

Research

# Myanmar's Rohingya crisis and regional impact on Bangladesh: A systematic analysis and possible solution based on SAARC

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**Abstract:** SAARC is a political and economic regional organization for south Asian countries to promote social progress, cultural development, economic growth, collective self-reliance among south Asian countries, and mutual trust and appreciation of one another's problems. Unfortunately, proposed objective has not been established yet among south Asian countries. As a result, several conflicts exist among south Asian countries, and their economic condition is not well developed. This research will illustrate Myanmar's Rohingya crisis, which can be a significant factor in creating conflict among south Asian countries in the future. In addition, this research will demonstrate how the Rohingya crisis issue impacts Bangladeshi political and economic conditions. Initially, a consequence of universal conflict and common reasons are discussed, and this study acknowledges the challenges that preventative programmes face. As a result, this study aims to determine the viability of a conflict prevention mechanism in South Asia that alleviates the anxiety of violating the principle of non-intervention to a large amount. Secondly, the cause of conflict between the Myanmar Muslim minority and Rohingya Myanmar is discussed. Then, the impact of the Rohingya crisis on Bangladesh from various perspectives is analyzed, such as political violence, linkages with international terrorist organizations, water security & climate change, Rohingya terrorist group "Harakah al Yakin", and Maritime tension in the EEZ with Myanmar. Finally, a solution is proposed regarding establishing peace among south Asian countries to avoid any external threat like the Rohingya issue. This research has practical value in the modern world to control any regional conflict and protect citizens from external threats.

**Keywords:** Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis, Regional Impact on Bangladesh, SAARC, Conflict in Myanmar, Prevention Mechanism of Conflicts.

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## Introduction

Conflict has its unique place in human existence and occupies a lot of our cognitive space. The research focused on conflicts is an enormous intellectual task. A single word conflict generates much interest among the students and researchers of political science, international relations, international studies, and the more recent discipline, peace and conflict studies. Regarding these disciplines asunder, conflicts attract considerable attention from researchers, organizations, think-tanks, and scholars of different fields, such as history, economics, human rights, management,

sociology, law, and a generic definition may also appeal to sectors like health and education. Conflicts differ in typology, such as social conflict, intrastate conflict, interstate conflict, ethnic conflict, religious conflicts, etc. [1].

A survey by the University of Pennsylvania conducted in 2012 listed more than 60 per cent of the top 100 think-tanks engaged in studying conflicts and issues concerning conflicts. It can be deduced from the survey how much greater attention is paid to conflicts than in other areas of study [2].

Conflicts are an indispensable part of human lives. But not all conflicts mount a challenge to societal peace and human security. Some conflicts are essential for ushering in a positive change in societies. Conflicts are generated from the incompatibilities between individuals, groups, and states [3]. However, not all incompatibilities lead to violence in a community or cause human deaths. An incompatibility exists even between a teacher and a student, which is necessary to generate new knowledge. A more comprehensive definition of human incompatibility may also include the innate ability of a person to not concur with the thoughts and ideas of others: it can be further described as the ability to question and differ with others. This process spawns new ways of thinking and generates new ideas. Conflict within a corporation may occur for the larger good of general workers and their rightful share in the enterprise's prosperity. Numerous examples such as this can be drawn from daily life experiences [4].

There are conflicts whose aim and outcome are only mass murder and devastation of human lives. But some conflicts only cause human misery, suffering, mayhem, the hardship of unimaginable proportion, and deaths and destruction. As in the past, the world grapples with such conflicts where ordinary people succumb to insane violence [5].

Several regions are plagued with conflicts of varying intensity that are mounting a stiff challenge to maintain the peace in the world. South Asia is one of the regions embroiled in various conflicts. This part of the world has seen full-scale interstate wars and some deeply entrenched conflicts of the intrastate character. The internal conflicts have generated a lot of bloodshed, hundreds of thousands of casualties, acute human misery and the concomitant after-effects. Apart from that, other sources threaten regional peace and security: The region is troubled by militancy, terrorism, insurgency, and communal violence, along with sectarian religious clashes [6].

Looking at the historical experiences and current events around the world, conflicts with the propensity for violence are a natural phenomenon in the international system of states. Reasons and objectives vary, but the reality remains immutable that conflicts have rendered humans agonized. With time, conflicts have acquired diversified character. Until World War II, armed conflicts between states were predominant in the international system. Even in the Cold War period, most conflicts occurred between states. But the post-Cold War era is marked by a dramatic decline in the incidence of interstate conflicts and a sharp rise in intrastate conflicts [6].

Until recently, civil wars of the intrastate type attracted more attention, but today the world is witnessing a transformation in how internal conflicts are fought. There are several conflicts today in which the states are not a party. Ethnic conflict is one such conflict in which groups target each other but not the state or state symbols. Although, such conflicts tend to draw the state to one side against the other and are often internationalized, with the involvement of a bordering state on behalf of their ethnic kin. Nevertheless, there are conflicts in which a strict typology is difficult, and those can only be loosely categorized in the intrastate segment. For instance, there are armed conflicts today in which parties only resort to terror tactics but are fighting to establish their own rule. The Myanmar Rohingya issue is one of them [7].

Whatever be the reasons or type of conflicts, the fact is that they result in irrational violence and the killing of innocent people. There have been conflicts for aeons, and so are the efforts to stop or prevent them. But the steps to avoid conflict have not matched up to the intensity of a dispute. In conflicts after clashes, there have been only partial efforts, half-hearted efforts or no effort to prevent the outbreak. That is why conflict prevention has not been very successful till today. But given the predominance of conflicts in human existence, a whole-hearted effort to the scale of a systemized and standardized way of thinking and action is necessary in every part of the world to address disputes or conflicts before they start to wreak havoc on a country's population. The inadequacy of a more localized or regionalized conflict

prevention mechanism is the reason behind several conflicts that could have been prevented before they acquired monstrous forms. Various examples from across the world suggest an acute shortage of indigenous response capacity to signs of local troubles that ultimately unravel uncontrollably [8].

Given the nature of conflicts in the post-Cold War era, scholars, authors, and professionals have flagged the urgency of paying more attention to “Conflict Prevention” rather than only managing conflicts. Lee H. In the Foreword to *Opportunities Missed, Opportunities Seized*, Hamilton argues, “No issue facing the world today deserves our attention more than conflict prevention”. Scholars like Hamilton think that timely intervention in some of the disputes – that eventually escalated into large-scale violence (Bosnia, Rwanda, Somalia, etc.) – could have prevented the enormous human casualties [9].

Conflict prevention has primarily been confined to rhetoric in parts of the world. The idea is yet to acquire importance in world politics. The experience shows that conflict prevention is considered reluctantly, at best, by the international community. This pattern of acceptance can be attributed to the divergence in the understanding across the globe. There is no agreed-upon meaning of the term „Conflict Prevention“, as can be deduced from the available literature on the concept. The idea is going through a transition: it has reached the stage of adolescence, if not maturity. South Asia is no exception in undertaking the task of preventing conflicts [10].

Like, in several other regions across the globe, the approach to preventing conflict has been passive in South Asia. In other words, the idea of conflict prevention is yet to gain significance in the South Asian region. Every member state responds to conflicts only after they escalate to a crisis level and significant violence occurs. The response is akin to crisis management, not crisis prevention. This approach to dealing with conflicts – of both intrastate and interstate natures – needs a paradigmatic shift towards a more active response mechanism, which prioritizes proactive action for dealing with today’s concerns that may become tomorrow’s crises [11].

Given the need to prevent violent conflicts, this research study has explored the feasibility of a regional conflict prevention mechanism, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). These two regional organizations are actively engaged in preventing conflicts in their region by creating an institutional capacity over more than four decades. Both of them enjoy significant success in preventing conflict between states and within the states. In the post-Cold War era, the incidence of conflicts of interstate nature has dramatically declined, and today, we witness more and more conflicts of intrastate nature. The focus of the study, therefore, is mainly on intrastate conflicts. However, it doesn’t gloss over the significance of preventing further escalation of interstate conflicts between the Rohingya Muslim minority and the Myanmar army, which is the only major interstate conflict regionally and globally. This research will attempt to propose solutions to resolve the conflict between Rohingya and Myanmar army to pave the way for adopting a regional conflict prevention mechanism to achieve enduring peace in the region [12].

The study’s rationale is that conflicts, especially those of an intrastate nature with the potential for deadly violence, need to be addressed to prevent mass killings before the outbreak of violence. A regionalized response mechanism needs to be evolved to understand better the local situation that will elicit appropriate policy tools and methods to tackle the signs of trouble to ensure a timely response. Empirical evidence suggests that an inaccurate analysis of a conflict would result in inappropriate policy recommendations, which may cause further escalation of the crisis. A better understanding of conflict, informed by proper research, is essential for undertaking suitable measures for preventing the problem from escalating. For precise analysis, engaging regional bodies or individual practitioners is highly desirable.

### **Research Problem**

This study aims to find solutions to keep conflicts from growing into violent armed conflicts. The study is motivated by the notion that every human being’s moral mission is to defend the lives and dignity of every soul on the globe. People

have been trained and skilled to act only after a disaster has ravaged villages or cities. People work only after hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced from their homes. People act only after a large number of people have been separated from their loved ones. People work only after the tender bodies of millions of children have been tormented by powerful shells, or other millions have been rendered homeless and without food. People act only after a large number of human lives have been lost. People work after many human lives have been forced to live in misery and complete despair, after massive human rights abuses have disgraced humankind by agents of hatred. These are the outcomes when a conflict gets uncontrollable.

Prevention appears to be the keyword at every stage of life. In their daily lives, people hear about prevention: a doctor forbids a patient from eating a particular food if it is the cause of an illness; a mother forbids her child from engaging in a potentially harmful act; a teacher forbids his or her pupil from engaging in any wrongdoing; a father forbids his son or daughter from being in bad company. Of course, everyone is familiar with the adage "prevention is better than cure." People are sensitive to the necessity of prevention in their lives as human beings. That is why this term is repeated so often [13].

The global community banded together to prevent future conflicts, and the concept of war prevention gained traction. Established in June 1919, the League of Nations was an attempt in this direction. However, it failed to avert the world's worst conflict two decades later. In 1945, the community of nations highlighted the need to renew the concept of prevention, and it became one of the United Nations' fundamental pledges (UN) [14].

However, prevention has not developed to the extent that it was envisioned at the UN's creation. States frequently see it as a filthy phrase, associating it with interference in domestic affairs or acts undermining state sovereignty. Actions made to avert violent conflicts go counter to non-intervention, as nations frequently point the finger at the UN or other international players [15].

Nonetheless, this study acknowledges the challenges that preventative programmes face. It is critical to strike a balance when conducting preventive operations not to jeopardize the state's sovereignty. As a result, this study aims to determine the viability of a conflict prevention mechanism in South Asia that alleviates the anxiety of violating the principle of non-intervention to a large amount. External intervention elicits patriotic or jingoistic passion in states, but a joint regional effort might benefit those experiencing internal strife. This technique would also aid in the management of interstate disputes between neighbours.

### **Conflict in Myanmar**

Conflict prevention still seems an alien concept in Myanmar. The political class or the governments do not bother to take cognizance of a problem until that spirals into violent clashes resulting in the loss of precious human lives. There are many examples from the region whereby violence could have been averted had there been swift action from the ruling government [16].

In Myanmar, the ruling government is running a campaign against the Rohingya Muslims to exterminate them from their country. Rohingya are the stateless people in Myanmar's Rakhine province. Myanmar refuses to recognize them as citizens. The ethnic group has been under repression by the government since the 1970s. In the latest crisis, the government has launched an "ethnic cleansing" campaign as per a UN official. Myanmar refrains from recognizing Rohingya as citizens because accepting them as legal citizens will eventually bestow all the constitutional rights and privileges to the ethnic community. The Myanmar government is always sticking to its usual practice of systematically denying the rights to the community [17].

The culture of post-crisis response is deeply embedded in the governance structure of South Asian countries. Several factors hamper the actions of the ruling government. One of the significant factors is the lack of political will of the governments to act in times of crisis. It is almost a common feature in every country in South Asia. Had there been solid

political will against the masses or religious leaders stoking communal violence, several of the violent clashes in the past between different communities could have been averted [18].

### **Human Rights in Myanmar**

The military-dominated authoritarian regime that has held power for the last four decades has been the main culprit behind the mass infringement of human rights in Myanmar.

Christina Fink (2001) details the historical events concerning the oppressive rule of the military government in Myanmar in her book. She contends that the practice of human rights in various areas like political, civil, economic, social and cultural are restricted under the military rule of Myanmar. Those restrictions intensified, particularly the civil and political rights, when the democratically led elections denied the mandate to the ruling military regime. After that, the military junta repudiated the results and refused to allow the democratically elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

Maung Maung Gyi (1983) attributes the importance of Burmese political values in providing socio-political roots to authoritarianism. His book has widely described the traditional Burmese beliefs, political attitudes, myths, orientations and values still prevalent in Burma. He has provided the impetus to deepen the roots of authoritarianism in Burma. Holding the same view, Mya Maung (1999) provides that the policies pursued by the military junta, either in repression or in the field of development, usually reflect those traditions and cultures which are adopted and preserved for a long time. Moreover, Jalal Alamgir (1997) identified that together with the role of tradition and culture, the strategic sources (power, might etc.) also helped the authoritarian regime sustain. Hence, whatever the reason behind the survival of authoritarian regimes in Myanmar, they substantially weaken the prospects for democratization.

Peter Carey (1997) has identified various obstacles preventing the country from democratizing due to two major problematic areas of concern. Udai Bhanu Singh (1999) has emphasized that the suppression of political and civil liberties in good governance has reached a saturation point. And there is an urgency to provide some fundamental changes; otherwise, the political demand for reform could probably be converted into revolution. Problems like drug trafficking, ethnicity, arms trade, forced labour, prostitution, human rights etc., are confronting the nation. While internationally, the economic interest of various countries has restricted them from initiating such steps toward democratization. Hence it seems extremely hard for the state to overcome the military rule and establish democracy.

In this regard for exploring the possibilities to reform Burma, Joshua Kurlantzick (2002) has emphasized the international community's role. He attributes that the countries engaging in different economic activities with Myanmar should either enter into a dialogue or pressure it through sanctions to bring about a process towards democracy. But overall, the state is still ruled by the same repressive authoritarian military regime, which does not respect human rights. Martin Smith (1999) has described insurgency and the politics of ethnicity in his book. He has historically explained the genesis of the ethnic contention, which later turned into a revolution. The study reveals the plight of these insurgent groups regularly subjected to human rights abuse. In the same context Josef Silverstien (1990) explains how Myanmar has become a haven for drug trafficking, illicit-arm trade and logging. The article explains that the compulsion of ethnic groups to survive has led them to engage in illegal practices. It also provides reasons behind the failure of the ethnic groups to join the civil war against the military regime.

Similarly, the plight of refugees is an important issue related to Myanmar. Josef Silversteirf (1992) describes the problem of refugees as the other international issue other than drug trafficking, which relates to Burma. He emphasizes that the issue of Burmese refugees in the neighboring countries is the main root of contention concerning bilateral relations. He has also described the complication of the problem where the refugees do not want to return to their homeland, and the host countries are forcibly pushing them back from their frontiers. The Rohingya are the worst victimized among the various communities fleeing the country. Yunus Ali Sheikh (1998) has highlighted the plight of Rohingya refugees, who belong to the Muslim minority group residing in the western part of the state. The author analyzes that Rohingya

refugees constitute the most significant number of those who are driven out of the country. He has also explained the impact of Rohingya refugees on the host country Bangladesh, particular in the context of bilateral relations and human rights violations.

### **The ASEAN Approach**

Amitav Acharya (2001) has provided an insightful explanation of the role of norms, identity and socialization in establishing the ASEAN community. He describes that the internal problems of the countries in the Southeast Asian region are incredibly different to that of the entire world. And while confronting those problems, they had established the ideological construct of the ASEAN Way in the context of bilateral relations and human rights violations.

Stephen A. Douglas and Sara U. Douglas (1996) have provided the reason~ behind the ASEAN policy of non-intervention. They stressed domestic compulsions like economic degeneration and state security from the internal threats that tend these countries to abandon democratic practices. Also, the factors like the political culture of these countries and the fear of Western domination that had led them to discard human rights practices are dealt with. While examining the various trends in the development of the 'ASEAN Way', Hiro Katsumata (2003) has briefly outlined the reasons behind the strict adherence of ASEAN countries towards the policy of 'ASEAN Way'. She argues that the domestic concern of these countries towards restoring stability and sovereignty is the primary reason for their strict alignment.

Moreover, Michael E. Jones (2004) has stressed the importance of the 'A SEAN Way'. He argues that in a region of extensive diversity and common problems, it is itself an achievement to establish a common policy of the 'ASEAN Way'. And the difficult task is to adhere to it while establishing an ASEAN Community. At the same time, Leszek Buszynski (1997) claimed that the last decade's expansion of ASEAN and its increasing membership would bring immersive challenges to the Association. He contends that the evolving ASEAN will find it difficult to sustain economic growth together with the security perspective.

The 'ASEAN Way' construct based on the principle of non-intervention has been dealt with in his article by Carolina G. Hernandez (1998). She provides that the ASEAN has moved to abandon the principle of non-intervention to open and frank discussion by its members. And this step is taken in the thrust to enhance political cooperation among the member countries. Holding the same view David Capie (2001) stipulated that it is the impact of globalization that these countries are shifting their policy orientation. Also, the modern challenges requiring common initiative induced them to foster cooperation.

Hiro Katsumata (2004) explained the changing ASEAN diplomacy. He analyzes that it owes to the regional problems like Asian Financial Crises, the Haze problem and the increasing human rights violation in the region that it had to revise the policy. He also argued that the diplomatic change in ASEAN tends only in the late 1990s because most of these problems originated in this period only.

The positive aspects of the ASEAN diplomacy are described by C. P. F. Luhulima (2004), who identified that the ASEAN institutional mechanism is working toward establishing human rights and security in the region. He identified this in the Summit Declarations of ASEAN that are paving the way for the path by the instrument of the ASEAN Charter.

### **Binding Principle**

Human Rights, as different from other categories of rights, establish themselves as the essential ingredients for human survival. In this way, they exist as the primary requirements for every human being; hence, they cannot be divorced from their lives (Hayden 2001). Under its efforts and with the support of the International Community, United Nations has already succeeded in erecting the Charter of human rights and thereby promoting them to enforce these fundamental principles (Humphrey 1984).

It depends upon the member countries to enforce the human rights into effect. This reflects the might of wishful countries that ought to enforce them according to their parameters. For most of the countries which are willing to implement the standards of human rights, there is no problem with enforcement. Nevertheless, the countries that encounter economic hassles have their efforts employed to overcome the implementation problem (Woodiwiss 1998: 68).

But the real challenge is provided by regimes unwilling to entertain any degree of freedom and human rights enjoyment. In these cases, the implementation problem is enforced by using various mechanisms. Like the tools of arbitration, conciliation, mediation and mutual understanding are employed to bring the regimes towards human rights enforcement.

It is done because human rights' nature provides them with a special state of binding that cannot be detached from human rights. So they are binding where most countries usually implement the standards at their will, and the rest are either compelled peacefully or with other sorts of an available national or international mechanisms.

Here the question of legality arises when a sovereign country is forced forcibly to implement the human rights by the equivalent country or institution like the United Nations. As per the rules of international governance forcible mechanism employed to suffice the goal of human rights implementation is justified on the humanitarian ground and has the legal sanctity in the international documents explicitly or implicitly (Humphrey 1984). In this way, the concept of human rights has the tenet of binding principle, which provides it special importance in human lives.

### **Contemporary Conflicts and Challenges to Peace in Bangladesh**

The Rohingya emergence in the Arakan on Myanmar's western border has little to do with the crushing of the pro-democracy demonstrations that provoked the flight of so many Burmese dissidents to Thailand in 1988. The Rohingya have been routinely subjected to persecution arising from ethnic due to religious discrimination. In 1998, a quarter-million Rohingya were forced to flee to Bangladesh. Twelve years later, a similar state operation precipitated another mass exodus. Despite an April 1992 agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh to repatriate Muslim refugees, the problem of human rights violations and their consequences in the region continues [19].

The immense demands for forced labour along the northwest frontier also had resulted in a mass exodus of some 260,000 Muslims from the Arakan State into Bangladesh in late 1991. Further, two hundred and fifty thousand Rohingya from Burma were housed in refugee camps in Bangladesh between 1991 and 1995. And hence, a series of movements have been underway where a considerable population has emerged as refugees in Bangladesh [20], [21].

Dealing with the intensity of the problem in Bangladesh after signing an agreement on reparations in 1992 has also convinced the world community to foster the process as early as possible. The United Nations, after passing specific resolutions to overcome the problem, finally appointed the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights to Burma in 1992 to continue investigations and report throughout the 1990s (General Assembly resolution 1992/58 of March 3, 1992, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)). In 1995, an additional special representative of the UN Secretary-General was also appointed to try and put forward international concerns by more subtle means. And since then, repatriation has been underway to bring the problem under control (General Assembly resolution 49/197 of December 23, 1994 [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)) [22].

But, as a step forward, Bangladesh had mishandled the problem and used 'force' to throw back the refugees to Burma. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Prof. Sadako Ogata, appealed to the government to take all necessary measures to halt the coerced return of Rohingya refugees to Burma (UNHCR Global Appeal 1995: An Overview, [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)). But the government countered the argument by denying any use of force in repatriation [23].

But the international community is not blind to watching the event; as Fakhruddin Ahmed, a former Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary, said, "The whole thing has been mishandled." This is the first time Bangladesh has alienated itself from the international community. He said that if the refugees are going voluntarily (as noted by the government), why does the government deny access to the UNHCR? Thus the whole problem has entered into the gambit of politics, and

the problem of refugees will persist until there is a military junta in Burma (Amnesty International Report AMR 13/07/97, September 1997) [24].

The refugee problem of Burma does have profound implications that it has brought to the region of South Asia and Southeast Asia. Although there were some degrees of concern for the country bordering Burma, it is a severe problem for Thailand and Bangladesh. The two countries that were the destination of many refugees had socioeconomic considerations. The presence of refugees in abundance had brought severe setbacks to the economy of the particular region where they reside. Increased consumption of resources had brought the economy into chaos [25].

Unrest has also paved the way for crimes in society as an influx of various discriminated nationalities. Nevertheless, if not overcome by the time, the refugee problem could even bring serious threats. The increased drug trade, trafficking, AIDS and terrorism are a few but hazardous issues that, by the time, could get momentum by these refugees, who are denied their rights to existence. Hence, Burma is still on the verge of dangers brought by the gravity of the problems. As a neighboring country, India shall have deep apprehensions about the immense rise in refugees across its frontiers. Maybe Bangladesh could inflict dangers in various ways as a neighboring country or its northeastern states [26].

Firstly, India has an illegal migrant population crossed over one core that entered the mainland and created extra burdens on the economy and society. These are Bangladeshi migrants, and it is out of doubt that most of them could be Rohingya refugees, also called Chakma refugees. Since the saturation point of entertaining migrants has been crossed, it cannot be possible for India to allow any more of them. Secondly, the disturbed area of Northeast States has its complex problems. And any such migration could only incite it further. Hence refugee problem is posing a major threat to India's peace and development, particularly in the Northeast, which is seen as a possible gateway to ASEAN [27].

In its most recent graphical slide show, the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) expressed a few warnings and security concerns for Bangladesh [28]:

- Political violence and stability.
- Increasing pressure from the domestic religious militant group.
- Rise in youth and female radicalization.
- Implications of linkages with international terrorist organizations.
- Communal tension and violence within ethnic/religious minorities.
- Emergence and expansion of Rohingya terrorist group "Harakah al Yakin".
- Threats from water security & climate change.
- New Maritime tension in the EEZ with Myanmar.

These main security concerns can potentially exacerbate political unrest and threaten domestic peace. Bangladesh's administration is under enormous strain to preserve internal calm due to the influx of refugees from Myanmar's Rakhine State and rising religious extremism. Furthermore, the government's systematic targeting of political opponents and execution of religious leaders has harmed the legitimacy of governing institutions and public trust in the criminal justice system. The government must act quickly to prevent the deteriorating law and order situation from spiraling out of control. If the current pattern continues, there is concern that religious and political violence may escalate in the future years [29].

According to the Crisis Group study, the Awami League government must take immediate action to de-escalate the growing tensions in Bangladesh. The first and most important step the administration should take is to cease using police and other institutions to attack political opponents. The report also recommends taking some immediate steps, including accommodating political opposition, restoring political stability, and ensuring internal security; withdrawing cases against human rights activists, journalists, and other civil society activists; guaranteeing due process and restoring the criminal justice system; and pushing for a broader political reform agenda [30].

Other nations' experiences suggest that a deteriorating internal political situation and declining social security lead to a country's descent into violence or radicalization. The lack of a valid social order causes a slew of issues that governments



are sometimes unable to address at the same time. Overall economic progress and development suffer in this context, resulting in hardship for the general public. The current situation is gradually leading to a slew of internal tensions. If the dispute is allowed to fester, it threatens not just internal security but also the lives of countless people. In such cases, the government must take action to prevent the deterioration of socioeconomic circumstances, which can lead to disagreements and, eventually, violence. Robust governance procedures that pay attention to developing events reduce structural reasons and prevent conflicts from escalating [31].

### **Prevention Mechanism of Rohingya Crisis**

This research study has explored the feasibility of a regional conflict between the Rohingya Muslim minority and the Myanmar army and its prevention mechanism. The rationale of this study was that the region is home to several conflicts that are still unresolved and have caused millions of deaths. Because of the festering conflicts in the Rakhine State, common people in the entire Bangladesh landscape continue to suffer, and Rohingya are compelled to live miserable lives. The research study hypothesized that regional bodies would be more suitable for undertaking actions intended to prevent conflicts and arrest their escalation within particular regions than those sponsored by the UN. From studying the UN's conflict prevention history and its engagement in different countries, the UN's record has not been very encouraging. The UN faces institutional constraints, capacity deficits and problems with funding. The dearth of regional or local experts is also a significant constraint for the UN to carry out conflict prevention efforts effectively and successfully.

While organisations like OSCE and ASEAN have managed to prevent deadly conflicts in their respective regions because of certain factors: availability of local experts; continued ground presence; indigenous ways of dealing with emerging problems; focus on the entire conflict cycle; effective measures for precise early warning; dialogue facilitation; expertise in monitoring local situations; well-structured informal dialogue facilitation and discussion forums; special-purpose workshops for discussing and debating disputes or conflicts; and the focus of all activities ultimately on the prevention of the outbreak of violent conflicts. The case studies of OSCE and ASEAN highlight the role of these two organisations in preventing violent conflicts in their respective regions. Their success can be gauged from the fact that they have managed to contain conflicts where they have been actively engaged. However, it cannot be said that no deadly conflict has broken out in their respective regions. Harmful internal conflicts have happened after the breakup of Yugoslavia in the OSCE area. Similarly, several internal conflicts have broken out in the Southeast Asian region. Notwithstanding the failures, the two regional organisations have succeeded in effecting change on the ground and invigorating overall regional prosperity. Together with the ten countries, ASEAN forms an economic powerhouse while OSCE has the world's top economies as its participating States. The two regions are economically well-integrated, while South Asia is the least integrated [32].

South Asia ranks number one in the global population. As per World Bank's November 2016 report, South Asia has more than 400 million people living in poverty. The region faces the challenge of employing 12 million people that enter the labour force each year. South Asia is the least economically integrated area globally, and the region's intraregional trade stands at 5% [33]. While its neighbor regional nation, ASEAN's intraregional trade is a formidable 25%. The grim economic picture is due to the historical political tensions, security concerns and cross-border conflicts [34].

In South Asia, an attempt has been made to bring in the paradigmatic shift from the statist discourses of national security to human security. For example, countries like India and Pakistan continue to allocate a large part of their annual budget to defense. They are compelled to do so because of the perceived threat to security from each other. This trend has been continuing ever since the decolonization of the South Asian region. The countries have failed to realize the importance of shared living and common security concerns. Consider a hypothetical situation in which India and Pakistan reconcile their differences. This particular scenario would open up several avenues that would result in greater prosperity for the

people in the region. Once India and Pakistan resolve the outstanding issues in their decade-long rivalry, establishing a regional mechanism for preventing deadly conflicts would become a high possibility [35].

One of the immediate benefits of such a scenario would be the dissipation of the fear of perceived security threats. The follow up to such a changed situation would be a cut in the defense budget by India and Pakistan. The saved funds from the defense budget could then be diverted to spend on uplifting people from abject poverty, creating better healthcare facilities, bettering the education system, infrastructure development, research & innovation, scientific development, strengthening the technology for dealing with natural disasters, and developing renewable technology among several others [36].

Envisaging any regional conflict prevention mechanism for South Asia hinges on the relations between member states, especially India and Pakistan. A core framework is essential for the greater willingness of each country to recognize the importance of synergetic effort in tackling the common threats to regional peace. Of course, it is not an easy task. Given the diversity of opinions, not-so-good relations among the states, and hostile India and Pakistan bilateral relations, creating such a general forum is hard to crack [37].

However, an initiative has to be made to reach a consensus in building a regional framework for addressing today's concerns that may become tomorrow's crises. Every South Asian state tends to respond after a problem has happened. The approach has been dealing with the consequences of violent manifestations instead of proactive action to resolve the issues in the pre-violent stage. There is a severe lack of understanding of the values of peace and what peaceful societies can contribute to overall societal development, especially human development.

A commonly held belief is that peace is suitable for development, and development is good for peace. Development and peace are mutually reinforcing concepts that feed into each other. The more peaceful a country or region is, the greater the development and vice versa. Therefore, all the countries in the South Asian region must bring about a change in their attitudes towards each other.

Why is a change in the states' attitude necessary? Several reasons illustrate this contention. First, South Asia is home to nearly a quarter of the world's population. It puts enormous pressure on the regional resources endowed by nature. Each country is densely populated or overpopulated, thus, creating a massive task for each government to meet the population demands. Any violent conflict directly affects the population. Meeting energy, food, education, health, and other basic requirements itself is a challenge for successive governments in each country. Would engaging in an armed conflict not result in a waste of our time, energy and resources? In a climate of political instability and mutual suspicion, states find themselves in a security dilemma. Such a situation leads to an arms race which ultimately diverts enormous budgetary allocations to building a defense arsenal, as in India and Pakistan. Pakistan allocates a massive budget to its arms build-up annually at the expense of the welfare of its people. Had there been mutual trust and peaceful relations between India and Pakistan, the taxpayer's money could have been used for health, education, improved people's livelihood and protecting South Asian people from other nations' threats like the Rohingya crisis [38].

First, Innovation in energy management and new scientific research would only be possible in a climate of peace. Keeping the peace is indispensable for optimum use of the resources and exploring nontraditional means of energy sources to meet human needs. Countries can work together to create innovative solutions for regional energy requirements to meet general consumption. They can work in synergy to invest more in the agricultural sector to devise innovative production techniques to ensure food security for its population.

Second, the region lags far behind in comparison to the other world areas on some of the vital indicators of peace, prosperity and development. South Asia today is the most violent region globally after the Middle East & North Africa, as per Global Peace Index (2016). Afghanistan is ranked in the 160th position, while India and Pakistan are ranked 141 and 153. Lack of peace in the region inevitably undermines true human potential. According to Johan Galtung, violence, if not somatic, even psychological, hinders human beings from attaining their true potential and, in turn, human productivity.

Third, ethnic diversity across the region constantly challenges regional peace. Most countries are ethnically diverse, ensuring a persistent fear of internal conflicts. Such conflicts tend to spill over between neighbouring countries due to ethnically similar people across international borders, thereby enhancing the probability of other countries' involvement in the host country's internal conflicts.

Fourth, the region is home to several unresolved territorial and border disputes, especially between India and Pakistan and India and China. Kashmir is the prominent bone of contention between India and Pakistan. The territorial dispute between India and Pakistan has resulted in two full-blown wars and two limited wars, apart from several crises. Until the Kashmir conflict is resolved, the two countries could begin by resolving more minor disputes in hand to build a climate of trust. It will generate goodwill, and they can work together to enhance the role of an organization like SAARC in dealing with regional security issues.

Fifth, transnational terrorism is another grave source of threat to regional peace. Terrorist activities have continued to grow over the years. A recent spurt in cross-border terror attacks in India and home-grown attacks in Pakistan is a cause of great concern for regional peace. Pakistan being home to many such groups needs to realize the real-world consequences of a festering menace that is more dangerous to its national integrity. On the other hand, India is erring in distancing itself from Pakistan to isolate its north-western neighbours from the international community and employ all the diplomatic means to declare it a terrorist state. An unstable nuclear Pakistan could prove to be devastating for the region. Short-term ad-hoc policy measures must be replaced with a long-term Pakistan policy. Some aberrations are always better than a complete disruption in human lives caused by weapons of mass destruction.

And finally, regional instability or internal conflicts can best be tackled by the affected parties themselves. Is it wise to expect outsiders to resolve disputes in our home? Who would be better placed to mediate in intrastate or interstate conflicts than the regional political class and society collectively? Can we expect the outsiders to understand the intricacies of disputes or disagreements in countries of our region fully? A regional approach would not only be more empathetic but also characterized by more significant knowledge about the incumbent ground situation.

One of the reasons for such a political attitude is the failure, thus far, of the vernacular media and intelligentsia to recognize the significance of regional cooperation for peace and security. Regionalism in South Asia has failed to take off as it lacks the political appeal for the politicians to make it part of their electoral agenda to garner support from their domestic constituency. Rather election, for example, in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is an opportunity for the politicians to vilify and demonize each other to consolidate electoral support. Thus, the political discourses are shaped in a way that generates enhanced local support through the vilification of hostile neighbours. This is starkly in contrast to people of some of the other regions, who have gradually recognized the importance of shared responsibility of collectively working against common security threats and ensuring sustainable peace. Apart from hostility between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, internal political instability poses a serious challenge to regional peace. The big five countries, including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, face challenges to internal peace.

States, as an entity, have most widely participated in conflicts worldwide. There is a need to change the approach states adopt towards internal disturbances and interstate conflicts to vary this sequence of events. It would apply to all the South Asian states that have long been scenes of civil unrest or violent internal conflicts. As per Robert Gurr and Barbara Harff, most internal conflicts are fought between states or between a state and a rebel group. And in instances in which states are not directly involved, they are indirectly involved by taking sides with ethnic groups to whom they are sympathetic.

Resolution of such intractable conflicts is indispensable for achieving sustainable internal peace, which is, in essence, positive peace. South Asian states' approach toward such conflicts is primarily managing or defusing crises once they cross a certain threshold. In most such instances, the state uses its apparatus to suppress any form of rebellion against the state. The revolutions that are dealt with iron fist leave the grievances unaddressed. Intrinsic to such grievances is the ever-present potential of violent manifestation anytime soon. Studies have proven that a conflict which has

expressed itself violently at one point in time is susceptible to violent images if the outstanding issues are not resolved. Examples of such disputes can be found in African countries, South Asia, the Middle East, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

Consider, for example, the recent unrest in Rohingya; SAARC failed to recognize the grievances of the ordinary Rohingya Muslim minority and did not take cognizance of the deteriorating ground situation. Had it been active in crisis prevention, the SAARC would have responded swiftly to the swelling mass killing mission in Arakan Rakhine State and set in motion crisis management efforts at the earliest. Early response to the situation would have stopped the cycle of violence and subsequent killing of innocent people and injuries by a pellet gun. Though the conflict was not new, the situation in the Arakan Rakhine state was relatively peaceful and amenable for dialogue before the current crisis unraveled.

### Conclusion

This research illustrated the idea of a regional security and cooperation mechanism can only be made practical through a transformation in the statist realpolitik discourses that compels a state to amass weapons of mass destruction. A shift of focus from the realist notion of national security, which fails to recognize the human sufferings and internal turmoil, to a human-centric idea of security is warranted to move toward formulating a regional peace and security framework. This could be based on shared past and common perceptions of future peace and prosperity.

The success of conflict prevention efforts depends on the willingness to intervene early. Early intervention throws many opportunities to defuse the crisis. In contrast, late intervention confronts practical problems of talking to the parties, organizing meetings, understanding the ground situation when violence is fast spreading within the society and throwing open more challenges. Studies, and even practical experiences, have proven the advantages of early intervention.

Studies such as by Michael S. Lund have underscored the benefits of early intervention. Early actions in a conflict benefit from the absence of several issues that emerge after the breakout of violence. One of the benefits is that it mitigates the possibility of hardening parties' positions after casualties on both sides. Some of the significant benefits of a prevalent stage are: the issues in dispute are less complex and fewer in number; parties to the conflict are not highly mobilized and armed; no sense of victimization because of the absence of bloodshed; the parties have still not resorted to stereotyping and demonizing each other; parties have not reached a situation where compromise would seem like a loss of face [39].

The world-renowned scholar, David A. Hamburg, feels strongly about proactive actions to mitigate the possibility of violent conflicts. He advocates for devoting research and proactive actions, which he calls pillars of prevention, in six different fields [40]:

- Peace education.
- Early warning.
- Strengthening democracy with best civic practices.
- Fostering socio-economic equality.
- Empowering people and ensuring human rights.
- Disarming the world from history's most dangerous weapons.

Conflict prevention is not an abstract idea but a pragmatic enterprise. However, it depends on how states respond to this concept. In the South Asian context, the countries are yet to realize the significance of taking early actions to prevent deadly conflicts. The region needs to learn from the follies of the past that have inflicted unimaginable misery on humankind. South Asia can learn from regions like Europe that have been a theatre of war for centuries but endeavored to reconcile their differences and learnt to live together. The region can work towards developing a common security

agenda by identifying the familiar sources of threats to human security. South Asia needs to work toward evolving a collective will to protect the successive generations from the scourge of war.

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