhabitants, but this phenomenon was vice versa. However, precedence of harmonious coexistence was also observed.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AIMED TO FULLY REALIZE GOVERNMENTAL GOALS AND POLICIES PERTINENT TO THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS**

To fully dissolve any tensions present between the dominant Bengalis and the minority Pahari people and to assuage any grievances held by the latter, which may or may manifest as an insurgent outburst, an empathetic approach may be applicable from the perspective of a common history.

Prior to acquiring the privilege of sovereignty as Bangladeshis, we ourselves, the dominant Bengali people, had felt like outliers under the collective Pakistani identity. It may not be very difficult to empathize with the Pahari people based on the common sentiment of feeling like subordinates.

While addressing the political situations, we must approach resolutions using an empathetic approach, alloyed with pragmatism. Addressing the political dimension of the contentions, we must keep in mind that the question of CHT cessation is completely out of the question. Not only are the lands they live in Bangladeshi, but they themselves are a part of that dominant national identity. We should focus on is the complete materialization of the Peace Accord, to the best extent possible. Although much more is needed to fully materialize every single objective mentioned in the Accord, substantial tangible progress has already been realized, which marks progress and highlights potential for further developments.

And finally, this research puts across policy recommendations deemed to be necessary based on contemporary political and regional developments. They are as below-

The CHT Peace Accord Implementation and Monitoring Committee should be granted stronger authority and substantial rules of business. This will allow the Committee to wield more power regarding holding parties accountable and implementing projects more strongly.

Law enforcement in the region must be kept at a relatively high level, given the recent issues materializing over the activities of the Kuki-Chin National Front in the region. Such instability may bring about a loss of autonomy, severe loss of human life, and indoctrination of the younger generation into terrorist activities. The local law enforcement agencies should synergize their plans and action

pathways with the army and the border guards. For peak efficiency, the district councils in question may be granted the Accord-enshrined law enforcement capabilities to ensure tribal participation and local knowledge against crimes and terrorism. Additionally, the government should continue peace talks with the KNF, as it has already begun through the Peace Establishment Committee (Rumi, 2024).

Deforestation and environmental degradation are major concerns for Pahari inhabitants in the CHT. These conditions strip away the verdant authenticity of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. To address such instances, the government may be advised to conduct proper feasibility studies and field surveys to compute just how much impact or strain developmental projects may bring upon the environment. This way, the government may halt projects which project high chances of bringing objective environmental degradation in the CHT. Not only will such firm initiatives be lauded by international environmental organizations, but they will also appease the Pahari people. The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) may assist the government in this aspect.

The Regional and Hill Districts Council should be granted the powers inscribed as conditions in the CHT Accord. Given that the regional Council has been deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, it may only be allowed supplementary status and be granted the power to empower the three Hill District Councils in general administration, development projects coordination and law and order, as stated in Section 9 (d) of Part-C of the Peace Accord (CHT Peace Accord, 1997). It shall abridge and foster communication between the government and the three HDCs.

The Regional Council should be consulted by the government before and during the creation of any laws related to the CHT as mentioned in Section 13 of Part-C of the Peace Accord (CHT Peace Accord, 1997). The Council then may consult the three Hill District Councils on the matter. If the Regional Council is not redeemed of its constitutional status, the three HDCs shall be directly consulted on policy and law matters.

The Hill Districts should be fully empowered to practice the rights given in Section 34 (b) of Part-B of the Accord to recruit local law enforcement agents (police) from the level of sub-inspector and below. The government may assist the HDCs, if asked, to create the Hill Districts Task Force, as desired by the Councils.

Intergroup dialogue between Bengali and Hill Tribes should be fostered regularly. District and Central-level talks should be fostered. Organizations such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Citizens Committee among others wield enough power to accommodate dialogue and conversation. The government should facilitate regular and specific biannual national-level meetings between CHT representatives and themselves. It should also make sure that proper representation from all existing hill tribes is present at such gatherings. Going further, the government may hold or promote seminars, conventions, and meetings of the aforementioned nature on both local (zila and upazila) and national levels.

Proper representation and quota in government jobs for the ethnic minorities of Bangladesh should be sternly followed. As of July 21st, 2024, The Supreme Court of Bangladesh has allowed 1% government job quota to the ethnic minorities of Bangladesh (The Daily Star, 2024). Such quota for minorities should be strictly maintained, with a balanced proportion of representatives from all hill communities. Regardless of the public perception of quotas for civil service jobs, much-needed protection should be granted to the hill tribes to protect and promote their participation in public service and higher education. Quotas and scholarships for ethnic minorities have been vested in the CHT Accord in Article 10 of Part-D until development equal to the other districts is attained.

The government should consider increasing agricultural investments in the CHT. The CHTDB is already doing so by introducing coffee and nut production in the region (Dhar, 2023). Apart from coffee, cashews and dragon fruits, turmeric is one of the most profitable crops grown predominantly in the CHT region in abundance. The government may invest further into turmeric production, which has astoundingly high domestic and international demand and as a result it became extremely profitable. Bananas, a staple in everyday consumption worldwide, also grow extremely well in the CHT. The GoB may incentivise banana production further.

As stated in Article 9 of Part-D of the Accord, the government should continue boosting and upgrading tourism and other development projects in the CHT while keeping the protection of the environment in mind.

The government should operate in concord with the three Hill Districts to fully implement all the sections in four parts of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord. This will assist in fully materializing all demands made by the CHT Pahari people.

As aforesaid, if the CHT Peace Accord were to be fully implemented, all demands made by the Pahari people should be assuaged. The full realization of the CHT Peace Accord will abridge existing gaps between the Pahari and the Bengali groups, foster connections, create understanding, build communication, and promote peaceful coexistence. Only then can the government deem its initiatives fully successful. These are not mere demands being recently made, these are actual decisions which both parties had reached at one point in time. So, such provisions should be duly materialized.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to observe change in the status of the CHT and the present conditions of its people, with the 1997 Peace Accord as the primary discussion point. The research extracted raw primary data from the hilly CHT region and magnified the realities on the ground. By extensive and synergetic use of both primary and secondary data, we were able to project the thoughts, opinions, concerns, desires, expectations, and objectives of the tribal people of the CHT, to the best of our expertise.

Holding the history of the tribal people at the helm, the paper discussed the evolution of the hill tribes, their driving force, their political movements and where they are now. Following an exploratory approach, the research aimed at observing how much the CHT Peace Accord had impacted life in the hill tract districts and how much of it had been implemented. Upon meeting the locals from both the Pahari and Bengali groups in the region, we were able to experience the culture, political atmosphere, and nature of development in the region. Moreover, we were able to visit specific locations to both view the nature of change and interview relevant locals. Upon observing the perspectives of the Pahari people and bringing Bengalis to the mix, we were able to extract information from the two groups as qualitative data, which seemed to be divergent at times between the factions. However, we had noticed commonalities in the issues of peace, security, and harmonious coexistence. Upon an elaborate analysis of the progress and the shortcomings in the CHT, the paper provided supplementary recommendations for the full materialization of the CHT Peace Accord. Lastly, through this research, we concluded that for the goal of ultimate progress and development to be realized in the CHT, there is a necessity to quench the policy-related thirst felt by the Pahari people and for both the Pahari and the Bengali people to co-inhabit the region harmoniously. We end with the note that there

is absolutely no alternative to the absolute implementation of the Accord in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to ensure sustainable peace and security.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express gratitude to the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, who cooperated in developing this study. We would further convey thankfulness to the people in the region who had assisted the research team with travel and navigation. We accredit and honor the Bangladesh Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs (BCIPA) for facilitating the research in this field. We accredit the Government of Bangladesh, specifically the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHA), and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Fund (CHTDB), for the developments accomplished in the CHT. And lastly, we thank the researchers and academicians who had conducted various studies in the region prior to this study. Their work assisted in consolidating the justifications for this research.

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## AUTHORS

**Mr. Mostakim Bin Motaher** is an Associate Professor of International Relations at Jahangirnagar University, in Bangladesh. He obtained his B.A. and M.A. degrees from the same department where he now teaches. He obtained another Master's degree in Peace and Development Work from Linnaeus University in Sweden. Mr. Motaher is also a Research Associate and Center Coordinator at the Bangladesh Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs, a first-of-its kind research initiative at Jahangirnagar University. His written works have centred on the Rohingya crisis and the Indo-Pacific strategy.

E-mail: *mostakim@juniv.edu*

**Md. Farhan Intisher Khaled** is a Postgraduate Student from the Department of International Relations, Jahangirnagar University. He obtained a B.S.S from the same Department where he now is a Master's Student. Mr. Khaled is also the Assistant Center Coordinator at the Bangladesh Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs (BCIPA) at Jahangirnagar University. His area of work (published and pending) includes the Indo-Pacific Strategy, Blue Economy, Economic Diplomacy and Foreign Direct Investments and Policy Analysis.

E-mail: *intisber@gmail.com*



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