

FROM COX'S BAZAR TO BHASANCHAR: A STEP FORWARD TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS FOR THE ROHINGYAS

Snapshots of a Research Conducted Jointly by



CFISS

**CENTRAL FOUNDATION FOR
INTERNATIONAL AND STRATEGIC STUDIES**

and



**DEPARTMENT OF PEACE AND
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Editor's Note

In August 2017, a deadly crackdown by Myanmar's army on the Rohingyas caused hundreds of thousands of people to flee into Bangladesh. The exodus began on 25 August and as a result now there are 1.1 Million Rohingyas living in Cox's Bazar area. The Cox's Bazar Camps are so cramped that it is poised to bring a number of threats emanating from, human trafficking, drug smuggling, deterioration of law and order, arms smuggling, livelihood competitions with the locals, environmental degradation and health concerns. In that backdrop, the Bangladesh Government decided to decongest these camps by relocating some of the Rohingyas to Bhasanchar. There were a number of apprehensions and misconceptions regarding Bhasanchar, for example: questions were raised regarding the safety and sustainability of the Bhasanchar island, human security and protection aspects and potential of the island in terms of providing a sustainable livelihood etc.

In order to evaluate the real perspective of Bhasanchar, a joint research was undertaken by Central Foundation for International and Strategic Studies (CFISS) and Department of Peace and Conflict, University of Dhaka. The research team conducted a dispassionate and balanced study based on a mixed research method where different data were collected from the ground and these were supplemented with FGD, Expert Interview (EI) and Key Informant Interview (KII).

No	Location	Date	Methods	Number	Male	Female
1.	Bhasanchar	18-19 November 2020	KII	04	04	00
			FGD	02	17	00
			EI	03	02	01
2.	Cox's Bazar	10-12 December 2020	KII	19	17	02
			FGD	06	25	14
			EI	05	05	00
Total					70	17
Total KIIs						23
Total FGDs						08
Total EIs						08

Table: Overview of Participants' Data Collection; Source: Fieldwork



Broad Objectives of the Research

1. To assess the safety and sustainability of the island in accommodating the Rohingyas who will be relocated to Bhasanchar.
2. To identify and assess the key aspects of livelihood options available for the Rohingyas living in the temporary camps of Cox's Bazar;
3. To critically evaluate the potential threats related to the human security aspects of Rohingyas living in Cox's Bazar;
4. To explore the viability, livability, and security aspects related in relocating the Rohingyas to Bhasanchar;
5. To provide a comparative picture based on facilities and options between the Cox's Bazar camps and Bhasanchar Ashrayan-3 project;
6. To map a rationale for relocating the Rohingya displaced people to the Ashrayan-3 project temporarily, with a set of policy recommendations for further initiatives.

Key Findings

1. In terms of sustainability of the island, experts on geology and geomorphology opined that the mainland and build up areas of the island are considerably stable. A few studies on the erosion and accretion of the area based on satellite images also reaffirmed the same based on the data from 2016 to 2019; and there is a possibility of the emergence of new land lying in between the islands, Sandip and Hatia. Experts are anticipating that Sandip and Hatia will be connected to the mainland of Bhasanchar due to the rising isles. Moreover, people of the adjacent islands living in Sandip, Hatia and Southern part of Noakhali district could survive over the last 20 years in spite of a number of natural calamities. In these circumstances, such flat accusations on the sustainability of Bhasanchar seems to be exaggerated. In addition, the existing 9 feet high embankment will be enhanced further to 19 feet so that the island can be protected from any sort of natural calamity (such as: cyclone and floods).

2. As mentioned earlier, due to the excessive number of people in the Rohingya Camps in Cox's Bazar, there is potential danger of landslide, deterioration of law and order and pressure on the environment etc.



3. In retrospect, Bhashanchar provides, excellent area where the security is looked after by the constant presence of the law enforcing agencies and absence of criminal gangs in the area. Internal and external security measures in Bhashan Char are maintained through the installation of security cameras, perimeter fences, watch towers and police posts.

4. The project site has already been developed with 120 plots. Each plot consists of 12 buildings including cyclone centers, hospitals, educational institutes, mosques etc. Each cyclone center can withstand strong winds of up to 260 km per hour and will accommodate 1000 people and 200 cattle in an emergency. Additionally, there are buildings for the NGOs and international organizations. Spaces have also been allocated for a day-care center, orphanage and guest houses.

5. Although there are limited scopes of earning in the existing Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, there will be various means of livelihoods in Bhashanchar. The possible ways of earning available are, fishing, poultry farming, sheep and cattle rearing, cultivation of rice and vegetables, carpentry, handicrafts, tailoring and providing different community services. Shops have also been set up in the designated market places and Rohingyas can conduct small business in Bhashanchar as well.

The research concludes that Bhashanchar is certainly a better place for the Rohingya displaced people, compared to the camps in Cox's Bazar. The island has all the facilities necessary for their temporary relocation until their repatriation to Myanmar.

Cox's Bazar: Hosting Beyond Capacity



❑ Cox's Bazar camps are amongst Bangladesh's most vulnerable areas, with a poverty rate far exceeding the country's national average.

❑ This place is now accommodating around 1.1 million Rohingya refugees who have fled their country due to the persecution of the Myanmar Army.

❑ The camps are filled beyond its carrying capacity, with only 10.7 square meters of usable space per person.

❑ Ineffective planning, coupled with the mismanagement of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, has led to environmental degradation in the area.

❑ In consequence, Cox's Bazar Rohingya camps are very cramped, jam packed due to overpopulation which makes the lives of the Rohingyas vulnerable.



Bhashan Char: A Safe Home for the Rohingyas

○ On the other hand, Bhasanchar is very well planned and built with adequate space for every individual which provides better living conditions for the Rohingyas.

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

▲ Noakhali

BANGLADESH

▲ Sandwip

● CHITTAGONG

● Bhasan Char

▲ Hatiya Island

Bay of Bengal



COX'S BAZAR DISTRICT

MYANMAR

UKHIYA SUBDISTRICT

▲ Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Camp

TEKNAF SUBDISTRICT

▲ Leda Makeshift Settlement

MUANGDAW TOWNSHIP

RAKHINE STATE

RATHEDAUNG TOWNSHIP

● SITTWE

○ Bhashanchar is an island of approximately 38.85 square km area lying in between Sandwip and Hatiya. The distances from these islands are respectively 16.9 km and 28 km. (See the map).

Sustainability and Stability: Cox's Bazar

○ The Cox's Bazar camps have the Rohingya families living in makeshift camps. The infrastructure is not stable due to overpopulation and congestion.

○ Since the camps have been built by cutting down hills, they remain in risk of being buried in landslides.

○ Increased deforestation also amounts to severe environmental degradation in the area.



Sustainability and Stability: Bhasanchar

◆ Bhasanchar has a three-staged embankment system in place to protect the island, there are wave breakers which have been installed to weaken the waves.

◆ At the second stage, there are the low elevated barriers built with gravel, and geo-bags filled with sands.

◆ There is also a main dam, which is a three-layered engineered protection system that further lowers the intensity of the waves.

◆ The houses have been constructed four feet above the ground, in order to protect the refugees from high tidal waves.

◆ Each of the houses have concrete breeze-block rooms measuring 2m x 2.5m with small barred windows, which are more habitable than the camps in Cox's Bazar.

◆ In order to protect the site from tidal floods and natural disasters, a 9 feet high and 12.1 km long double embankment has been built on the island which is being enhanced upto 19 feet in height.



Safety and Security:Cox's Bazar



◆ The mass influx of Rohingyas has posed imminent security challenges for Cox's Bazar which has forests near the camps and those hilly remote bordering areas now have criminal gangs operating their illicit trades.

◆ The number of arms and drug-related incidents has sharply increased in Cox's bazar camps over the last three years compared to other crimes.

◆ According to the statistics by Cox's Bazar police, almost 725 criminal cases have been filed against 1,664 Rohingya individuals between August 2017 to August 2020.

◆ However, it is nearly impossible to curb the criminal activities in the area even with the continued surveillance because the Rohingya people are directly involved with the network of crimes.



◆ The Bangladesh government has deployed two Armed Police Battalions in the camps.

◆ Additionally, the Bangladesh Army has built wire fences around the camps to reduce the criminal activities.

Safety and Security:Bhasanchar



⇒ Overall safety and security issue of Bhasanchar is ensured by the fact that the Island is under the constant supervision of the Bangladesh Navy.

⇒ Two police stations have already been established in the Island to sufficiently cover and protect the population in Bhasanchar.

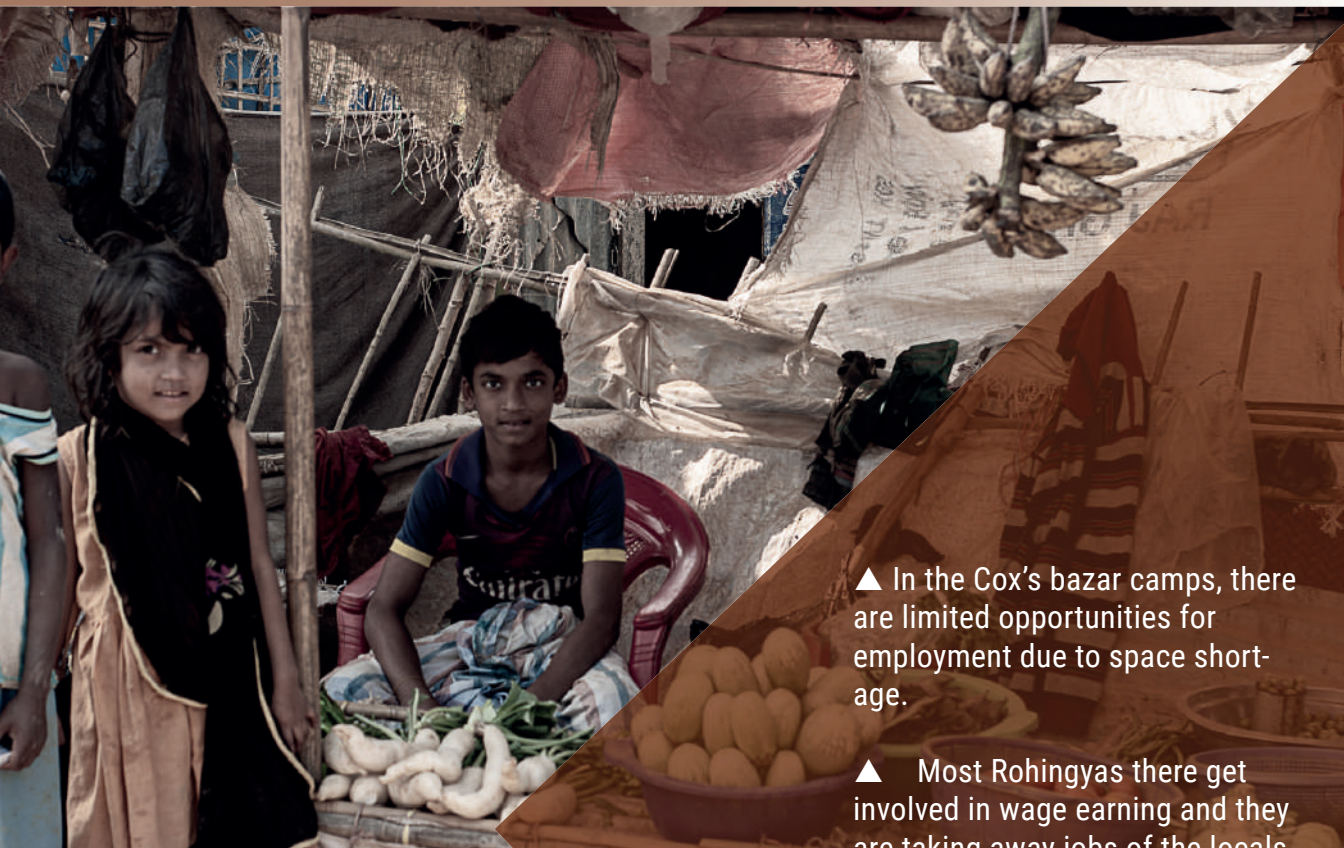
⇒ Since the population size here is very small, the number of staff available here is sufficient.

⇒ Law Enforcement frequently patrol in small squads in order to keep the area under our observations.



⇒ There are 30 Police personnels from the District Police, 31 from the Armed Police Battalion Units (APBNs), and 10 female officers dedicated to meet the security needs of this area.

Livelihood and Employment Opportunities: Cox's Bazar



▲ In the Cox's bazar camps, there are limited opportunities for employment due to space short-age.

▲ Most Rohingyas there get involved in wage earning and they are taking away jobs of the locals as they offer to work for a lower wage.

▲ These activities are increasing competition between the Rohingyas and the locals living in Cox's Bazar.



Livelihood and Employment Opportunities: Bhasanchar



▲ The island has been developed in a way that can not only ensure a comfortable living, but also help Rohingya people improve their lives socially and financially.

▲ The possible ways of earning in Bhasanchar are carpentry, handi-crafts, tailoring and providing different community services. Shops have also been set up in the designated market place.

▲ The Rohingyas can also work in cottage industries, agricultural work, fish farming, and animal husbandry.

▲ Also, a Special Economic Zone is being built so it will generate more employment opportunities; especially in the garments.



Livelihood and Employment Opportunities: Bhasanchar



Buffalo



Sheep



Duck



Chicken



Pigeon

⇒ It is imperative to know that many different kinds of crops can be grown on the Bhasanchar.

⇒ As an experimental project, Bangladesh Navy has already planted paddy, vegetables and different fruit and medicinal trees in Bhasanchar.

⇒ Especially, huge success in producing Dragon Fruit in Bhasanchar shows the possibility of it becoming the “Cash Crop” of the island.



Salinity resistant Rice variety



Zucchini



Dragon Fruit



Different types of vegetables

Recreational Facilities: Bhasanchar



○ Contrary to the Cox's Bazar camps, where there are no recreational facilities available, Bhasanchar has been built with arrangements for adults and children alike.

○ There are playgrounds with swings, see-saws, slippers and space allocated to arrange picnics and cultural events.



Water and sanitation: Cox's Bazar

○ As the camps are hosting refugees beyond its capacity, system mismanagement, ineffective planning, poor water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and other issues have led to the contamination of water at the camps.



○ Considering the pressure of over- population and the massive volume of waste production, solid waste management (SWM) is now an urgent need in Cox's Bazar.

○ SWM is a necessity for environmental protection, prevention of diseases, promotion of hygiene and proper sanitation standards.

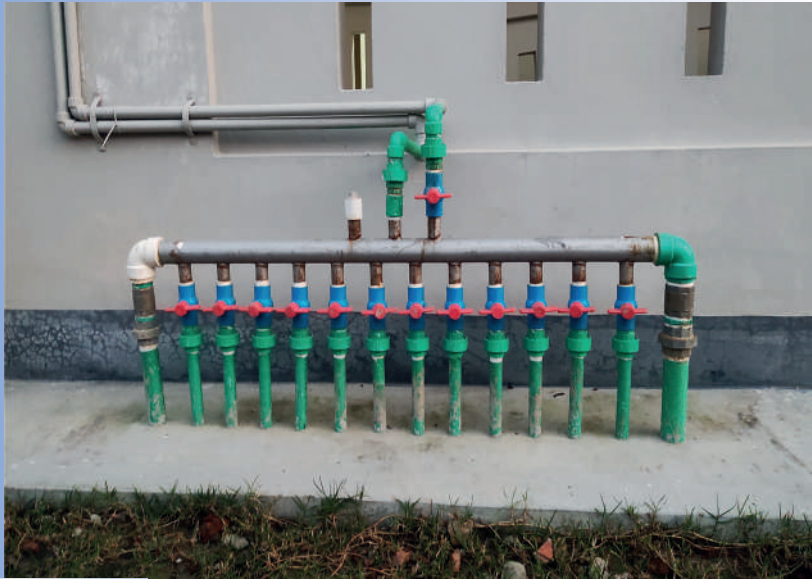


Water and Sanitation: Bhasanchar

► In Bhasanchar, water and sanitation facilities are incorporated in the Ashrayan-3 project itself.

► There is an under-water table of freshwater (700-780 feet deep) from which drinking water will be extracted for the Rohingyas.

► The residents will be able to use this reserve water for domestic use.



► The drainage system is built by keeping the waste management in mind.

► There would be a lot of accumulated waste here. 1 lakh [i.e., 100,000] people would be living here together, so a lot of waste would be dumped in one location.

► Since there's a lot of rainfall, measures have been taken so that they can collect and store rainwater as well.

► A landfill has been designated for dumping, and a site has been selected for this purpose.

► There is also a functional waste management system which directly converts the waste into Bio-gas.



Medical Facilities: Cox's Bazar



► There are 11 health facilities in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps.

► It includes two primary health care centers and nine health posts, which are not enough in comparison to the growing number of Rohingyas.



► In the onset of COVID- 19 pandemic, social distancing is a necessary protocol which is almost impossible to maintain due to the congestion of the camps.

Medical Facilities: Bhasanchar



⇒ As part of the Ashrayan-3 project site in Bhasanchar, 4 community clinics and 2 hospitals have been built, with facilities in place for the treatment of some serious illnesses.

⇒ Nevertheless, there are accommodation facilities for doctors who will be treating the patients in that they have quarters for living with their families.



⇒ It also consists of a proper bedding system with all the necessary equipment for serious patients. The Hospital and Clinics both have separate male and female wards.



⇒ As the Island is situated far from the mainland, adequate medical facilities have been arranged for people who would reside in the Island as temporary settlers.



Disaster Resistance Facilities: Cox's Bazar



⇒ The emergency facilities in Cox's bazar Camp are not sufficient in comparison to the huge population living there.

⇒ Advance facilities like ample and spacious cyclone centers and space for emergency landings are not available.



⇒ This makes it hard in terms of taking immediate steps in any emergency situation.

Disaster Resistance Facilities: Bhasanchar



❑ The project site has already been developed with 12 cyclone centers. Each of them can withstand strong winds up to 260 km per hour and will accommodate 1000 people and 200 cattle in emergency.

❑ In normal situations, the shelters will be used for educational, administrative, medical, religious and community activities.



❑ The lighthouse is recognized by all the ships that pass near the island and they send signals to this lighthouse on a regular basis.



❑ There are two helipads which will help transfer emergency patients and facilitate immediate evacuation.



Education and Religious Facilities: Cox's Bazar



❑ In Cox's bazar, there is no formal or certified education system available for the Rohingyas.

❑ Though religious practice is considered the only way of learning in the camp, the number of mosques and madrasas are not sufficient for this large number of population.



Education and Religious Facilities: Bhasanchar

- ▶ The planner has constructed schools for the relocated Rohingya children.
- ▶ There are two four-storied schools constructed for the Rohingya children, who would inhabit the Island.
- ▶ An officer working closely with the project at Bhasanchar also confirmed that "there would be some non-formal structures dedicated for initial learning centers, where teachers will teach the Rohingya children English and Arabic."



- ▶ The research team observed that there are 3 mosques and a community center located in the middle of the Bhasanchar.



- ▶ Considering the religious sentiment of the Rohingya people, the project planners have constructed mosques and religious centers in Bhasanchar that would facilitate their religious rights.

CONCLUSION

Needless to say, temporary relocation in Bhasanchar island will improve the livelihood options of the Rohingya displaced people, as well as address the ongoing security concerns. Therefore, the relocation plan is a part of the broader plan of repatriation which is the utmost priority for the Government of Bangladesh. Relocation is not an obstacle but a stepping stone toward repatriation for the Rohingya people. It is imperative that the international community and all stakeholders understand this.



A woman wearing an orange headscarf and a yellow patterned top is holding a baby. The baby is wearing a pink jacket and a white headscarf. They are standing in front of a wall with laundry hanging on a line. A blue UNHCR bucket is visible in the bottom right corner.

“Definitely
Bhasanchar ushers a
new hope among us
as we have been pro-
vided with adequate
safety, security and
livelihood options in
our temporary
shelter.”

- **Jamila Begum,**
A Rohingya Woman
living in Bhasanchar

