



# ROHINGYA PRESS

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## THE BAD INFINITY OF BORDERS: POSTCOLONIAL REALISM AND THE GANDHIAN ALTERNATIVE

In early May 2025, Indian authorities forcibly disappeared 38 Rohingya refugees from Delhi, deceiving them under the guise of biometric registration [1]. Among them were minors, the elderly, and the critically ill. They were flown, bound and blindfolded, to Port Blair, then loaded onto a naval vessel. Beaten and abused aboard, including reports of sexual assault, they were asked: “Myanmar or Indonesia?” They pleaded not to be sent back to the country they had fled. No one listened. One by one, they were thrown into international waters and left to swim. Hours later, weak and disoriented, they realized the truth: they had landed back in Myanmar. This was not an isolated incident. India officially labels the Rohingya as “illegal immigrants.” Denied asylum, they are restricted from legal work, healthcare, and education. They live under constant threat of detention and deportation.

### Postcolonial Realism

What is distinctive about India’s brutal handling of Rohingya refugees is its borrowing of the language of the very imperialist structures that once subjugated them. India acknowledges the global imperialist regime that produces refugee populations through war, underdevelopment, and climate collapse [2]. However, this acknowledgment is followed by a refusal to challenge imperialism in any substantive manner. Instead, a short-term model of securitization is adopted, which attempts to preserve the sanctity of borders through continuous expulsions of refugees. In the 2018 Supreme Court hearing on Rohingya deportations, the Additional Solicitor General stated that India “cannot be the world’s refugee capital” [3]. This imports a Euro-American imaginary of being overrun by

refugees, a fantasy central to the far-right politics of Europe and the U.S. The legal justification for the pushback operations (deploying chili spray and stun grenades) demonstrated how India is operationalizing the techniques of deterrence perfected by the global North, from Australia’s offshore detention model to the U.S.-Mexico border militarization. The imperialist alignment of Indian refugee policy is deepened in Home Minister Amit Shah’s 2025 remarks, where he states that India is not a “dharamshala,” a term invoking hospitality and care, but one that is now rhetorically negated [4]. The distinction he draws between legal migrants who “spread prosperity” and others who are “a threat to security” is eerily consonant with the neoliberal securitization logic of Western asylum regimes, where economic utility determines the right to remain.

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The anti-refugee sentiments of the Indian nationalist imaginary are paradoxically realized through a recognition of unjust imperialist systems. This paradox represents postcolonial realism: an ideological atmosphere in which the limits of political imagination are determined not by the dream of liberation, but by the pragmatics of imperial endurance.

In the contemporary global imperial order, the structures of domination (military hierarchies, financial institutions, surveillance networks, climate apartheid) have become so vast, interconnected, and self-reinforcing that they appear as immutable facts rather than historical constructs. The structural inequalities of the global order are acknowledged only to justify the adoption of imperial techniques: deterrence without redress, visibility without hospitality, sovereignty without transformation. The national militarization of Indian borders is ultimately an expression of the incapacity to physically overturn the fossilized borders that mark the globe. Since the means of technologically advanced violence are concentrated in the Global North, the Global South experiences a deficit in physical strength, or the ability to impose its will on richer

countries through the threat of destruction. When the international equations of violence are not favorable for ex-colonized countries, the next thing left to do is to enforce such violence at the regional level, where southern nations can try to compensate for the autonomy that they have lost due to global hierarchies.

Postcolonial border violence, then, is compensatory in nature: it is an affirmation of localized integrity attempting to conceal the country's defeatist realism vis-à-vis global hierarchies. Insofar as imperialist nations are unwilling to give up their monopoly on violence, is the compensatory cycle of postcolonial border militarism the only reality left? Do the nations of the South need to dedicate all their resources to accessing military powers that can then allow them to impose their will on the North?

### The Futility of Punishment

Mahatma Gandhi overcomes the vexing question of violence by pointing to its structural futility. Violence, he says, is motivated by the desire for "punishment," to make the oppressor suffer for the oppression they have inflicted [5]. But the imposition of suffering on the other is not something that they will accept willingly.

As a fundamentally coercive act, punishment is unsustainable: power maintained by force always provokes resistance, a resistance that demands another act of imposition. Violence, thus, seems to stretch into what GWF Hegel called a "bad infinity": an arithmetic series repetitively trying to reach the infinite [6].

Gandhi uses the history of WWII to illustrate the bad infinity driving border violence [7]. After the devastation of World War I, France, haunted by its losses, built the Maginot Line, a massive fortification along the German border, to deter future invasion. In response, Nazi Germany expanded its own Siegfried Line, creating a mirrored structure of mutual defense. This arms race exemplifies the security dilemma: one nation's defense becomes another's threat, triggering endless militarization.

Both lines, though defensive in intent, normalized continental rearmament. When war came in 1940, Germany bypassed the Maginot Line through Belgium, rendering it obsolete. But the deeper failure lay in the belief that security could be achieved through fear.

This is the heart of Gandhi's critique.



# ROHINGYA REPATRIATION AT A CROSSROADS

AN OPEN DIALOGUE by Abdullah Shibli (Economist, and previously worked for the World Bank and Harvard University)

Since the interim government took over, hundreds of thousands more Rohingya have crossed into Bangladesh. FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

As the war in the Middle East continues and escalates unabated, it is time to reflect on the potential fallout from festering refugee problems, including the unresolved Rohingya repatriation programme.

The history of Palestine is a lesson for all. The British government and its allies decided in 1917, through the Balfour Declaration, to provide the Jewish people with a homeland by implanting them among the Arabs in Palestine. That was the catalyst for the Nakba—the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948. In almost identical fashion, the military and their cohort in Myanmar pushed more than a million Rohingya into Bangladesh. Now, it is time to take a fresh look at the Rohingya crisis that has been brewing in Bangladesh and make a renewed effort to expedite their resettlement in Myanmar. The interim government has promised to prioritise Rohingya repatriation, and Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has repeatedly sought

international help. Various advisers have visited China and held meetings to revive the Kunming Understanding, but things remain at a standstill. Since the interim government took over, hundreds of thousands more Rohingya people have crossed into Bangladesh. On the positive side, a “high-level meeting” on the situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar is scheduled for September 30 this year to be held at the UN headquarters in New York. At the urging of the CA during his visit to the UN in September 2024, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on November 13, 2024, to convene a high-level conference within this year on the Rohingya situation in Myanmar. But it is difficult to pin much hope on the outcome of this conclave.

In the meantime, there is much talk about repatriation emanating from the interim government. During a visit to Bangladesh, UN Secretary-General António Guterres visited the Rohingya camps and expressed his solidarity with the refugees. The CA, alongside Guterres, pledged to work towards a future in which Rohingya people can celebrate Eid in

their homeland in Myanmar’s Rakhine state next year. Given that elections in Bangladesh will be held early next year, the interim government will likely need to work on an expedited schedule to accomplish this before transferring power to the next prime minister.

It is laudable that the interim government has given repatriation of the Rohingya high priority. During his trip to London earlier this month, Dr Yunus warned that the current state of affairs is grim. He even mentioned that the plight of the Rohingya should be a reason for alarm and warned that, “if there is no hope for them, this might lead to an explosion.” I will now turn to a few ideas on the repatriation issue. In light of the current global environment, it is difficult to foresee much progress before the national elections. Hopes were raised when the interim government and the press reported that the Myanmar authorities had confirmed the eligibility of 1,80,000 Rohingya refugees for repatriation. But it is now clear that this is an illusion. In the past, one obstacle has been the unwillingness of refugees to return unless certain conditions are met. And there are other roadblocks to the process.

■ Source: thedailystar.net