The Rohingya Conflict:
An Analysis through the Lens of the Geopolitical Economy of Resources

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“In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful”

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Abstract

This thesis aims to reveal the underlying reason behind the recent Rohingya conflict. This paper argues that, instead of only focusing on the ethnic and religious view of the Rohingya conflict, the geopolitical economic view of the conflict also needs to be addressed sincerely as the conflict has a long history and occurred in different political and economic conditions. From that purpose, this research analyses the recent Rohingya conflict from the perspective of the geopolitical economy of resources. It examines the role and activities of the Government of Myanmar and military force concerning the recent conflict. Besides that, this paper also examines the geopolitical economic interests of China and India in Rakhine state regards to their unwillingness to stop the conflict.

In this study, secondary sources such as books, academic articles, reports of government and non-government organisations and the UCDP database have mainly been used for data collection, which is based on textual analysis. This thesis applies the concept of Resource, Resource curse, Resource war and Intrastate conflict along with the analytical framework ‘Vulnerability, risk and opportunity’ by Philippe Le Billon as a tool to explain and analyse the conflict.

The research shows that the recent violent conflicts which forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of the Rohingyas from their houses and destroyed many Rohingya villages in Rakhine state have a possible connection with the resources and economic opportunities that are present in the Rakhine state. There is a strong possibility that the resource and economic opportunities influence the GoM and military force to become involved in this conflict. Also, the resource and economic opportunities might prevent China and India from playing an active role to stop the conflict. The Rohingya crisis has been going on for decades now, yet it has not been solved. Also, there is no sign of solving the crisis soon. The geopolitical economic perspective of the conflict might be the answer to why the Rohingya crisis has not yet been solved.

Key Words: Rohingya Conflict, Rohingya Crisis, Geopolitical Economy, Resource War, Rakhine State, Government of Myanmar, Tatmadaw, China, India.
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List of Acronyms

AA  Arakan Army
ARSA  Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
ALP  Arakan Liberation Party
ALA  Arakan Liberation Army
BCIMEC  Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor
BRI  Belt and Road Initiative
BRF  Belt and Road Forums
CITIC  China International Trust Investment Corporation
CMEC  China-Myanmar Economic Corridor
CPEC  China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
EAO  Ethnic Armed Organizations
ECHO  European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ENAC  Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Center
GoB  Government of Bangladesh
GoC  Government of China
GoI  Government of India
GoM  Government of Myanmar
HoC  House of Commons
HRC  Human Rights Council
MIC  Myanmar Investment Commission
MOGE  Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise
MoU  Memorandum of Understanding
NCA  Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NLD  Nationalities Development Party
<table>
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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OBOR</td>
<td>One Belt, One Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHCHR</td>
<td>Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSO</td>
<td>Rohingya Solidarity Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNDP</td>
<td>Rakhine Nationalities Development Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIPRI</td>
<td>Stockholm International Peace Research Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCDP</td>
<td>Uppsala Conflict Data Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKTI</td>
<td>UK Trade &amp; Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>USDP</td>
<td>Union Solidarity and Development Party</td>
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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Formulation

Worldwide 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced from their home because of armed conflict, generalized violence and human rights violations. These millions of stateless people have been denied national identity and fundamental rights (education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement) (UNHCR, 2019a). According to UNHCR, 67% (Two-thirds) of all the refugees worldwide belong to only five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia (UNHCR, 2019b). The Rohingya ethnic minority group is among some of those stateless people who used to live in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Myanmar is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country which has 135 official ethnic groups. All of these ethnic groups aggregated in eight major ethnic groups where Bamar’s (32% of the total population) are the majority, and intrastate conflicts are often recorded between the Burmese military force (Tatmadaw\textsuperscript{1}) and other ethnic arm groups (Stokke et al., 2018:3-4, 46; Strömberg, 2018:6; François and Souris, 2018:12; Mithun, 2018:648). In contrast, compared to the other ethnic conflicts in Myanmar, “The Rohingya conflict is highly asymmetrical in terms of power, resources and military assets as the Rohingya population as a group has very few resources, military or otherwise”. Describing the Rohingya conflict as a two-party conflict is difficult. It is more like systematic discrimination, denial of human rights and violence, specifically against the Rohingya civilians (SIDA, 2019:2).

Although the conditions of the Rohingyas were not always like this. They were the citizens of Myanmar before 1962. Even they were elected as the members of the parliament, worked in the government offices and military once (Martin et al., 2017:5). But, the situation deteriorated periodically, and now they are not even recognised as the citizens of Myanmar (Cheesman, 2017). The Rohingya people have a long history of being victims of mass violence and military crackdown. It occurred in different periods, notably in 1978, 1991,1992, 2012, 2015, 2016 and 2017 (Habib, M. et al., 2018:2). These violent incidents ultimately forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas to abandon their houses in the Rakhine state (UNHCR, 2018a; IOM, 2019; MSF, 2018). However, one point to be noticed in here is that the violence of 1978, 1991,

\textsuperscript{1} In this study, I use the term ‘Tatmadaw’ and ‘Military force’ interchangeably without indicating any special differences. The term ‘Tatmadaw’ is the vernacular name of Myanmar’s tri-service (army, navy and air force). In general, Tatmadaw only refers to the army; however, it is a combination of army, navy and air force. It also considered as a royal force in Myanmar (Seth, 2018).
1992 occurred under an economically sanctioned military government where factors relating to ethnic and religious differences played the pivotal role in the conflicts (Rahman, 2015:289-290; Mithun, 2018). On the other hand, the violence of 2012, 2015, 2016 and 2017 occurred under a relatively open economic democratic government, which had different political and economic conditions compared to the previous conflicts (Garbo, 2016; Hadar, 1998).

Despite having these different political and economic conditions, most scholars and observers continue to almost exclusively focus on the ethnic and religious related causes of the conflict. Also, these are the most common perception of general people when they hear about Rohingya conflict (Azad & Jasmin, 2013; Kipgen, 2014; Rahman, 2015; Ibrahim, 2016; Goraya and Mazhar, 2016; Mithun, 2018). According to Sassek’s (2017) opinion “The world’s coverage of these events has focused entirely on the religious/ethnic aspect, characterising them as religious persecution”. Though, recently, some scholars addressed the geopolitical economic aspect of the recent Rohingya conflict in their writings (Bepler 2018:9; Fair, 2018; Ware and Laoutides, 2018:201; Sassek’s, 2017). However, some aspect of this conflict can still be seen as under-researched. Especially the resources and economic opportunities that present in Rakhine state needs in-depth examination concerning the recent Rohingya conflict, which forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people from the Rakhine state. Therefore, this study is approaching the recent Rohingya conflict from the perspective of the geopolitical economy of resources.

1.2 Research Relevance and Importance

Millions of people became stateless every year. However, the reasons for being forcibly displaced or stateless are not the same in every case. People might be forcibly displaced, or stateless due to war, conflict or climate change etc. The important thing is to identify the actual reason because without addressing the actual reason, the problem cannot be solved permanently. Around one million Rohingya people are now living in inhuman conditions in some camps of Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2019c; IOM, 2019; MSF, 2018). Among them, around 723000 Rohingya people fled to Bangladesh only in August 2017 to August 2018. These people joined the other 213000 people who fled to Bangladesh in different periods since 1978 (UNHCR, 2019c; ECHO, 2018; SIDA, 2019). Several organisations including UNHCR, MSF, Amnesty International reported mass killings, rapes, destruction of houses in Rakhine state against the Rohingya civilian population (UNHCR, 2018a; MSF 2018; Amnesty

The Rohingya people, especially the unregistered Rohingya people in the refugee camp, are led an inhuman life as they are illicit residents with no status (Uddin, 2015:63). Moreover, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) denied giving the status of ‘refugee’ to the displaced Rohingya people as the status of refugee ensure freedom of movement, access to public services, education and livelihoods (HRW, 2018:4). The GoB referred to these people as ‘Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals’ (HRW, 2018:4; UNHCR, 2018a). They agreed on a repatriation deal with the Government of Myanmar (GoM) in October 2017, though it has not been implemented yet (ICG, 2018:3). According to some observers, Rohingya people do not want to go back until guaranteed safety, abolished the discriminatory laws and policies and restored human rights by the Myanmar government (Martin et al., 2017:1; Wake and Yu, 2018:2). Additionally, the GoB has decided to relocate some of these people in an island called Bashan Char (see Annex I), which is not considered as a safe place due to the high chances of the natural disaster. The island is vulnerable to frequent cyclones (HRW, 2018; Adams, B., 2019; Anik & Raju, 2019; BBC, 2017a; Siddiqui, 2019; The Daily Star, 2018). Also, there are allegations that the NGOs and INGOs which are working in Bangladesh are involved in profitable businesses and doing little for the Rohingyas (Hasan, 2019; Aziz, 2019).

Furthermore, in India, approximately 16500 Rohingya people live as a refugee since the last decade. Also, because of the recent violence, 40000 (approximately) more Rohingyas took shelter in India. However, these 40000 Rohingyas who took shelter in India did not receive the status of refugee and are seen as “illegal immigrants”. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (India), these Rohingyas are ‘national security threats’ with ‘Pak-based’2 connections, though the government provides no evidence behind the claim (Mohan, 2017: 102; Yhome, 2018: 4; Sen, 2017). Moreover, more than 4500 Rohingyas people are trapped in the “no-man’s land” between Bangladesh and Myanmar and continuously threatened by the Myanmar officials to cross into Bangladesh (HRW, 2019).

2 The term ‘Pak-based’ indicates Pakistani based Islamic militant.
After observing the whole situation, Ibrahim (2016:3), said that if this kind of violence which is happening with the Rohingya people is left unchallenged then sooner or later we will see another Rwandan genocide. Also, as highlighted by the US Congressional Research Service report 2017 that the displaced Rohingya people in Bangladesh are at high risk of radicalisation. These displaced Rohingya people can be recruited by ARSA\(^3\) or any other Islamist militant group (Martin et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to solve the crisis as soon as possible.

### 1.3 Literature Review

According to Bryman (2016), the purpose of the literature review is to establish what is previously comprehended about the topic and to frame the review in such a way that it can act as a background and justification for the investigation (Bryman, 2016:90). From that point of view, this literature review will firstly present the common perceptions of the conflict. Then, it will present the studies which highlighted the geopolitical economic view of the conflict. There has been considerable research on the Rohingya issue; therefore, to examine the most recent and accurate research, I have narrowed it down to some of the latest studies on the topic.

#### 1.3.1 Root causes of the Rohingya conflict— the mainstream discourse

Some common perceptions related to ethnic and religious differences have captured the attention of scholars, observers and commentators around the world as the motivation behind the Rohingya conflict. For example, Rahman (2015:289) analyses the conflict in the lens of primordialism theory where the primordialist argue that people’s ethnic and religious identities have profound social, historical and genetic foundations which create separate psychology, culture and values inside their ethnic and kinship surroundings (Rahman, 2015:289-290). Further, he used the term ‘ethno-political’ to describe the Rohingya conflict. He mainly indicated on the political factors of the conflict and claimed that the political authority of Myanmar patronising the Buddhist against the Muslim Rohingyas. According to his view, ethnic and religious differences added extra value to push this conflict beyond.

In the context that political factors influence the conflict, Ibrahim (2016:3,11) in his book *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide* explained that, for the political gains the major political parties USDP, NLD are supporting the extremist Buddhist organisation such as 969

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\(^3\) Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), is an armed organization (Myanmar Government labelled them as a terrorist group) who claim to defend the rights of the region’s predominately Muslim Rohingya minority, and an allegedly excessive military response by Burma’s military (Martin et al., 2017).
movements and MaBaTha which are the heart of intercommunal violence. Likewise, the ethnic regional parties are also allied with these major political parties and extreme Buddhist group. Notably, the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (previously known as Arakan League for Democracy) whose manifesto was anti-Rohingya from the beginning has closely linked with NLD and the extreme Buddhist groups (Ibrahim, 2016:13).

Also, many pieces of literature specifically blamed the 1982 Citizenship Law for the conflict. This law divided citizenship into three groups, such as citizen, associate citizen, naturalised citizen (Haque, 2017; Cheesman, 2017; Holiday, 2014). According to Haque (2017:454), the 1982 citizenship law deprives the Rohingya nationality and fails to meet the international standard. Because of this law, the Rohingya people do not qualify for full citizenship. The enactment of 1982 citizenship law makes the Rohingya people stateless, whereas the Union Citizenship Act 1948 recognised Arakan Muslim citizenship (Haque, 2017:454, 458-459). Moreover, the Advisory Commission’s final report in 2017 and New Direction’s report in 2018 also addressed the 1982 citizenship act as the main challenges to solve the conflict (The Advisory Commission on Rakhine State 2017; Martin et al., 2017:5). Cheesman (2017:470) in his writing, emphasised that the idea of ‘taingyintha’ or national races is so complicated in Myanmar which exclude the Rohingyas from the 135 ethnic groups.

Some analyses have also explained the Rohingya conflict from the angles of the ethnic security dilemma, dual minority complex and the role of the state. Ware and Laoutides (2018:198) in their book Myanmar’s ‘Rohingya’ Conflict claimed that Rohingya conflict is not about the denial of citizenship, statelessness, economic interests, identity, ethnicity or territory, it is a problem of inclusion of the Rohingya people in the political community of Myanmar. Moreover, Goraya and Mazhar (2016:33-35), emphasises on the discriminations such as the denial of citizenship, forced displacement, ban on travel and restriction on education as the reasons for the conflict. Olivius (2015), also claims that Rohingyas face discrimination because of ethnic and cultural differences (cited in Mithun 2018:649).

Many pieces of literature also covered the view of the Myanmar government and other external actors in this conflict. Kipgen (2014:237), emphasised that, from the beginning of the Rohingya crisis, the Myanmar government denied all accusations and claimed that these violent incidents were the result of mistrust and religious differences between the Muslims and Buddhists. According to the Government of Myanmar investigation, the violence provoked by some local
and international organisations, although the government did not specify the names of the organisations (Kipgen, 2014:237, 240). Moreover, the state councillor of Myanmar Aung Saan Suu Ki\footnote{Aung Saan Suu Ki is the leader of NLD party and the state councillor of Myanmar current government (2015 general election). Also, a Nobel Peace prize winner in 1991.} addressed this conflict as communal violence between the Muslims and Buddhists where she claimed that human rights violations occurred in both sides. Besides, Myanmar government, the role of Suu Ki to address and handle this problem, was also highly criticised by the international community (Kipgen, 2014:49; Azad and Jasmin, 2013:33). As explained by Mithun (2018), the conflicting relationship between the Buddhist and Muslim was the reason behind Suu Ki’s silence. Suu Ki supported the government to avoid confronting the Buddhist leaders. To support the Rohingya community would be the political suicide for Suu Ki as the leader of the NLD party (Mithun, 2018:657).

Moreover, Azad and Jasmin (2013:32-33) in their article describes that the regional countries are more reluctant to this matter because they do not want to hamper the trade relation with such a resourceful country. In 2007, when UK and USA present the resolution 1674 (Responsibly to protect) to cease all attacks on the ethnic minorities in the UN security council, China and Russia voted against the resolution. According to China’s view, Myanmar did not pose any threat to international peace and security in the region (Azad and Jasmin, 2013:32-33). Likewise, Myanmar was also backed by Russia. Russian government stated that interventions in Myanmar’s internal affair would worsen the conflict more and blamed ARSA for violence against the civilians. Further, Russia suggests that other countries should not label this ongoing violence as ‘ethnic cleansing’ or ‘genocide’. However, observing the whole situation countries like the UK, USA and France addressed the ongoing violence as ‘ethnic cleansing’ and ‘genocide’ (Strömberg, 2018:12-25). Furthermore, regional and international organisations such as ASEAN, EU, UN change their discourses on Myanmar after observing the violent incidents and criticise the role of the Myanmar government. Especially, USA and EU put travel bans and sanctions against some high ranked military personnel’s (François and Souris, 2018:52-53).

\subsection*{1.3.2 Geopolitical Economic view of the Rohingya conflict}

Besides the common perceptions and view of the Rohingya conflict, as mentioned in the previous part, Ware and Laoutides also analyse the economic aspects of the Rohingya conflict
through ‘greed thesis’ and the political economy approach. According to them, the political economy makes this conflict more complex and poses new significant dangers, but it is not the primary driver of the conflict (Ware and Laoutides, 2018:201). However, Bepler (2018:10) argues that complex political and economic reasons are underlying factors behind the recent violence. According to him, the ethnic and religious view is not sufficient enough to explain the recent Rohingya conflict (Bepler, 2018:9).

Some literature also emphasises the issue of third parties and their role in terms of Rohingya crisis in Rakhine state. According to Ibrahim (2016:73), China sees Myanmar as a bridge to the Bay of Bengal, and for India, Myanmar is a significant trading opportunity. Fair (2018:72-74) and Bepler (2018:9-10) also highlighted the economic interest of China and India in Rakhine state. According to Bertil Litner, the Rakhine state becomes a strategic competition between China and India in Southeast Asia. Further, he addressed the problems as a ‘The Great Game East’ (Cited in Fair, 2018:65). Bepler’s (2018) and Fair’s (2018) analyses are much-related work regarding my objectives.

However, these pieces of literature did not attempt to analyse the correlation between the geopolitical economic interests of different actors and the recent Rohingya conflict. It is necessary to see that if there is any correlation between the recent economic opportunities that arise from the existing resources in Rakhine state and the increasing number of violence and destruction of Rohingya villages.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions
The most common reason given for the Rohingya conflict is ethno-religious related factors. However, recently, a few types of research consider the geopolitical economic factors of the conflict, which needs further comprehensive investigation. Therefore, the objective of this research paper is to examine the recent Rohingya conflict, through the lens of geopolitical economy of resources. Especially, to find out the causes behind the rise of violence and destruction of Rohingya villages in Rakhine state. Also, to examine the role of the Myanmar government and military force, China and India in the recent Rohingya conflict from the same lens.
In order to fulfil the objective and purpose of this study, the research will attempt to answer the following questions:

I. What are the resources and economic opportunities vested in Rakhine state that might triggered the recent Rohingya conflict?

II. What are the geopolitical economic interests China and India have in Rakhine state that restrict them from playing an active role to stop the recent Rohingya conflict?

III. What are the underlying reasons behind the massive increase of violence and destruction of Rohingya villages in Rakhine state?

1.5 Research Methodology
To fulfil the objective and purpose of the study, this research is designed as a desk study utilising both abductive and case study method. Secondary sources such as books, academic articles, government and non-government organisations reports, policy briefs and newspaper articles have been used for qualitative data collection based on text analysis. Also, to compare the number of violence (State-Based Violence, Non-State Violence, One-Sided Violence) in different states of Myanmar, UCDP Database has been used for data collection based on text analysis.

1.6 Conceptual and Analytical framework
The Rohingya conflict is very complex in nature; it can be explained and analysed from different perspectives such as an ethnic and religious view or a political and economic view. However, this study analyses the conflict from the perspective of the geopolitical economy of resources. For that purpose, the concept of Resource, Resource war, Resource curse and Intrastate conflict were used to understand and explain the conflict better. Moreover, the analytical framework of Phillipe Le Billon ‘Vulnerability, risk and opportunity’ were utilised as a tool to analyse this research. The reason for choosing this analytical framework is due to its precise applicability, which is suitable for this research.
1.7 Structure of the Thesis

To get an overview of how the thesis is constructed, the structure of the thesis is presented here. The Second chapter of this paper explains the methodological approach in details. It demonstrates how the study was conducted and how the material was gathered and analysed. It also includes the delimitations and limitations of the study and remarks the ethical consideration. The Third chapter consists of two parts. In the first part, it discusses the concept of Resource, Resource curse, Resource wars and Intrastate Conflict. Also, in the second part, it presents the analytical framework ‘Vulnerability, risk and opportunity’ introduce by Phillip Le Billon. The Fourth chapter presents the case of the Rohingya with a short background history and some significant facts about the Rohingya people.

The Fifth chapter presents the findings in three parts. First it presents an overview of Rakhine state which shows geographical importance of Rakhine state and the natural resources that reserve in Rakhine state. Secondly, it presents the geopolitical economic significance of Rakhine state to different actors. Thirdly, it presents the increasing number of violence in Rakhine state and the destruction of the Rohingya villages in Rakhine state. In the Sixth chapter, the analysis of the findings is presented by using the analytical framework of Le Billon. It intended to answer the research questions of this paper. In the end, the Seventh chapter presents the concluding discussion, where it highlights the findings and the analysis of the paper once again regarding the research problem. Further, it emphasizes on the importance of the research and discusses some possible solutions regarding the conflict.
2 Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological design of the study is explained in details. This study is designed as a desk study utilising both abductive and case study method. Also, text analysis approach was utilised to analysis the secondary sources of data.

2.1 Desk Study

This study is designed as a desk study which is also known as secondary research or secondary analysis. According to Bryman (2016:594), “…secondary analysis will allow the researcher to mine data that were not examined by the primary investigators or that new interpretations is possible”. Moreover, secondary analysis has many benefits such as it saves cost and time for collecting data and at the same time provide a high quality of data and give more time for analysing those data (Bryman, 2016:310-312).

In this study, the purpose of the desk study method mainly concerned examining the recent Rohingya conflict form a geopolitical economic perspective. It included the geopolitical economic importance of Rakhine state to the government of Myanmar and military force, China and India. In trying to understand these complex trends of Rohingya conflict, all relevant information for this trend collected from books, academical articles, government and different organisational reports, newspaper articles and UCDP database.

2.2 Abduction

This research follows an abductive method. Habermas (1972), explain abduction as a mode of inference which broadened our knowledge and stimulated the research process. Moreover, abduction introduces new ideas which are more important for research (cited in Danermark et al. 2002:94). In general, social science discoveries are closely associated with recontextualization, where recontextualization presents new meaning to the known phenomenon. Also, abduction method can be used to recontextualization something. By recontextualization, it means “to observe, describe, interpret and explain something within the frame of a new context” (Danermark et al. 2002:91). Also, it is similar to Eco’s (1984) creative abduction method which is characterised as a unique and innovative method where the researcher used a frame of interpretation which opposes conventional interpretations or never used before to observe something (cited in Danermark et al. 2002:93).
In this research, the abductive method is used to get new insights, and knowledge of the Rohingya conflict; as the Rohingya conflict has a long history and which occurred in different political and economic conditions. To understand the conflict better, the concept of Resource, Resource curse, Resource war, Intrastate conflict were used. Also, the conflict mostly analysed from the ethnic and religious view; therefore, interpreting the Rohingya conflict from the lens of geopolitical economy of resources by using the analytical framework of Le Billon, that used in this study might provide new insights and new findings. However, it is only one of the ways of analysing; different frameworks may provide different outcomes.

2.3 Case Study

This study further constructed as a case study method. According to Bryman (2016:60), in a case study the term ‘case’ principally associated with a location such as community or organisation where the researcher attempts to reveal the unique feature of the case. The case is an object of interest to the researcher, where the researcher aims to provide an in-depth examination of it (Bryman, 2016:61). According to Yin (2018:15) “A case study is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident”. A case study is most suitable when the researcher is decided to study contemporary events (a fluid rendition of recent past and present) (Yin, 2018:12).

This study looks at how the presence of resources and economic opportunities influence the role and activities of different actors on a conflict, taking the Rohingya ethnic minority of Myanmar as a case study. In Myanmar, there are many other ethnic groups presents who have similar problems like the Rohingya people. Despite the common problems, the Rohingya ethnic minority face some additional problems which required specific in-depth examination. Particularly, the recent violent events that occurred with the Rohingya people within the territory of Rakhine state need proper examination. Therefore, to answer the research questions of this paper and to fulfil the objectives of this paper case study method is more suitable.

2.4 Textual analysis

This study used textual analysis approach for the critical review of the secondary sources of data to understand what is happening on the ground and causes of the conflict from neutral perspectives. Textual analysis is a method where researchers try to collect information and try
to understand the perceptions of other people (McKee, 2003:1). It is a useful method to describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts (Frey et al., 1999:225).

2.4.1 Textual analysis of Secondary sources

This study deals with a contemporary topic, and therefore, it is essential to use the latest data and analysis of up-to-date publications. The books that primarily used for conducting the analysis were Ibrahim’s *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide* and Ware and Laoutides’s *Myanmar’s ‘Rohingya’ Conflict*. Along with these books, several academic articles also utilised. These books and articles analysed for understanding the background history and the common perception of the Rohingya conflict. Also, official reports by Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, House of Commons, Congressional Research Service; and organisational reports by MSF, Ontario International Development Agency, UNHCR, UNA Sweden, United Institutes of Peace were used to obtain a comprehensive and more objective understanding of the Rohingya conflict. Moreover, the report of HRC (2018) on *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar* was used to find out the causalities and destructions that occurred in Rakhine state. Since the Rohingya crisis has been a recent issue, that is why relevant newspaper articles by The Guardian, BBC, The Washington Post, Reuters and many others were also used because it explained Rohingyas situation in Myanmar thoroughly and precisely.

Moreover, the report *Rakhine State Investment Opportunity Survey* by MIC (2019) and *Energy Guide 2018* by EUROCHAM Myanmar (2018), which highlight the economic opportunities in Rakhine state and some other academic articles which highlight Myanmar, China and India’s economic interest were applied to understand the geopolitical economic perspective of the conflict. Also, to observe and analyse the before and after situation of the Rohingya conflict in Rakhine state, the report *UNOSAT analysis of destruction and other developments in Rakhine State, Myanmar* by UNOSAT’s (2018) and *Remaking Rakhine State* by Amnesty International (2018) mainly and other investigative newspaper articles by HRW (2016), The Guardian (2018), Reuters (2018) and The Diplomat (2018) were used. The data and satellite images from these reports and newspaper articles help to understand the role and activities of the GoM and military force during the recent Rohingya conflict.
2.4.2 Textual analysis of UCDP database

In addition, in this study, I utilised the UCDP database to collect data on violent incidents in Myanmar. Uppsala database divided the violent conflict into three types: State-based violence, Non-State violence and One-Sided violence. State-based violence (State-based armed conflict) refers to the fighting between two parties where one has to be the government force and the other a formally organised armed group. Non-state violence (Non-state conflict) means none of the warring parties is the government of a state. One-sided violence refers to the unilateral use of armed force by either the government of a state or a formally organised group against the civilians (UCDP Definitions). Mainly, from this database, the number of violence that happened in Myanmar from 1989 to 2017 were observed and analysed. Moreover, it helps to compare the number of violence that occurred in the Rakhine state and the other states of Myanmar from 1989 to 2017.

In this paper, I divided the timeline 1989 to 2017 into two different periods; 1989-2009 and 2010-2017 for each type of violence (State-Based Violence, Non-state violence and One-sided violence). The reason behind choosing the timeline 1989- 2009 and 2010-2017 is due to the study purpose. I decided to organise the periods (1989- 2009 and 2010-2017) in such a way, which will help to observe and analyse the number of violence in Myanmar in different types of government and economic conditions. Moreover, from this database, the actors who were involved in the violence can also be traced.

After collecting and analysing the data from the books, academic and newspaper articles, government and organisational reports and the UCDP database through using textual analysis method, it incorporated with the analytical framework to fulfil the objective of the study.

2.5 Limitations and Delimitations

In terms of limitations, even though secondary data is available, one of the difficulties that occurred during the data collection was that relevant data was not available, or it was not detailed enough for this research. For example, the research would be more credible if I could triangulate the number of violence. Except for the UCDP database, I could not find any other database which shows the number of violence. Hence, to measure the increasing number of violence I depended on the UCDP database only. However, I looked into the Global Peace Index (GPI, 2018), The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK, 2018)
and many others where I found some brief information about the Rohingya conflict, only though I need quantitative data to compare the number of violence in Rakhine state and other states in Myanmar. Another limitation was that the UCDP database only contains data from 1989 to 2017; though for this study, it will be better if I have the data from 1970 to 2018 at least.

Regarding delimitations, as I mentioned before that the Rohingya conflict could be analysed from different perspectives such as ethnic, religious, political and economic. In this study, I limited myself to focus on the geopolitical economic perspectives of the conflict, as this is the main objective of the study. Though, I discuss the ethnic and religious view of the conflict in different parts of the thesis. Besides that, this study is designed as a desk study, so I have to rely on the secondary sources for data collection. Though the research could be more effective if I could conduct a field study in the Rakhine state. However, it is not possible because there are many restrictions to visit that state. Also, limited research time and financing the research is an obstruction too.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

As this study is designed as a desk study, and I did not conduct any interviews. Therefore, regarding interviewee, there is no ethical issue to consider. However, Rohingya conflict is a sensitive issue and closely linked with the sentiments of many ethnic and religious groups in Myanmar and other neighbour countries. Though my intention is not to hurt the sentiments of anyone or any group, I conduct my research in good faith.
3 Conceptual and Analytical framework

In this chapter, the conceptual and analytical framework is presented as a tool to understand and analyse the geopolitical economic perspective of Rohingya conflict. Firstly, I look into the concept of Resource, Resource Curse and Resource Wars, which will help to understand what type of resources and how resources can influence a conflict. I also present the concept of Intrastate Conflict to understand the difference between the Rohingya conflict and the other ethnic conflicts in Myanmar. Then, at last, I present the analytical framework of Le Billon.

3.1 Concepts of Resource, Resource Curse, Resource Wars and Intrastate Conflict

3.1.1 Resource

The term ‘resource’ indicates those types of natural elements which produced for satisfying human needs and desire. It also stands for natural resources, raw materials and primary commodities (Le Billon, 2012:9). The World Bank definition of natural resources is “materials that occur in nature and are essential or useful to humans, such as water, air, land, forests, fish and wildlife, topsoil, and minerals” (cited in USIP, 2007:4). Resources can be differentiated by their spatial location, relative abundance, physical characteristics, technologies of extraction and transformation, use, social and environmental impacts and economic value (Le Billon, 2012:10). The two broad categories of natural resources are renewable resources and non-renewable resources. Renewable resources (cropland, forests and water) are sustainable, if not overused, on the other hand, non-renewable resources (diamonds, minerals, oils) are not sustainable and finite in quantitates (USIP, 2007:4).

Moreover, resources can also be categorised by its distinctive characteristics, ‘control’ and ‘access’. The characteristics of ‘control’ define resources as proximate and distant. Proximate resources are close to the centre of power, under the control of the government. On the other hand, distant resources are located in remote places, mostly in border areas where politically marginalised group live. Moreover, the characteristics of ‘access’ define resources as point and diffuse. Point resources concentrated in small areas and usually exploited by capital-intensive extractive industries. For example, minerals and oils. Conversely, diffuse resources spread over large areas and usually exploited by less capital-intensive industries such as alluvial gems, minerals, timber, agricultural products, fish (Le Billon, 2012:28).
3.1.2 Resource Curse

In general, natural resources were perceived as countries assets, part of natural capital, and countries which hold a considerable amount of natural resources are considered as fortunate (Davis and Tilton, 2005:233). However, as explained by Collier (2008:38) discovery of natural resource wealth can be a catalyst to prosperity, but it can also contribute to the conflict trap. The status of natural resources as a driver of economic development in the 1980s has changed dramatically and from the 1990s natural resource coined with the term ‘natural resource curse’ (Brunnschweiler and Bulte, 2009:651).

The term ‘resource curse’ usually refers to those countries, which have a lot of resources (renewable and non-renewable) but do not get any benefit from it (NRGI, 2015:1). The studies from recent past decades shows that natural resources such as oil, natural gas, diamonds and other valuable products did not guarantee economic benefits to a country (Davis and Tilton, 2005:233; Frankel, 2010:3). In many countries, the resource can be the reason for conflict, corruption and poverty (Collier and Hoeffler, 2005:624; Le Billon, 2001; Mittelman, 2017). Brunnschweiler and Bulte (2009:651) connected resources with slower economic growth, violent civil conflict and undemocratic regime types and addressed these as the dimensions of the resource curse.

3.1.3 Resource Wars

In the 1980s the term ‘Resource wars’ gets the attention of the world as a geopolitical device to explain and exacerbate renewed tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union over the control of fuel and minerals in disputed peripheries (Patey, 2010 as cited in Le Billon, 2012:12). The conventional geopolitical perspective defines resource wars ‘as armed conflicts which revolved around the “pursuit or possession of critical materials”, (Klare, 2001 as cited by Le Billon, 2012:12). It is a type of conflict (war) where violence becomes an inherent part of the political economy of resource exploitation (Le Billon, 2000:26).

Similarly, Heywood (2014:414) defines resource war as “A war that is fought to gain or retain control of resources which are important to economic development and political power”. Though the term resource war is relatively new; but the geopolitical perspective connected to resource always existed in history; even during both of the World Wars (Le Billon, 2012:51). The geopolitical perspective of resource could be seen in the 1910s when the British and German were tried to seize the oil sources of Mesopotamia and Persia as they diverted their
interest from coal to oil. Also, in 1942 when Hitler try to capture the Caucasus oil fields but failed and later destroyed it or Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor because of United States oil embargo and invasion in South East Asia for access to natural resources (Le Billon, 2012:51).

Latterly, in the post-cold war period, armed conflict characterised by a specific political ecology closely linked to the geography and political economy of natural resources (Le Billon, 2001:561). Economic agendas linked with exploitation of resources can influence the course of a conflict. Besides that, financial self-interest also motivates individual soldiers, local commanders and their political backers to sustain the conflicts. In the same way, resource wealth (financial benefits) has an impact on the international community. Due to the financial benefits from the resource wealth international community often lack cohesion, willingness or leverage to stop the conflict. In particular, access to resource work as a divisive factor among international actors (Le Billon, 2001:578). Additionally, the value or financial benefits of resources were used to win or sustain a conflict. It can be used to buy arms, commercial exchanges and many other illicit things (Le Billon, 2000:26-27).

Moreover, resource involvement (extraction or production) can change the nature of violence. For example, with extractive resources (mineral, oil, gas) violence will take a form of war between states or at least a territorial seizes. On the other hand, with productive resources (agriculture) violence will take a structural form such as coercing labour or controlling trade (Le Billon, 2000:26). Similarly, both non-renewable resources and renewable resources can provoke conflict. Non-renewable resources are apparently connected to conflict through resource abundance and renewable resources connected to conflict through resource scarcity (Koubi et al. 2014:227).

Furthermore, resource gained a new status, which is called ‘Strategic Resource’. Many countries involved in a conflict over the pursuit or possession of critical materials (Le Billon, 2004:1). As seen in the past, resources provided the mean and motive of global European expansion, the focus of interstate rivalry and strategic denial of access (Le Billon, 2004:5). Foreign interventions which may turn into any kind of armed conflicts can also occur due to the control over strategic resources such as oil or mineral deposits and to secure major commercial and strategic interests (Le Billon, 2012:44). Moreover, to get access to the resources, external actors can intervene in secessionist attempts by manipulating local political identities (Le Billon, 2012:36).
3.1.4 Intrastate Conflict

The concept of intrastate conflict is not new. After the end of the Second World War, Intrastate conflict is more frequent than Interstate conflict (SIPRI-UNESCO Handbook, 1998, as cited in Abazi, 2000:2). Though, intrastate conflict considered as a dominant form of International politics (Jackson, 2007:121). According to Yilmaz (2007:12) “The main threat to peace does not come from major inter-state confrontations any more, but from intra-state conflicts, conflicts that occur within the border of states”. The term ‘Intrastate conflict’ interchangeably used as Intrastate war, Non-intrastate war and Civil war. These all have the similar meanings but different authors in different periods addressed it differently (Jackson 2007; Sarkees and Schafer, 2000; Ramsbotham et al. 2016; Abazi, 2000; Yilmaz, 2007; UCDP, 2019).

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to study conflicts within the state; therefore, I use intrastate war, Non-intrastate war and Civil war synonymously. UCDP defines intrastate conflict as an armed confrontation between a government and a non-government party within the country’s territory. In intrastate conflict, other governments (foreign) could also be involved by supporting (sending troops) the government or the opposite sides (UCDP, 2019). Basically, intrastate conflict involves intragroup disputes between two or more ethnocultural groups which are different from each other. Here, one group feels underprivileged and try to change the situations such as cultural rights to autonomy, political separation or full independence through conflict (Yilmaz, 2007:13).

However, Intrastate conflict should not be misunderstood with the concept of Interstate conflict, which means classic war between two states (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:91). Moreover, it is essential to identify the type of conflict because international humanitarian law distinguishes between international armed conflict, internationalised armed conflict and non-international armed conflict (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:90). Ramsbotham et al. (2016:91), divided the conflict into two major categories, Interstate and Non-interstate. Further, they split Non-interstate armed conflict into three subcategories: revolution/ideology conflict, identity/secession conflict, economic/resource conflict.

Thus, a much-acclaimed category of conflict (Typology of war) also found in Sarkees and Schafer (2000:129) works. In their ‘Expanded typology of war’, they divided the Intrastate war into two categories; the civil war where the state government and non-state actor involved and inter-communal conflicts where two or more non-state government state actors engaged in
disputes. According to Sarkees et al. (2003:59), intrastate wars occurred between or among two or more groups within the internationally recognised territory of a country. Here, the state-based and non-state groups were engaged in organised military conflict with light weapons and unconventional military strategies within a single country (Jackson, 2007:121).

3.2 Analytical Framework
In this part, I explained the analytical framework ‘Vulnerability, risk and opportunity’ which was developed by Phillip Le Billon (Le Billon, 2012:24-28). Philippe Le Billon is a professor at the University of British Colombia who have conducted many types of research concerning geopolitical economy of resources. In his book Wars of Plunder: Conflicts, profits and the politics of resources, he strongly argues that ‘resource sectors influence the likelihood and course of armed conflicts’. Further, he added that some resources make wars ‘more likely, nasty and lengthy’ and on the worse side, these conflicts turn assets into liabilities (Le Billon, 2012:4).

In this analytical framework, Le Billon (2012:24) presents three arguments; “resource curse” “resource conflict” and “conflict resources”. Also, divided these three arguments into two parts, ‘Rethinking the resource curse: Conceptualising vulnerability’ and ‘Resource conflict and conflict resources: Conceptualising risk and opportunity’ to explain how resource influence war. It is mentioned below.

In the first part, Rethinking the resource curse: Conceptualising vulnerability Le Billon present the first argument “resource curse”. According to this perspective, resource dependence creates a situation which makes society more vulnerable to armed conflict through its negative impact on the economy and weak governance system. Principally, economic shocks and weak governance increase the risk of armed conflicts (Le Billon, 2012:24-25).

The second part, Resource conflict and conflict resources: Conceptualising risk and opportunity present the other two perspectives “resource conflict” and “conflict resources”. “Resource conflict” suggest that resource control and exploitation raise the risk of large-scale armed conflicts and can lead to war. It linked resources with specific conflicts such as livelihood conflicts which occurred mostly over the access of renewable resources. Also, it connected resources with occurrences of violence such as the militarisation of resource areas, pollution or labour abuses. Besides that, these occurrences of violence are primarily related to non-
renewable resources (Le Billon, 2012:26). Moreover, the “conflict resource” perspective linked resources with specific opportunities (mostly financial opportunities) to the belligerents. Some resources have financial opportunities which are more prone to armed conflicts. These resources are sustaining and motivating war than the other resources (Le Billon, 2012:27). Further, regarding the risks of generating armed conflict and creating financial opportunities for the combatant’s, ‘resource conflicts’ and ‘conflict resources’ are complementary in their respective focus (Le Billon, 2012:27). Notably, in the case of this study “resource conflict” and “conflict resources” are much related.

From the above discussion, it can be seen that resources can provide both motive (resource control and exploitation) and opportunity (economic/financial opportunities) to the actors (belligerents) for involving in a conflict. In the following figure, I summarise the analytical framework of Le Billon’s and try to visualise it in a way which will help to analysis this research objective (see figure 1). In this thesis, I use this analytical framework for the analysis of the connection between resources and conflict in the case of recent Rohingya conflict.

**Figure 1:** Analytical Framework— Vulnerability, risk and opportunity

![Analytical Framework](image)

*Source:* On the basis of Le Billon’s (2012:24-28) analytical framework ‘Vulnerability, risk and opportunity’.
4 The case of Rohingya—background history and considerable facts

The purpose of this chapter is to present the case of the Rohingya ethnic minority. It will provide some essential information about the origin of the Rohingya people, their situation under the British and Military rule, and subsequent causes of the violent incidents. Also, it will present the differences between the Rohingyas and other ethnic groups in Myanmar, which will help to understand the miserable and vulnerable condition of the Rohingya people. In order to understand the geopolitical economic perspective of the conflict, it is imperative to know about the background history and some notable facts about the Rohingya people.

4.1 Rohingya—Who are they?

The Rohingyas are an ethnic group who live in the Rakhine state of Myanmar (François and Souris, 2018; Strömberg, 2018; Martin et al., 2017). Majority of the Rohingyas are Muslim, although a small fraction of them are also Hindus (Strömberg, 2018:6). They are the second largest group in Rakhine state after the ethnic Rakhine’s (Buddhist). Rohingyas are also considered as the largest Muslim group in Myanmar (Martin et al., 2017:5; Mithun, 2018:649). Mainly, the Rohingya people live in the northern part of Rakhine state. They have a population of about 1.0 million to 1.1 million (Martin et al., 2017:5; Mithun, 2018:649). In Rakhine state, except for the Rohingyas, there is another small Muslim group live name Kaman who are among the 135 ethnic groups and also face cultural and institutional discrimination (Mon, 2018).

Moreover, the Rohingyas are the only ethnic minority group in Myanmar who face difficulties in travel, marriage, employment, education and maintaining religious rituals and structures at the same time (Goraya and Mazhar, 2016:33-34; Mithun, 2018:649; Strömberg, 2018:6). According to the World Bank report, Rohingyas are the most impoverished minority in Myanmar (François and Souris, 2018:17). Most of the Rohingyas are now living in different countries as a refugee or a displaced person, especially in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and UAE (Al Jazeera, 2018). Around 128000 Rohingya are still living in the refugee camps in the central part of Rakhine state (SIDA, 2019:5).
4.1.1 Tracing the Rohingyas from the beginning

There are many pieces of literature with the historical claims that, Rohingyas are living in Arakan (present Rakhine state) for centuries (Ware and Laoutides, 2018; Ibrahim, 2016; Parnini, 2013; Yunus, 1994; Rahman, 2015). Yunus (1994), in his book A history of Arakan: Past and present, briefly describes the history of the Rohingyas. He identified the different view of the rulers of Myanmar who claimed that Rohingyas migrated from Bangladesh. However, he ensured that Rohingyas are part of the Arakan long before the British came here (Yunus, 1994). Similar to Yunus, Ibrahim (2016:33) and François and Souris, (2018:17) also reaffirmed in their writings that Rohingyas belonged to Arakan. However, the extreme Buddhist and government of Myanmar claims that Rohingyas are the immigrants who came from Bangladesh and addressed them as latecomers, even said that the name Rohingya is a new creation, but Ibrahim (2016) tries to prove all this assertion wrong by providing extensive archival documentation in his book that shows Rohingyas reside in Arakan for centuries (Ibrahim, 2016).

Ware and Laoutides (2018:79) also in their book Myanmar’s ‘Rohingya’ Conflict briefly describes the historical narratives of the Muslims (who are now mostly considered as Rohingya people). According to those narratives, the Muslims were migrated and settled in this region into four waves. The first wave was started by the Arab Traders and Settlers when they came into this region for trading, from sixth to fourteenth centuries. The emerge of Maruk-U dynasty in 1430, was considered as the second wave of Muslim migration. The third wave of Muslim migration took place due to Portuguese slave trading, especially when the Maruk-U kings get dependent on the Portuguese mercenaries for security and expansions. Further, the last wave (17th century) of Muslims came into this region before the colonial period, when the Mughal Emperors son Shah Shuja sought asylum in Arakan in 1660 (Ware and Laoutides, 2018:78-88). Later, in 1785 the Burmese king conquered Arakan and executed thousands of Arakanese men and deported a large portion of them as labours to central Burma. This massacre made Arakan a scarcely populated area before the British came here (Rahman, 2015:291).
4.1.2 **Rohingyas under the British colony and Military rule**

The British first conquered Arakan in 1826 and by 1885, they captured the whole of Burma\(^5\) (Ibrahim, 2016:26; Yunus, 1994:82). They ruled Burma as a province of Indian empire till 1937, and after that, from 1937 to 1948 (Burma got independence in 1948 from the British) it was ruled as a self-governing colony (Ullah, 2011:140). For their own benefits, the East India Company\(^6\) annexed Arakan state with the Bengali administration, which eventually migrated many Bengalis to Arakan and many Arakanese to Chittagong, a division of Bangladesh (Rahman, 2015:291).

Further, the present conflict can be traced from the Second World War when the Rohingyas remained loyal to the British army, and the Burmese sided with the invading Japanese. Clashes between Rohingyas and Burmese have occurred ever since (Rahman, 2015:290-293). The Buddhist killed thousands of Rohingya Muslims in 1942 (Goraya and Mazhar, 2016:29). Moreover, in 1948, when Burma became independent from the British rule, tension escalated between the Burmese led government and the Rohingyas (François and Souris, 2018:18). Especially in 1962, when Burma Socialist Party seized power, they dismantled Rohingya social and political organisations (Ullah, 2011:143). Before 1962, Rohingyas were the citizen of Burma. Even they served in the government offices and military (Martin et al., 2017). The civilian government headed by the Prime Minister U. Nu listed 144 ethnic groups on that time, and Rohingyas were one of those groups. But after General Ne Win seized power, the list turned into 135, which excluded some ethnic minorities, including the Rohingyas (Ullah, 2016:286).

In particular, the sufferings and displacement of Rohingya people first started since 1978, when General Ne Win launched ‘Operation Dragon’\(^7\) to wipe out illegal foreigners. It forced almost 200000 Rohingya people to flee from their homes (Rahman, 2015:292; François and Souris, 2018:18; Martin et al., 2017:5). Also, in 1991-92, over a quarter million people took shelter in Bangladesh. These military campaigns were targeted against the civilians, and widespread killings, rapes were conducted during these operations (Uddin, 2015:67; Parnini, 2013:281, Rahman, 2015). The primary objective was to scare the Muslims and forced them to leave Arakan (Yunus, 1994:118).

\(^5\) Burma, presently known as Myanmar. In 1989, the military government change the name from Burma to Myanmar. In this study we used both names interchangeably.

\(^6\) Mainly the British came into this region through the East India Company in the purpose of trade.

\(^7\) Operation Dragon also known as Operation Naga Min or Dragon king. A military operation by the Tatmadaw force against the illegal immigrants (Rahman, 2015:292; François and Souris, 2018:18; Martin et al., 2017:5).
4.1.3 Recent violent conflicts

The conflict took a new violent shape in 2012, when a Rakhine Buddhist woman was raped and killed by three Muslim men on May 27 and subsequently ten Muslim men were killed in a passenger bus on June 3 (Rahman, 2015; Ware and Laoutides, 2018; Kipgen, 2014; Ibrahim, 2016). Eventually, riots broke out, and it turned into communal violence between the Muslims and Buddhists, which eventually killed 192 people and destroyed 8614 houses. Also, 140000 Muslim population and around 20000 Rakhine and many Kaman Muslims were internally displaced. According to the official figures, 86 per cent of the victims were the Muslims (Ware and Laoutides, 2018:40). Moreover, Ibrahim (2016:81), described the 2012 violence as ethnic cleansing and an attempt to drive the Rohingya out of the country or at least to the refugee camps.

The mass exodus happened in 2016 and 2017, when the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a radical Islamic militant group started fighting against the Myanmar government forces (Ware and Laoutides, 2018:47-58; Selth, 2018:3; Strömberg, 2018:7; Martin et al., 2017:4). On October 9 2016, ARSA attacked three border outpost and killed nine police officers. As a response, the government labelled ARSA as a terrorist organisation and started ‘area clearance operation’, which forced 87000 (approximately) Rohingya people to leave their houses. Also, on August 25, 2017, ARSA attacked the military security facilities and killed dozens of military personnel. This time the ‘area clearance operation’ forced approximately 600000 Rohingyas to flee from their houses (Martin et al., 2017:1).

4.2 Rohingyas and the other ethnic groups in Myanmar

Myanmar is a multi-ethnic country where the intrastate conflict between the government and ethnic groups are widespread. It is not that the Rohingyas are the only victim of government and military force's oppression, other ethnic groups are also facing discrimination and oppression (Stokke et al., 2018:46, HRW, 2019). The International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar stated the oppression and discrimination which include murder, torture, sexual slavery, extermination and forced deportation by the military forces in Kachin, Shan and Rakhine state since 2011 (HRC, 2018). Mainly, the ethnic groups of Myanmar are fighting for self-determination, political representation and ethnic equality (Stokke et al., 2018:46). Moreover, lack of infrastructure, high rate of poverty, a lower rate of education, land confiscation and unfair distribution of revenues from natural resources are also identified as
reasons for intrastate conflicts (Kraas, Spohner & Myint, 2017 cited in Stokke et al., 2018:46). Despite having all these common problems like the other ethnic groups, the Rohingya people have some additional problems which make their life more vulnerable and miserable.

4.2.1 Denial of Citizenship

The Rohingya people are not the citizens of Myanmar like the other 135 ethnic groups. The 1982 Citizenship Act excluded the Rohingyas from citizenship (Cheesman, 2017; Holliday, 2014; Haque, 2017). They faced severe discrimination in every step of their life. Even, they got restrictions on free movement, getting married, having children, higher education, and so many. Also, their land has been confiscated by the government and military force, and Rohingya men were forced to works as a labourer (Strömberg, 2018:6; Goraya and Mazhar, 2016:33-35). Additionally, they are not accepted by the local Buddhist community. The Rakhine Buddhist believe that the increasing number of Muslims in this area is a risk to their identity, they perceive the Muslim culture as a threat to the Buddhist culture (Goraya and Mazhar, 2016:34,37).

4.2.2 Ethnic Armed Organizations

There are twenty-one recognised Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO) presents in Myanmar (Burma News International, 2016:29). Some of these ethnic armed groups have a ceasefire agreement with the government (Stokke et al., 2018:23-27). Bauer, Shortell, & Delesgues (2016) and Woods (2011) remarks that, to stop the violence, ceasefire agreements have been made between the EAO and government; however, those ceasefire agreements have been accompanied by intensified natural resource extraction and large industrial projects (cited in Stokke et al. 2018:46-47). Sadan (2016) and Woods (2011), describes ceasefire agreement as ‘ceasefire capitalism’, where the military commanders, business tycoons and EAO engaged in the exploitation of natural resources (cited in Stokke et al. 2018:47).

Moreover, in October 2015 the government signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with eight of the EAO and left thirteen other groups from the agreement (SIDA, 2019:2; Burma News International 2016:29). Notably, some of these ethnic armed groups have the ability to wage war against the centre (Cited in Parnini, 2013:282). Particularly, Karen and Kachin ethnic armed groups have enough power to act as an alternative system of local governance and can challenge the central authority (François and Bethsabée, 2018:12). In 2018, armed conflicts
broke out between the Myanmar military force and EAO in Kachin, Shan and Karen states stoked by large scale development projects and the dispute over natural resources (HRW, 2019). Also, the Arakan Army (AA) and Arakan Liberation Army (ALA) which represents the ethnic Rakhine Buddhist, are also fighting against the Burmese military for their self-determinations (Ware and Laoutides, 2018:41; Martin et al., 2017:18).

On the other hand, the Rohingya people have no separatist demand. All they want is to go back to Myanmar and citizenship (Fair, 2018:76). Also, the newly emerged militant group ARSA is not as powerful as the other ethnic groups (see figure 2). They conducted occasional small military attacks on the Burmese army (François and Bethsabée, 2018:19; Ware and Laoutides, 2018:47-58; Head, 2017). Until now ARSA attacked two times, one in October 2016 when they attack the border outpost and killed nine police officer and the second time in on August 2017 when they attack the military personnel and killed dozen of the officers (Martin et al., 2017:4). According to the government reports the August 2017 attack, they use knives and homemade bombs (BBC, 2017). Moreover, to capture the members of ARSA, Myanmar government labelled them as a terrorist group and started ‘area clearance operation’ which ultimately forced millions of Rohingya people to flee in Bangladesh (Selth, 2018:3; Strömberg, 2018:7; Martin et al., 2017:4, BBC, 2017b). According to the Independent International Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar, “The manner in which the operations were conducted would have required that all Rohingya were “terrorists” and a legitimate target, necessitating the destruction of entire villages and communities. In reality, and as known to the Tatmadaw, ARSA posed a limited threat” (HRC, 2018:363).
Figure 2: Ethnic Armed Organizations in Myanmar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic armed organisations</th>
<th>Area of operation</th>
<th>Estimated strength</th>
<th>Ceasefire?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restoration Council of Shan State/ Shan State</td>
<td>Southern Shan State</td>
<td>8000+</td>
<td>Signatory of the National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army-South (RCSS/SSA-S)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ceasefire Agreement (NCA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)</td>
<td>Northern Rakhine</td>
<td>60-100</td>
<td>Signatory of the NCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chin National Front (CNF)</td>
<td>North Western chin State; Sagaing Region</td>
<td>200+</td>
<td>Signatory of the NCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Karen Buddhist/benevolent Army (DKBA)</td>
<td>Eastern Karen State</td>
<td>1500+</td>
<td>Signatory of the NCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC)</td>
<td>Central Karen State</td>
<td>≈200</td>
<td>Signatory of the NCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen National Union (KNU)</td>
<td>Karen and Mon States</td>
<td>5000+</td>
<td>Signatory of the NCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pa-O National Liberation Organisation (PNL0)</td>
<td>Southern Shan State</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Signatory of the NCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan State Progress Party/ Shan State Army-North</td>
<td>Northern Shan State</td>
<td>8000+</td>
<td>Not signatory of ceasefire-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SSPP/SSA-N)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ongoing fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO)</td>
<td>Kachin State</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>No ceasefire agreement-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>going-ongoing fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arakan Army (AA)</td>
<td>Rakhine State</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>No ceasefire agreement-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ongoing fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar National Democracy Army (MNDA)</td>
<td>Kokang Region, North eastern Shan State</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>No ceasefire agreement-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ongoing fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)</td>
<td>Shan State</td>
<td>4500</td>
<td>No ceasefire agreement-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ongoing fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Wa State Army/Party (UWSA)</td>
<td>Wa self- administered division, Eastern</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>No ceasefire- no active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shan State</td>
<td></td>
<td>fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)</td>
<td>Karenni State</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Bilateral ceasefire in 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mon State Party (NHS)</td>
<td>Mon State</td>
<td>800-2000</td>
<td>No ceasefire agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army</td>
<td>Rakhine State</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>No ceasefire agreement-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ongoing active fighting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: François and Bethsabée, 2018:14

4.2.3 Repatriation

Like the Rohingya people (around one million) who mainly took shelter in Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2019c), there are also many other ethnic groups in Myanmar who also took shelter in different countries for their safety. The ethnic Karen and Karenni group who live in the south-eastern part of Myanmar are among some of them. They took shelter in Thailand; and as of March 2019, around 96802 Karen and Karenni refugee live in nine camps in four provinces of the Thai-Myanmar border (UNHCR, 2019d). Moreover, from 2016, with the help of UNHCR, the first repatriation of the Myanmar refugees began with Thailand (Lefevre, 2016). Following that in 2018, the second group of refugees, and in 2019, the third group of refugees went back to Myanmar from Thailand (Zaw, 2018; UNHCR News, 2019). Moreover, in April 2019, Myanmar and Thailand agreed on the repatriation of the fourth group (Xinhua, 2019).

According to UNHCR, the conditions of the south-eastern part of Myanmar allowed them to facilitate the voluntary return process of the refugees from Thailand. On the other hand, the
conditions of the Rakhine state is not favourable for the Rohingya refugees to return (UNHCR News, 2018). Also, the Rohingya people are not agreed to go back into Myanmar voluntarily until the Myanmar government guaranteed their security and changed the discriminatory laws (Wake and Yu, 2018:2; Martin et al., 2017:1). The conditions (restricted movement, forced labour, and arbitrary arrest) of the remaining Rohingyas in the Rakhine state mainly demotivated the refugees to return (Yarnell and Sullivan, 2019). Further, the government of Bangladesh and the government of Myanmar agreed on a repatriation deal in October 2017 which supposed to be implemented from November 2018, but after the denial of Rohingyas and opposed by many international organisations including UNHCR and Rohingya refugee Committee; Bangladesh government stop the initiative (ICG, 2018:2-3, HRW, 2019).

Furthermore, the Rohingyas are extremely poor and illiterate. Between the various ethnic groups in Myanmar, the living conditions of the Rohingyas are the worst (see annex II), (Mithun, 2018:649; OCHA, 2013: 7). Compare to the Rohingyas, the other ethnic groups (Karen, Shan, Chin, Mon) in Myanmar are well organised, and they can maintain a strong international connection with their respective diaspora communities. On the other hand, the Rohingyas are not organised and lack international networking and channel to combine issues to their community, which ultimately isolated them from the international community (Imtiaz, 2001, cited in Parnini 2013:282).
5 Findings

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented descriptively. The findings are divided into three parts. At first, it presents an overview of the Rakhine state along with the geographical location, natural resources and economic opportunities that vested in Rakhine state. Secondly, it presents the geopolitical economic interests of the GoM, Military force, China and India. At last, it presents the growing number of violence and destruction situation that occurred in the Rakhine state.

5.1 Overview of Rakhine state

Rakhine state (also known as Arakan until 1989) is located in the western part of Myanmar. It shares borders with Bangladesh in the northwest, Chin State in the north, Ayeyarwady Region in the east, and the Bay of Bengal in the western and southern border. It covers the area of 36778 square kilometres (14200 square miles) and consists of five districts, seventeen townships and three sub-townships. Sittwe is the capital of the state. Estimated population of Rakhine state is 3.3 million (before the forced displacement of Rohingya people), among them the Rakhine Buddhist are the majority but other ethnic and religious groups are also living in this state (Mithun, 2018:652; MIC, 2019:53; ENAC, 2017:15; Martin et al., 2017:5).

**Figure 3**: Geographical location of Rakhine state and Myanmar.

*Source: Rakhine state on left (MIMU, 2015) and Myanmar on right (Selth, 2018:7).*
5.1.1 Geographical location of the Rakhine state and its importance

The Rakhine state holds a unique geographical position which connects South Asia to South-east Asian countries. It carries above 360 miles long strategic coast, which gives passage to the Indian ocean. Additionally, this state provides a political and economic corridor to Myanmar for connecting with the countries of Africa, Middle-east and India (MIC, 2019:37). This state is located near the Malacca Strait, which viewed as one of the most strategic natural waterways. It has a critical strategic and commercial link between the Middle-east and East Asia. Also, it is a strategic supply route for the USA as it connects the US military bases of the Pacific and the Middle-east (Steinberg, 2010 cited in Goraya and Mazhar, 2016:27). Moreover, this strategic geographical location on the Bay of Bengal and abundance of resources make Rakhine state an economically strategic area, which creates investing competition between the international community (ENAC, 2017:56).

![Figure 4: Geographical location of Rakhine state.](image)


5.1.2 Natural Resources and economic opportunities in the Rakhine state

Geographically the Rakhine state is not situated in the heartland of Myanmar. Despite that, the state provides a lot in terms of the country’s overall economy. It is only possible because the state holds large economic potentials with abundance in natural resources such as oil, natural gas and maritime resources (MIC, 2019:40). According to the US Energy Information Administration, Myanmar has estimated 10 trillion cubic feet of proven gas reserves and an estimated 50 million barrels of proven oil reserves (UKTI, 2015:3). In total, 105 oil and gas
fields are discovered in Myanmar, 54 onshore and 51 offshore fields. Notably, among those 105 oil and gas fields 25 oil and gas fields (23 offshore oil and gas fields and two onshore oil and gas fields) are situated in the region of Rakhine state (MIC, 2019:99; EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018:16). The Shwe gas project which situated in Rakhine state is considered as one of the four offshore gas projects which bring the most income to Myanmar in export. The daily production rate of the Shwe gas field is 500 million cubic feet (EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018:17). Besides natural resources, there are vast economic opportunities for investors in many sectors in the Rakhine state. For example, recently, Myanmar Survey Research (MSR) named some potential business sectors for the investors within the Rakhine state. Some of them are fisheries and livestock, agriculture, manufacture, energy and many others (MIC, 2019:13). In the past, the state’s economy was dependent on agriculture and fisheries only. However, the recent discovery of oil and gas bring a massive amount of foreign investment in the state (ENAC, 2017:15).

The situation became changed, especially after 2008, when the Constitution was amended, and a few investment laws has been passed and modified such as the Foreign Investment Law 2012, the Myanmar Citizen Law 2013 and the Myanmar Special Economic Zone Law 2014. Further, when the newly elected NLD government came into power in 2016, they passed the Myanmar Investment Law, which updated both the Foreign Investment Law 2012 and Myanmar Citizen Law 2013 (ENAC, 2017:15). Besides that, the EU and US lifted economic sanctions which make the way clearer for the investors on investing within Myanmar (Garbo, 2016; Hadar, 1998; Martin et al., 2017:22). The effect can be monitored through the oil sectors. Before 2012 only a few international oil companies were operating in Myanmar because the US imposed economic sanctions (Vakulchuk, 2017 cited in Stokke, K. et al., 2018:39). However, after lifting the sanctions in 2012, companies like British Gas, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, ENI, Oil India, Ophir, Petro Vietnam, Shell, Statoil, Total and Woodside all came into Myanmar (NRGI, 2016 cited in Stokke, K. et al., 2018:39).

Furthermore, there are also some significant projects (Special Economic Zone, Trading Zone, Industrial Zone) running in the Rakhine state, include two international projects. These projects, on the one hand, create substantial investment opportunities for the investors and on the other hand, have substantial economic benefits to the domestic and international actors (see figure 5) (MIC, 2019: 103-112).
5.2 Geopolitical economic interests of GoM, Military force, China and India

5.2.1 Government of Myanmar’s and Military Force’s interest
Myanmar is a unitary parliamentary system of government with seven states and seven regions (The World Factbook, 2019). The amended 2008 Constitution makes the country a multiparty democratic system, but the military still holds substantial political power (Selth, 2018:11; The Economist, 2017). This amended Constitution contains several provisions that safeguard continued power for the military (Egreteau 2014; Williams 2014, cited in Stokke, K. et al., 2018:9). The military gets several key positions in the government such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Border Affairs and Ministry of Defence (Stokke, K. et al., 2018:14).

In terms of controlling and managing the natural resources from all the ethnic regions, the Central government has the foremost authority. For example, the government controlled the natural gas of Rakhine state and Tanintharyi Region and the entire forests of the country. Similarly, the hydropower that produces in Karenni (Kayah) state, gemstones from Shan state, jade and gold from Kachin state are also directly controlled by the Central government (ENAC, 2017:13). According to the 2008 Constitution, Article 37 (a-b), “The Union is the ultimate
owner of all the lands and all natural resources above and below the ground, above and beneath the water and in the atmosphere in the Union. The Union shall enact necessary law to supervise extraction and utilization of State-owned natural resources by economic forces.” (ENAC, 2017:15). According to the findings of the Asia Foundation, state and regional government do not have precise control over the resources. They only have the management power and tax over some resources such as salt and forest products (ENAC, 2017:17).

Moreover, the Rakhine state is one of those states which earned a lot of foreign revenues for Myanmar as a whole through its natural resources and different large-scale investment projects. Despite the fact, Rakhine is the second poorest and least developed after Chin state (François and Souris, 2018:17; ENAC, 2017:55; Mithun, 2018:652). The government control all the gas and oil fields by Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) under the Ministry of Electricity and Energy governed (ENAC, 2017:17, 56). Also, the officials of MOGE are former and current generals and military officers connected to Tatmadaw. They are in charge of exploration, production and distribution of the resources. MOGE is also blamed for land grabbing and threatening the farmers for the Myanmar-China oil and gas pipeline project (ENAC, 2017:58-59).

Furthermore, the report “Natural resources of Myanmar (Burma)” highlighted that the military force (Tatmadaw) plays a vital role in the extraction, production and sale of natural resources. The Tatmadaw also monopolises and dominates the MOGE. Moreover, the officers of Tatmadaw under the Ministry of Defence involved in the resource extraction and received illicit benefits from the resources (ENAC, 2017:14). Sassen (2017) also identified similar things. Her research, based on the reports of “Displacement and Dispossession: Forced Migration and Land Rights in Burma” and “Commercial Agriculture Expansion in Myanmar: Links to Deforestation, Conversion Timber, and Land Conflicts” shows that the military force is involved in the land grabbing from the smallholders since 1990s. According to her findings “At the time of the 2012 attacks, the land allocated to large projects had increased by 170% between 2010 and 2013. By 2012 the law governing land was changed to favour large corporate acquisitions”. She added that persecution of the Rohingyas and other ethnic minorities could be influenced by the military economic interests rather than ethnic and religious issue (Sassen, 2017).
Notably, as an underdeveloped state, there is job unavailability in Rakhine state, and local Rakhine people have a perception that the Rohingya people are stealing their jobs (Mithun, 2018:653). They perceived the Rohingya people as an economic threat as in the past Rohingyas dominated on the small local business such as fisheries, produce markets, informal financial services, trading persons (Goraya and Mazhar, 2016:37). The Burmese elite perceived the Rohingya people as an economic burden and competition for current jobs and businesses (Wolf, 2015).

5.2.2 China’s interest

China is the largest investors in Myanmar. Since 1988/89 to 2018, 297 Chinese enterprises invested around 20,353.528 million USD, which is 25.92% of the total FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) of Myanmar (MIC, 2019:27). Also, China is the largest arms supplier (2014-18) to Myanmar too (Pieter, D. et al. 2019:6; Asrar, S. 2017). China is always supportive of the Myanmar regime as they need safeguards for its massive investments (Ibrahim, 2016:73; Joy, 2018). It can be seen from the past, that Chinese investment projects fueling disputes about land ownership across Myanmar. The escalation of conflicts and tensions in Kachin and Shan states also linked with Chinese infrastructure projects. Moreover, the new perception of China towards Myanmar is that they see Myanmar ‘as the bridge to the Bay of Bengal and the waters beyond’ (Ibrahim 2016:73). China’s main interest in Rakhine is economical, and they are doing many projects in the Rakhine state (Joy, 2018:2).

5.2.2.1 Belt and Road Initiative

In 2013, China’s president Xi Jinping announced the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt and the sea-based 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which combinedly known as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or One Belt, One Road (OBOR) (Yu, 2017:117). China already allocated (reportedly) more than 900 billion US dollar through the Chinese and International financial institutions to many infrastructure projects associated with the BRI and Myanmar is a big part of it (Yu, 2017:117, 120; Blanchard, 2018:329). The sea-based Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) will improve China’s resource security by enhancing its access to raw materials (Blanchard, 2018:333). Mainly, China perceived South-east Asia as an important linkage point and anchor for achieving the BRI (Yu, 2017:122). A large portion of China’s BRI projects is directly related to the Rakhine state. Specifically, in Kyaukpyu (a coastal town in Rakhine state), China built a deep-sea water port, a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and Oil and Gas
Pipeline. Also, there are more upcoming projects in the queue such as China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), Kunming-Kyaukpyu railway project. All these projects are part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (Blanchard, 2018:333, 339; Martin et al., 2017:19-20).

5.2.2.2 Oil and Gas field and Myanmar-China Oil and Gas Pipeline

Rakhine state generated a high amount of foreign revenue for Myanmar by exporting oil and natural gas to China (ENAC, 2017:55). In Myanmar, Chinese companies extracting oil and gas from five specific blocks AD-1, AD-6, AD-8, M-10 and PSC-F. Among those five blocks, three are situated in Rakhine state. China’s state-owned company China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) extracted oil and gas from the block AD-1, AD-6 and AD-8 (MIC, 2019:99; EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018: 39-44). Also, China built an oil and gas pipeline and twelve mega oil storage tanks in Kyaukphyu, Rakhine State to store and transfer the oil that will be bought from the Middle East and Africa (ENAC, 2017:56).

Figure 6: Myanmar-China Oil and Gas pipeline

![Myanmar-China Oil and Gas Pipeline](source: Shwe Gas Movement cited in ENAC, 2017:56)

The Myanmar-China Oil and Gas Pipeline (also known as Sino-Myanmar pipeline) is originated from Rakhine state. Around 770 kilometres (480 miles) long this pipeline started from Kyaukphyu, Rakhine state of western Myanmar and ended in Kunming, Yunnan Province of southern China. The pipeline goes through in total 21 townships of Rakhine state, Magway Region, Mandalay Region, and Shan States (ENAC, 2017:56; Reuters, 2017; Beining; ENAC,
The oil pipeline can transport 22 million tons of oil, and natural gas pipeline can transport 12 billion cubic meter gas annually (Beining, 2017). Moreover, this pipeline saves a lot of energy import cost for China (ENAC, 2017:59). As China imported a massive amount of crude oil every year from the Middle-east and Africa, this pipeline will help to supply the crude oil from the Middle-east and Africa to China without using the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. It is a significant part of China’s Belt and Road Initiatives (Funairole and Hillman 2018:4; South China Morning Post, 2017).

To build this oil and gas pipeline, China’s state-owned oil and gas corporation CNPC and Myanmar government first signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2008. It is a thirty-year joint venture between CNPC and MOGE (ENAC, 2017:57-58). In total, four countries (China, Myanmar, South Korea and India) and six companies were involved in this project. These all countries and companies together established two individual companies named SEAOP and SEAGP, to build this oil and gas pipeline. Notably, the Chinese CNPC owns the majority of share (SEAGP 50.9000% and SEAOP 50.9%) in both of these two companies (ENAC, 2017:59).

5.2.2.3 SEZ and Deep-Sea port in Kyaukphyu and CMEC and others

The Kyaukphyu SEZ is situated on the Ramree Island, south part of Kyaukphyu town in Rakhine State. The first phase of this project includes a deep-sea port, industrial park and a residential area (MIC, 2019:103). China’s state-owned company China International Trust Investment Corporation (CITIC) got the tender of making the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and a deep-sea port in 2015 (Lee and Aung, 2017). The Kyaukphyu deep-sea port project is part of China’s Maritime Silk Road Initiative, which also includes the port of Gwadar in Pakistan; Hambantota in Sri Lanka in large (Funairole and Hillman 2018:2; Green, 2018:1). The estimated value of the port project is 7.3 billion, and the SEZ is 2.7 billion USD. According to the deal, CITIC will build the port and run the project for 50 years with a possible extension of another 25 years (Poling, 2018:5).

Furthermore, China also signed an agreement with Myanmar to build 1700 kilometres (nearly) long China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), which will connect China’s landlocked Yunnan province through Mandalay to Kyaukphyu and Yangon (Lwin, 2018). Myanmar’s state councillor Aung San Suu Ki and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed in 2017 to build this corridor (Poling, 2018:5). Though, in 2013 when China announced the Belt and Road Initiative
(BRI), it mentioned creating the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC) however, in the recent Belt and Road Forums (BRF) meeting BCIMEC is not included in the list of BRI’s project (The Times of India, 2019).

5.2.3 India’s interest
India maintains a close relationship with Myanmar, especially after 2011, when Myanmar entered into the path of democracy, the relationship between the two-neighbour countries got much better (Saint-Mézard, 2016:185). Myanmar’s transition to democracy ease several difficulties (withdrawal of economic sanctions) and create new opportunities, and since then Myanmar becomes a significant trading opportunity for India (Ibrahim, 2016:73; Dutta, 2018:3). Although like China, India is not the largest investor in Myanmar, but India also invested a considerable amount (from 1988/89 to 2018 is 763.567 million USD) in Myanmar (MIC, 2019:27). Moreover, Indian companies holding stakes in the Shwe gas field in Rakhine state and plans to build a cross-border pipeline (Yhome, 2018:3). Also, Indian companies are extracting oil and gas from four offshore blocks YEB, M-17, M-18, M-4 and three onshore blocks PSC-I, EP-3, PSC-B2 (EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018: 39-44). According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India is also Myanmar’s one of the top arms suppliers. They sell military aircraft, artillery, naval vessels and much other combat types of equipment to the military force of Myanmar (Choudhury, 2019; Asrar, 2017).

5.2.3.1 Act East Policy
In 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the ‘Act East Policy’ in the ASEAN summit in Myanmar. This announcement came just one year after China’s 2013 BRI’s announcement. Act East Policy is mainly driven by economic and security interests and it mainly modified the 1992’s ‘Look East Policy’ which only focused on the economic interests and only in Southeast Asia (Saint-Mézard, 2016:178; Palit, 2016:1; Sajjanhar, 2016:1; Martin et al., 2017:19-20). Whereas, with the Act East Policy, India wants to create close relationships with the ASEAN countries as well as the other Asia Pacific countries. Also, it will integrate the North Eastern Region of India. Remarkably, Myanmar is at the centre of the current Indian governments ‘Act East’ trade policy and holds an essential geostrategic position in India’s vision of ties with ASEAN states (Mohan 2017:103; Sajjanhar, 2016:2; Ramya, 2018). Therefore, to fulfil this vision, India already started and developed many projects such as the The Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway,
5.2.3.2 Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project

The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project is strategically important for both the governments of India and Myanmar. This project includes shipping, inland water and road transport. Moreover, India is funding this project (MIC, 2019:107). It will connect the port of Kolkata in India and the port of Sittwe in Rakhine. India already developed the Sittwe port; and from Sittwe port, it will continue to Mizoram, India by road (Sajjanhar, 2016:3). The project started in 2008 and presents a massive opportunity for both India and ASEAN countries (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region; Sajjanhar, 2016:3). The Government of India’s purpose of doing this project is to create a transport connection between India’s eastern littoral and landlocked Northeast region through Myanmar (Saint-Mézard, 2016:178).

Figure 7: Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport project

Source: MIC, 2019:107

5.2.3.3 India–Myanmar–Thailand highway and Rhi–Tiddim and Rhi–Falan Roads

India is also building and improving the India–Myanmar–Thailand trilateral highway which will connect the Tamu–Kalewa–Kalemyo Road also known as the ‘Friendship Road’. The approximate length of this trilateral highway is 1400 kilometres. It will link the Northeast region of India with South-east Asia through Myanmar and Thailand. Also, it is expected to boost trade and commerce in the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (Ziipao, 2018:481-482; Sajjanhar,
2016:2). Moreover, India is building and upgrading the Rhi–Tiddim (agreed in 2010 to build this road at the cost of $60 million) and Rhi–Falam roads in Myanmar which will connect the Mizoram state with Rih (Rihkahwdar) in Myanmar (Ziipao, 2018:482).

Along with vast economic interests, there are many other geopolitical concerns presents which urge India to engaged closely with Myanmar. India has both a competitive and, in some cases, conflictual relationship with China. India always worried about Chinese expansion in its backyard (Fair, 2018:73). In 1962, these two countries involved in a war over the border issue at Arunachal Pradesh. Also, they compete over political influence, hydrocarbon sources, sea lanes access, commercial markets and business opportunities in East Africa and Asia. Besides, China always supported and backed Pakistan, for example, at UN sanctions over terrorist outrages in India (Fair: 2018:73-74). Also, China built several ports nearby Indian territory such as Gwadar in Pakistan (part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Hambantota in Sri Lanka; and Kyaukpyu in Myanmar (Funaiole and Hillman 2018:2; Kanwal, 2018:12). Especially, India perceived the BRI’s flagship project China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) as a breach to their sovereignty which connects China’s Xinjiang autonomous region with Pakistan’s Baluchistan province and runs through the contested territory of Kashmir (Pant and Passi, 2017:89; Dutta, 2018:1). As a protest to China’s CMEC, India boycotted both of the Belt and Road Forums (BRF) meeting in 2017 and 2019 (The Times of India, 2019).

5.3 Increase of violence and destruction of Rohingya villages in Rakhine state

5.3.1 The increasing numbers of violence in the Rakhine state
From the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) database, the number of State-Based Violence, Non-state violence and One-sided violence all over Myanmar, including the Rakhine state are presented below.

5.3.1.1 State-Based Violence
Concerning the State-based violence in the Rakhine state (figure 8) from 1989 to 2009 (left side map), over twenty years, the number of violence was recorded 50 and the actors who involved in these outbreaks of violence were the Government of Myanmar and ALP (Arakan Liberation Party), Government of Myanmar and RSO (Rohingya Solidarity Organization). Whereas in the other states and regions, the number of violence was much higher than the Rakhine state.
On the other hand, the situation gets reversed from 2010 to 2017 (right side map). In only seven years, the number of State-based violence increased to 476. In this period, GoM and ALP, GoM and RSO, GoM and ARSA were involved in those acts of violence. However, in most of the other states and regions, the number of violence declined compared to the previous periods (UCDP Database).

**Figure 8:** State-based violence (1989-2009) and (2010-2017)

Source: UCDP Database.

### 5.3.1.2 Non-state violence

In the matter of non-state violence (figure 9) in the Rakhine state, it can be seen that from 1989 to 2009 (left side map), the number of acts of violence reported was 39. On the other hand, from 2010 to 2017 in seven years it increased to 179 (right side map). On the contrary, in most of the other states and regions, the number of acts of violence declined significantly from 2010 to 2017. In both periods, the violence occurred between the Buddhist and Muslims in the Rakhine state.
5.3.1.3 One-sided violence

The number of one-sided violence (figure 10) recorded in Rakhine state from 1989 to 2009 (left side map), was 291 between the Government of Myanmar and Civilians. Notably, in these twenty years, the number of violence in the other states and regions were much higher than the Rakhine state.

However, the situation changed dramatically from 2010 to 2017 (right side map). In this seven year, the number of violence raised to 1156 in Rakhine state between the Government of Myanmar and Civilians, ARSA and Civilians. Contrarily, on the other states and regions, the number of violence decreased significantly.
As can be seen from the UCDP database, that compared to the other states and regions in Myanmar, the number of violence in Rakhine state has increased significantly over the last decades. All types of violence in the Rakhine state was much lesser than the other states and regions from 1989 to 2009 in 20 years; however, the situation changed dramatically only in seven years from 2010 to 2017.

### 5.3.2 Destruction of Rohingya villages in the Rakhine state

Many organisations reported that, since 2016, many Rohingya villages in Rakhine state has been burned down and destroyed intentionally. Especially, it has been burned down and destroyed starting from the period of the ‘clearance operation’ against ARSA by the military forces on October 2016 and August 2017. The security forces carried out extensive measures (burning and demolishing) in a deliberated and targeted manner to razed the Rohingyas homes, mosques and shops. (Amnesty International, 2018:4; HRW, 2016; Wells, 2018). The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar provided the list of Tatmadaw officers who were responsible for atrocities during the 2017 ‘clearance operation’ (see annex V) (HRC, 2018:390-391). As well, Human Rights Watch identified from only October 2016 to December 2016 in these three months, 1500 buildings have been destroyed. The Myanmar
government and military force blamed the militants for burning down those villages, on the other hand, Human Rights Watch’s Asia director Brad Adams said: “The satellite imagery and eyewitness interviews clearly point the finger at the military for setting these buildings ablaze.” Further, he added, “It’s difficult to believe that militants burned down over 300 buildings in Wa Peik over a one-month period while Burmese security forces stood there and watched,” (HRW, 2016).

Significantly, the UNOSAT satellite image-based analysis, which mainly focused on Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Rathedaung township revealed that among the 993 villages and towns in these three townships, 392 villages and towns (40%) were affected, and estimated 37700 structures were destroyed. Among those villages, 134 villages and towns destroyed less than 50%, 80 villages and towns more than 50% and 178 villages and towns eradicated completely (see table 1 and annex IV) (UNOSAT 2018:7).

Table 1: Number of affected villages and towns and estimated destroyed structures and level of destruction between 25 August 2017 and 18 March 2018.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Total number of villages and towns (MIMU list)</th>
<th>Number of affected villages and towns (MIMU list)</th>
<th>% of villages affected</th>
<th>Estimated destroyed structures</th>
<th>Less than 50 % destroyed</th>
<th>More than 50% destroyed</th>
<th>Completely destroyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buthidaung</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maungdaw</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>31,300</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rathedaung</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37,700</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNOSAT 2018:7

Noticably, Myanmar authorities conducted large operations by using bulldozers to clear the burned villages. The satellite images discovered the signs of bulldozing or other types of terrain clear operations on the 78 (approximately) out of 392 affected villages, and large-scale bulldozing on the entire destroyed villages (UNOSAT, 2018:10-11). The human rights
advocates and the remaining Rohingya people in Rakhine state believe that the government was destroying the crime scenes before any credible investigation can occur. They were also destroying the remnants of the Rohingya culture to make it nearly impossible for them to return (Amnesty International, 2018:4; The Guardian 2018).

Moreover, there are signs of construction of new infrastructures (see annex IV). Both the UNOSAT and Amnesty International report revealed new infrastructures including houses, security force bases and large permanent structures in the previous destroyed Rohingya villages (UNOSAT, 2018:11; Amnesty International, 2018:3; Lewis, 2018). Amnesty International found new security force bases (under construction) in at least three places, two in Maungdaw Township and one in Buthidaung Township. In Buthidaung Township, the remaining Rohingyas were forced to leave their houses as the township authority confiscated their land to make Border Guard Police base (Amnesty International, 2018:7). Also, many any new roads have been built in the abandoned land which directly goes through the heart of the Rohingya villages. Such as in Ratheduang township where the newly built road directly goes through the abandoned houses of Rohingyas. If those roads placement is permanent, then it will be harder for the Rohingyas to return in their lands (Amnesty International, 2018:18). Major construction and expansion activities also observed in the northern Rakhine states around a Mine and a new port and the planned Special Economic Zones (Amnesty International, 2018:21).

According to the GoM’s claim, much of this work is part of the repatriation process of the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh, and to rebuild the devastated region. The government also built transit centres and resettlements camps for the refugees. However, most of these infrastructures surrounded by fence perimeter (Amnesty International, 2018:13-14; UNOSAT, 2018:13). The parliament of Myanmar approved $15 million budget to construct the fence and related projects alongside the Bangladesh border in the Rakhine state (The Guardian, 2018). Amnesty International raised concerned about that “the Myanmar authorities are reshaping the region so as to accommodate more security forces and more non-Rohingya villagers, at the expense of homes, agricultural lands and villages where Rohingya have lived and farmed for generations”. According to Amnesty International, a safe, voluntary and dignified return is uncertain without transparency, access and consultation with the Rohingyas and other communities living in the state (Amnesty International, 2018:3).
Similar to the GoM’s claim, Myanmar’s military force also claimed that they were protecting the country’s unity, stability and sovereignty from the terrorists (Selth, 2018:3). China is also supporting the stance of the Myanmar government and clarifying that the military operations were necessary for Myanmar’s national security. Further, China blocked or vetoed any resolutions that come against Myanmar (Strömberg, 2018:12; François and Souris, 2018:44). However, Ibrahim (2016:3) mention that there is evidence that the old military regime funded and supported the extremist Buddhist groups to foster unrest. Many observers also believe that the Tatmadaw planned to expel all the Rohingyas from Rakhine state (Selth, 2018:3). Moreover, in case of taking back this Rohingyas, little has been done by the GoM. The conditions created by the Myanmar authority such as burning down houses, repressive laws these preventing the Rohingyas to go back (Parnini, 2013:288). The US Congressional Research Service Report in 2017 also highlights the same fact, where some observers mentioned that the displaced Rohingyas would not wish to return because of the safety, discriminatory laws and policies of Myanmar government (Martin et al., 2017:1).
6 Analysis

In this chapter, the analysis of the findings from the previous chapter is presented to answer the research questions. To analyse the findings, I use the analytical framework ‘Vulnerability, risk and opportunity’ of Le Billon, which presented in the previous chapter (Conceptual and Analytical framework). This analytical framework which I summarised and visualised, shows that resources can provide both motive (resource control and exploitation) and opportunity (financial opportunities) to the actors (belligerents) for involving in a conflict. This can be interlinked with the case of recent Rohingya conflict in Rakhine state.

6.1 Resources which might provide Motive and Opportunity in recent Rohingya conflict

The central argument of Le Billon (2012:4) is that ‘resource sectors influence the likelihood and course of armed conflicts.’ He mentioned that some resources come up with specific opportunities, mostly financial related, and the resources which provide financial opportunities are more prone to armed conflicts than other resources (Le Billon, 2012:27). This might be linkage with the case of recent Rohingya conflict in Rakhine state and answer of the research questions. The Rakhine state holds a significant amount of natural resources. To be exact, among the 105 oil and gas fields that have been so far discovered in Myanmar, 25 of them are situated in the Rakhine state including the Shwe gas fields which contributed a lot in the export income of Myanmar (MIC, 2019:40, 99; MIC, 2019:99; EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018:16).

Moreover, aside from natural resources; in Rakhine state, there are many other growing business sectors presents such as fisheries and livestock, agriculture, manufacturing, energy, forestry, trade, construction, hotel and tourism which have vast economic potentials (MIC, 2019:13). Also, due to its location, the state has significant geostrategic importance to many other countries. The geographical location of the state also creates vast investment opportunity which provides substantial financial opportunities to many actors (MIC, 2019:37; ENAC, 2017:56). These resources, along with the economic opportunities, might provide both motive and opportunity to the different actors in case of the recent Rohingya conflict. Further, the possible motive and opportunity of specific actors are mentioned below.
6.1.1 Motive and Opportunity for GoM and Military force

Le Billon (2001) mentioned that economic agendas connected with exploitation of resources can influence the course of a conflict. Besides, financial self-interest also motivates individual soldiers, local commanders and their political backers to sustain the conflicts (Le Billon, 2001:578). This can be interlinked with the role and activities of the GoM and the military force (Tatmadaw) in case of the recent Rohingya conflict.

One may argue that in Rakhine state the natural resource always existed, so the question arises here why pointing at the government and military force for the resource control and exploitation now? The point to be noticed here is that, in Rakhine state, the resources existed always; however, the government could not utilise it properly before. One reason behind is this, previously Myanmar was economically sanctioned (since the 1990s) by the western countries especially by EU and US due to lack of democracy and human rights violations (Garbo, 2016; Hadar, 1998; Martin et al., 2017:22). Its restricted Myanmar to sell natural resources to other countries. Secondly, because of the economic sanctions, no major companies could not invest properly in Myanmar. But, the situation began to change, especially from 2008, when the military government of Myanmar amended the constitution and opened the door of democracy. Consequently, the Eu and US lifted the economic sanctions which withdraw all restrictions for the investors to invest within Myanmar. It could be seen in the case of Oil companies such as British Gas, Chevron and other companies who have failed to enter into Myanmar before 2012, but after lifting the economic sanctions, they got the access. (NRGI, 2016 cited in Stokke, K. et al., 2018:39). Moreover, along with the utilisation opportunity of natural resources, this new political and economic conditions which emerged after 2008 brought a massive amount of investment in the Rakhine state in different sectors such agriculture, manufacturing, energy and projects such as Special Economic Zone, Trading Zone, Industrial Zone (MIC, 2019: 13, 103-112).

Moreover, all these natural resources and projects are controlled and managed by the central government of Myanmar through different ministry. Such as the oil and natural gas are controlled by the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) under the Ministry of Electricity and Energy. Also, the officers of the MOGE are former and current military personals and both the MOGE and the military force accused of land grabbing, extraction of natural resources and receiving illegal benefits from the resources (ENAC, 2017:17, 56-59; Sassen, 2017; Stokke et al. 2018:47). So, in the end, GoM and military force get the most benefits from the resources
and the projects. It all becomes possible because the 2008 constitution of Myanmar grants the military some additional power and several key positions in the government which help the military to keep pressurise the government (Selth, 2018:11; The Economist, 2017; Stokke, K. et al., 2018:9, 14).

On the other hand, as argued by Le Billon (2012) that resource control and exploitation raise the risk of large-scale armed conflicts and can lead to war (Le Billon, 2012:26). It can be seen by observing the number of violence in Rakhine state over the two different periods from 1989 to 2009 and from 2010 to 2017. The UCDP database shows that every type of violence (State-Based Violence, Non-State Violence, One-Sided Violence) in the Rakhine state from 1989 to 2009 (twenty years) under the economically sanctioned military government was much lesser than the other states and regions in Myanmar. Surprisingly, only in seven years from 2010 to 2017 under the comparatively open economic and democratic government, the violence in Rakhine state increased dramatically. Specifically, regards to the State-based violence and One-sided violence where the Myanmar authority involved as one of the actors, the number of violence was increased significantly. From 1989 to 2009, State-based violence was recorded 50 which jumped into 476 in only in seven years (2010 to 2017); and One-sided violence which was recorded 291 in 20 years (1989-2009) turns into 1156 only in seven years (2010-2017) (UCDP Database).

Furthermore, how the GoM and military force handle the Rohingya conflict can also be interlinked with Le Billions argument where he connected resources with occurrences of violence such as militarization of resource areas, pollution or labour abuses (Le Billon, 2012:26). The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar found plenty of evidence that the Tatmadaw was involved in killings, gang rapes and arson in Rakhine state, and the GoM did not take any necessary steps to stop the violence (HRC, 2018). Even, the Myanmar authority deliberately burned down and demolished Rohingya people’s houses and villages. Only in three villages and town, 37700 structures were destroyed (UNOSAT, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018).

Moreover, regards to repatriation, the other ethnic groups such as Karen and Karenni group who took shelter in Thailand, started to return to Myanmar as the UNHCR founds the condition of the south-eastern part of Myanmar is well enough for returning (UNHCR News, 2018). On the other hand, according to UNHCR, the condition of the Rakhine state is not conducive.
enough for the Rohingya refugees to return (ICG, 2018:2-3, HRW, 2019). Instead of taking necessary steps for returning the Rohingya people the parliament of Myanmar allocated money (approved $15 million budget) to construct the fence and related projects in the border of Bangladesh (The Guardian 2018). Moreover, the announcement of the former President Thein Sein (President during 2011-2016) that, the only solution to Rohingya conflict is to send back the Rohingyas to other countries or refugee camp (François and Souris, 2018:22). Also, releasing the convicted seven military officers in less than one years, who were sentenced to ten years of prison for killing Rohingya men and boys in Inn din village are sufficient enough to understand the intention of Myanmar authority (BBC, 2019).

These all activities and roles of the GoM and military force indicated that they do not want that the Rohingya people ever return to Rakhine state. There is a strong possibility that the resource control and exploitation influence the GoM and military force to involve in this recent conflict. However, it would be inappropriate to justify the roles and activities of the GoM and military by only addressing that, resource control and exploitation work as an influencing factor for the GoM and military force. The role and activities of GoM and military force were also accompanied by some additional factors too. For example, that the Burmese citizens do not accept the Rohingyas as they thought that the Rohingyas are a threat to their national and cultural identity and a competitor to their local business (Wolf, 2015; Goraya and Mazhar, 2016:34, 37). Also, that the extreme Buddhist group (969 movements, MaBaTha) perceived them as a threat to their religion. Additionally, that the political parties both the national (USDP, NLD) and regional parties (RNDP) supporting these extreme Buddhist group for their political gain (Ibrahim, 2016:13). All these factors principally backed the stance of GoM’s and military force’s roles and activities in the recent conflict.

6.1.2 Motive and Opportunity for China

As mentioned by Le Billon that, resource wealth has an impact on the international community and due to the financial benefits from the resource wealth international community often lack cohesion, willingness or leverage to stop the conflict. In particular, access to the resource, work as a divisive factor among international actors (Le Billon, 2001:578). It can be interlinked with the role of China in the recent Rohingya conflict.

The main interest of China in the Rakhine state is around the oil and gas fields (block AD-1, AD-6 and AD-8) and the huge investment that they have already been made. According to the
report of MIC, China’s invested amount in Myanmar is 20,353.528 million USD until December 2018, which make China the largest investor in Myanmar (MIC, 2019:27,99). Notably, in the Belt and Road Initiative’s, China invests a considerable amount of money, and the significant portion of it vested in the Rakhine state. Markedly, the Myanmar-China Oil and gas pipeline project, Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone, deep-sea port and China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), Kunming-Kyaukpyu railway project (ENAC, 2017:56; MIC, 2019:103; Blanchard, 2018:333, 339). All these projects supposed to be brought substantial financial benefits to China.

Moreover, the geographical location of the Rakhine state is also very crucial to China as they wanted a safe transport route for the oil and gas that they export from Middle-east and Africa; so that, they can avoid the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea in the crisis period. Mainly, the Oil and Gas pipeline save a lot of transport cost and time for China. Also, the signed China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, which planned to connect China’s landlocked Yunnan province to Rakhine state will also financially benefited both the countries. Additionally, these projects are constructing by the Chinese state-owned companies such as CITIC (Kyaukphyu SEZ and deep-sea port), CNPC (oil and gas pipeline), which ultimately benefits China as a country. Further, to complete all these projects, China needs the support of the GoM as some of these projects required vast lands, and some projects are controversial regarding the environmental issue. For example, in the oil and gas pipeline project the local peoples did not agree to give up their lands, and further, many others raised concerns about the environmental impacts of the oil and gas pipelines (ENAC, 2017:64).

Therefore, to fulfil all this vision, China needs constant support and safeguard from the GoM and in return along with economic benefits from the projects China is supporting the GoM as it can be seen in the case of Rohingya conflict where China backed the Myanmar government. Previously, China defended Myanmar with the veto power in the UN Security Council when UK and USA present the resolution 1674 (Responsibly to protect) (Azad and Jasmin, 2013:33). And now they are defending Myanmar from the criticism of the International community by addressing the Rohingya conflict as Myanmar’s internal sovereign affair (Joy, 2018:4).

It can be said that in case of the recent Rohingya conflict, even though China is not directly involved in the conflict; however, the economic opportunities and huge investments are stopping them from playing an active role to stop the conflict.
6.1.3 Motive and Opportunity for India

The same explanation by Le Billon (2001:578) that resource wealth which provides financial benefits and has an impact on the international community regarding the willingness of stopping a conflict can be monitored in the role of India too in the recent Rohingya conflict. India played a very silent role in the recent Rohingya conflict. Neither they directly support, nor they strictly condemn the GoM and military force for the atrocities. They abstained from the voting at UNHCR on the resolution brought by Bangladesh for an independent international mechanism to probe abuses in Myanmar’s Rakhine State. Also, they opposed the preliminary inquiry of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on forced deportation of hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas from Rakhine state (Bhuyian, 2018).

India maintains a good neighbouring relationship with Myanmar, especially after when the military government switch to democracy from military rule. Presently, India’s main interest in Myanmar is based on the Act East policy, like China’s interest surrounded by the BRI. From India’s perspective, in the east, there is a vast trading opportunity with the ASEAN and other East Pacific countries which could bring substantial financial benefits, and only Myanmar has the physical connection between India and the east (Ramya, 2018). Moreover, the North-eastern region of India is isolated (landlocked) from the main part of India, which restrained the central government in terms of trades, politics and security. Further, to utilize the trading opportunity with the east and to connect the North-east region of India to the mainland, India doing several projects with Myanmar. Such as the GoI already built a port in Sittwe under the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project which will connect India’s Kolkata to Myanmar’s Sittwe by the sea route and from Sittwe it will connect with India by road. Notably, this project is financed by GoI and situated in the Rakhine state (MIC, 2019: 107).

Also, India is planning to build a cross-border gas pipeline, as many Indian companies holding stakes in the Shwe gas filed (Yhome, 2018:3). Moreover, there are also many other projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Rhi–Tiddim and Rhi–Falan Roads which would help India to enter in the market of East Asia (Ziipao, 2018:481-483). Besides, India has a competitive relationship with China and also highly concerned about China’s BRI projects in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan which located near Indian territory (Funaiole and Hillman 2018:2; Kanwal, 2018:12).
Furthermore, to accomplish the vision of the Act East policy and overcome the challenges of the North-eastern region and to counter China, Myanmar holds an essential position in GoI’s policy. Mainly, the Rakhine state is very crucial for the trading opportunity with the East Asian countries and transport connection. Similar to China, India also addressed the conflict as Myanmar’s internal affair and condemned ARSA’s attack. However, remain silent on the Rohingya refugee crisis and actively pursuing a good relationship with Myanmar’s army officials (Yhome, 2018:3, 4; BBC, 2018). Even they are selling combat equipment to the Myanmar military force (Choudhury, 2019). It can be assumed that India also does not want to hamper the relationship with GoM over the Rohingya issue as they have many interests in Myanmar.
7 Conclusion

Millions of people become stateless every year due to many reasons. Geopolitical economic resource related interest of the different actors is one of those reasons. Many countries and governments are involved in war and conflict due to their self-geopolitical economic interests which derived from the resources mainly. To achieve and fulfil their self-interests these actors violating human rights very often and, in most cases, the minority (ethnic or religious) people were the primary victim of it. In this study, I use the analytical framework of Le Billon, which shows that in many cases, resource and resource related economic opportunities provides both motive and opportunity to the actors (belligerents) for involving in a conflict.

Myanmar is the home of various ethnic nationalities; however, all the ethnic groups are not treated equally in this country. Some of the ethnic groups face severe discrimination and oppression by government authority. Among some of these ethnic groups, the conditions of the Rohingyas are the worst. Regarding the recent Rohingya conflict, the government has not responded in good faith to the global concern over the treatment of the Rohingya people. The GoM is trying to portray the recent conflict as a type of conflict which emerged from the ethnic and religious differences and eventually turned into communal violence between the Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists.

Further, the GoM and military force justifying their roles and activities which forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas from their residence, by stating that the military force was fighting the terrorist organization group ARSA. China and India also supported the GoM's stance and addressed it as Myanmar's internal affair. There is no doubt about that, the ethnic and religious differences, social and cultural differences, 1982 citizenship law, national and regional politics, ARSA's attack these all played a crucial role in the conflict, and these are the causes which erupt the conflict at first hand.

However, there is more to it; the geopolitical economic interests that vested in Rakhine state might be the underlying reason behind the massive re-escalation of the recent Rohingya conflict. The different political and economic conditions (transition to democracy) since 2010, which eventually lift the economic sanctions (imposed by the international community since the 1990s), and create a vast investment opportunity and a global market for selling the newly discovered resources (especially oil and gas) of Rakhine state. Also, in the same period, the
increased number of violence (State-Based Violence, Non-state violence and One-sided violence) from 2010 to 2017 and destroying the Rohingya villages deliberately in Rakhine state cannot be coincidental. These all indicated that in the case of recent Rohingya conflict, the vast natural resources and economic opportunities that present in Rakhine state might influence the actors. There is a high probability that the recent Rohingya conflict was driven by geopolitical economic interests rather than other causes.

Most importantly, the role of the GoM throughout the conflict was highly controversial and not sufficient enough to stop the conflict. Also, there is clear evidence that the military force directly involved in the atrocious crime and deliberately destroying the Rohingya villages in Rakhine state. There is a strong possibility that the GoM and military force involves in this conflict because of the resource control and exploitation. Also, the nature of Myanmar’s previous military government with the other ethnic communities indicated the same.

Furthermore, the role of neighbouring China and India, to obstruct this violence was not adequate too. Without solving and addressing the conflict adequately; China and India limited themselves in their self-interest’s in Myanmar. They invested in many projects in Myanmar, including in the conflict-prone Rakhine state where the Rohingya people used to live. There is a high probability that the benefits of the resources and economic opportunities restrain China and India from playing an active role to stop the conflict and condemn the GoM and military force for their negative role and activities. Both of these two countries do not want to hamper their relationship with Myanmar over the Rohingya issue.

7.1 Further discussion

Rakhine state is the second most impoverished state in Myanmar despite having vast natural resources and economic potentials. The state needs development and more investment to ensure that all the communities can live with dignity and prosperity. However, the international community must have to realize and at the same time have to ensure that any investment or assistance to Myanmar authority does not contribute to any human rights violations to any ethnic groups, including the Rohingyas. Especially, China and India have to be more responsible as China is the largest investor in Myanmar, and India is also a significant investor in Myanmar. Particularly, both of these two countries invest a lot in the conflict-prone Rakhine state by overlooking the situation of the Rohingyas. Also, China and India are the two most
influential (in terms of military and economic power) country in this whole region. From that point of view, both of these two countries needed to act more responsibly and rigidly against Myanmar authority.

The Rohingya crisis will not be solved ever without taking effective measures. The international community should use all possible avenues to pressure the Myanmar government to dismantle the state-based discrimination and segregation against all the ethnic groups, including the Rohingya. The international community must also take serious action against the persons who are responsible for the atrocities and brought them to justice. The international community, especially the EU and US, put trade and investment sanction on Myanmar in the 1990s due to human rights violation and absence of democracy. These economic sanctions had a direct impact on Myanmar at that time, which ultimately forced the Myanmar government to open the door of democracy and released the opposition leader Aung Saan Suu Ki in 2010. Though, recently, the EU and US, both place sanctions, comprising travel ban and assets freeze upon some military officials who were accused of violating human rights. However, criticism and individual sanctions do not have any impact on the behaviour of Myanmar authority. Therefore, enforce severe economic sanctions again to save the oppressed ethnic minorities, including the Rohingyas, can be a viable option.

Moreover, the countries who are selling arms to Myanmar, including China and India, needed to be more concerned about Myanmar authority regarding the use of their selling arms against the civilian population. In that case, the other countries can follow the footprint of the EU and stop selling arms to Myanmar. The world must have to realize that the Rohingyas are extremely poor and illiterate; additionally, they lack international networking and channel. Except for the involvement and assistance of the international community, they do not have any hope of survival.

To conclude the thesis, although there is no direct evidence that the recent Rohingya conflict is the result of geopolitical economic interests of these actors, however, looking into the findings and analysis of this study it can be said that the role of various actors, including the GoM, Military force, China and India, needed to be examined more in-depth. Further extensive research should be done on the Rohingya issue from the perspective of the geopolitical economy of resources. The world must need to know the underlying reason behind the conflict.
Without knowing and adequately addressing the underlying problem, no conflict, including the Rohingya conflict, cannot be solved permanently.
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Annex I: Map showing Bhasan Char

Source: HRW (2018)
Annex II: Overall condition of Myanmar and Rakhine state

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY BASELINE INDICATORS</th>
<th>Myanmar overall</th>
<th>Rakhine State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>29.7m (male)</td>
<td>1.6m (male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.1m (female)</td>
<td>1.7m (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59.8m (total)</td>
<td>3.3m (total)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population with access to improved drinking water source</td>
<td>82.3%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measles vaccination rate</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-five severe malnutrition</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of health workforce (medical doctor, nurse, midwife)</td>
<td>22,110</td>
<td>1,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total fertility rate (children per woman)</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal mortality (per 1,000 births)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 births)</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage of antenatal care</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled birth attendance rate</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-natal care coverage (frequency)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>92.1%</td>
<td>80.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS (in population aged 15-24)</td>
<td>92.1%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OCHA, 2013: 7
Annex III: Displaced people in Rakhine state

Source: OCHA, 2013: 4

Note: Example of destruction caused by fire visible Thaung Khu Lar (Song Khu Lar), Maungdaw Township, as of 25 September 2017 (left) and 1 October 2017 (right).

Source: UNSOAT, 2018:3

Note: Example of destruction caused by demolition visible in Maung Hla Ma, Buthidaung Township as of 9 January 2018 (left) and 13 February 2018 (right).

Source: UNSOAT, 2018:4
Note: Example of debris clearing in Doe Tan, Maungdaw Township, as of 9 January 2018 (left) and 13 February 2018 (right).

Source: UNSOAT, 2018:4

Note: Example of construction in Kan Kya (South), Maungdaw Township as of 9 January 2018 (left) and 27 February 2018 (right).

Source: UNSOAT, 2018:5
**Note:** In February 2018, Hla Poe Kaung and Pa Da Kar Ywar Thit villages in Maungdaw Township show newly built helipads. Yin Ma Zay village in Buthidaung Township also shows new helipads built in previously inhabited areas.

Source: Amnesty International, 2018:13
Annex V: Tatmadaw chain of command during the “clearance operations” as of 25 August 2017

Source: HRC (2018:391)