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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ROHINGYA REFUGEES MIGRATION TO MALAYSIA: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Abstract

The Rohingyas are refugees originally from Rakhine, Myanmar, who fled to Malaysia since in the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. They choose Malaysia as a destination compared to other South-east Asian countries, in spite of the obstacles and restrictions faced. Hence the purpose of this article is to identify the factors for their preference in choosing Malaysia as a transit country, and the modus operandi used by them to enter Malaysia. This qualitative research gathered data from content analysis of written materials. It argues that the ethnic Rohingyas' entry into Malaysia is not only to flee the ethnic crisis in their country of origin. Their purpose is partly economic in efforts to build a better life for the future, due to the favourable factors of sharing a common religion with Muslim Malaysians, family influence, political stability, attitude and culture of Malaysian society and opportunity for education in Malaysia. The availability of various migration cross-border routes paved the way for their planned or unplanned entry. The selection of migration route whether over land, water or air or combination of routes depends on aspects such as safety, duration of journey, service fees for smuggling of humans and the risk of getting caught by authorities.

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Introduction:-

The ethnic Rohingyas is one of the largest Muslim minority groups in South-east Asia. They originate from Arakan or Rakhine province in Myanmar. History proved that Arakan was once an independent Muslim state for 350 years, ruled successively by 48 sultans. Arakan began to experience political unrest until Burma rule under Raja Bodowphao, who took the opportunity of annexing Arakan in the year 1784. Arakan continued to be subjugated when the British colonised it in the year 1822 (Mohd Jamil 1993). It was forced to merge with the British colony of Burma, and on June 18 1989, Burma was re-named Union of Myanmar with its capital city, Rangoon re-named as Yangon. Later, in the year 2008, this multi-ethnic and multi-religious state became known as the Republic of The Union of Myanmar, an multi-ethnic and multi-religious state.

The ethnic Rohingya was forced to flee the country due to the amended Constitution and to governmental power frequently changing hands. Beginning with the Foreigners Act 1864 and Union Citizenship Act 1948 legislated by the British, they were deprived of Myanmar citizenship. The independence gained by Burma on January 4 1948 is meaningless to Rohingya people. By virtue of the Immigration Act 1974 passed by the Junta Myanmar government, they are labelled as illegal immigrants, thus once again denied their citizenship rights (Moshe 2002). Burmese

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Citizenship Laws 1982 enforced are discriminatory as ethnic Rohingya people are required to show proof stating they had inhabited Rakhine before the year 1823. The junta regime use The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) as strong proof to exclude them as one of the 135 Myanmar ethnic groups (Intan Suria 2018). Thus by law, they became stateless and illegal immigrants on the ground that they were brought to Burma by the colonial British even though history established that they had inhabited Arakan much earlier than other ethnic groups, since 1430 years ago (Moshe 2002).

As an effect of the legislation, 19 military operations were conducted in the period 1948 to 1992 in Rohingya settlements in the territory. The military committed atrocities such as murder, expulsion, destruction of mosques and prayer places, destruction of sources of livelihood and confiscation of farms and homes (Intan Suria et al. 2016a). In these operations, thousands of identity cards owned by Muslim residents were also confiscated, very few had their identity cards returned. This systematic persecution was to deprive many Rohingyas proof of citizenship through birth. Indirectly, they were treated as illegal immigrants to Myanmar and forced to leave (Izziah Suryani 2002). This situation made them more vulnerable to oppression, arbitrary and merciless persecution by the ruling regime of Myanmar. Due to on-going discrimination and cruelty by the ruling regime through restrictions on economy and liberties of life, and the policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide caused them to be categorised as stateless people by international organizations such as United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (AI) (Tan Pok Suan 2006).

The issues of discrimination, stripping of citizenship rights and identity, and violations of civil, political and social rights are the main factors which led to a series of migration waves by the ethnic Rohingya from Myanmar. They were forced to flee to transit countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia for survival (Andika 2019; Intan Suria et al. 2016b). Their migration to a transitory country is meant to be temporary, as if and when the conflict in their country of origin de-escalates and it becomes safer to live there, they will return to their homeland or be resettled in a third country.

Malaysia is one of the destinations focused by the Rohingya refugees, placing them as the number one group with the largest number of refugees in Malaysia (Aizat 2018). Research by Azharudin and Azlinariah in the year 2012 explained an annual increase in the Rohingya refugee population in Malaysia, as evidenced by the recorded increase from 5,000 in 1998 to 23,800 in the year 2012. The arrivals showed a marked increase from the years 2010 to 2016 (Intan Suria et al. 2020). Their journey to Malaysia is very challenging due to the many restrictions by authorities when traversing the region by the main route taken through Myanmar and Thailand. This led them to use various methods of entry including using small boats to arrive at their destination, whether from Myanmar or Bangladesh, even at the risk of losing their lives (Intan Suria et al. 2016b). The intense danger in their country made them desperate to embark on the journey regardless of the risk of insecurity for themselves, putting their lives at stake. The question arises concerning the factors for their preferred choice of Malaysia as destination. Starting from this point, the main focus of this article is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the factors for the Rohingya arrival in Malaysia. The second part is about the modes or modus operandi of their arrival in Malaysia. This is a qualitative research using data collection by the method of content analysis from sources of written materials from secondary and primary sources. Data collected was thematically analysed, guided by important themes to systematically explain issues.

Factors for Arrival of Ethnic Rohingyas in Malaysia:-

The arrival of Rohingya people was first detected in the end of the 1970s and early 1980s (Tan Pok Suan 2009; Azizah 2015; Letchamanan 2013). Statistics issued by UNHCR Malaysia as at end of August, 2022, there are 185,920 registered refugees in Malaysia, of which the majority or 105,710 are ethnic Rohingyas (UNHCR 2022). However, the precise dates and actual number of Rohingyas who arrived in Malaysia are unknown because not much attention and coverage were given to them at the time, besides the factor of their nomadic lifestyle or shifting places to ensure their survival as refugees (Azharudin & Azlinariah 2012). Some factors that attracted the attention of ethnic Rohingyas from Myanmar to Malaysia are namely, they search for economic sources, share the same Islamic religion as Malaysians Muslims, the attitude and cultural values of Malaysian society, family influence of family members already in Malaysia, political stability as well as education opportunities in Malaysia.

1. Search for Economic Sources

The employment factor is one of the attractions for Rohingyas to reside in Malaysia and this finding is based on data from research by Ozden et al. (2018) which shows a significant increase in the refugee population in Malaysia. In

the year 2003, 10,000 refugees were registered, and this significantly increased to 80,000 by the year 2010, most of them are from Myanmar. A report by Mixed Migration Centre (2021) and Andika (2019) found that most Rohingya men migrate to Malaysia in search of jobs to maintain their families in Malaysia or Myanmar. Therefore, refugees form part of the foreign workforce in Malaysia together with foreign workers with work permit, illegal foreign workers, and political asylum applicants (Abdul Rahman 2010). Foreign workers refer to immigrants or non-nationals who migrated or fled to Malaysia.

Difference in wages is another factor which attracts foreign workers to grab job opportunities in Malaysia (Intan Suria et al. 2020). According to a Global Wage Report 2014/15 issued by the International Labour Organization (2014), Malaysia is a middle-income country and foreign workers in Malaysia have the opportunity for a higher pay or monthly salary compared to some other countries in South-east Asia, South Asia and Pacific region such as Myanmar, Nepal, Cambodia and Pakistan. Such countries have a high rate of poverty in the world and its effect is lower earnings or wages. Therefore, Malaysia is like a ray of light or hope in the struggle to survive through economic improvement. In addition, Rohingya refugees come to Malaysia due to excitement from hearing about the favourable experience of family members or friends who fortunately and easily got jobs and frequently remitted money to their families in Myanmar or Bangladesh. They felt that migration to Malaysia would enable them to build a better life. However, after arriving in Malaysia, some of them became disappointed and regretful because of difficulty in getting jobs and the situation is not as rosy as was told by family members or friends (Azlinariah 2014; Andika & Aizat 2019).

The Malaysian government's policy does not allow refugees to be employed in the formal sector and do business in Malaysia as the Immigration department is bound by the Immigration Act 1959/53 (2002 Amendment) which states that refugees are illegal immigrants however, based on humanitarian grounds, they are allowed to work in the informal sector which enables them to earn wages and support their families in Malaysia. There are studies which categorised Rohingya refugees as unskilled workers suited for jobs as construction workers, scrap iron collectors, carton collectors, grass cutters, assistant hawkers in markets, restaurant waiters and factory workers as well as in three-wheel service to dispose of discarded items at landfills (Tan Pok Suan 2006; Intan Suria et al. 2016b). However, a minority of employers take advantage of undocumented refugees by paying them low wages not commensurate with job duties (Tan Pok Suan 2006; Azlinariah 2014; Azharudin & Azlinariah 2012) or not paying them at all for work done (Norazira 2014).

2. Common Religion, Similar Culture and Attitude with Malaysian Society

The status of Islam as the State Religion of the Federation of Malaysia does not deprive adherents of other faiths the right to practise their religions peacefully. The factors of Islam's position in the Federal Constitution and that Malaysia is a Muslim majority country attract the ethnic Rohingya to migrate to Malaysia, following the persecution they experienced back in Myanmar (Andika 2019; Intan Suria et al. 2020). In Myanmar, the ruling military regime forbids the freedom of Islamic practice, closed mosques and religious schools, and prohibited building of new mosques or repair of damaged old mosques (Azharudin 2013; Norazira 2014). Therefore, the Islamic environment and freedom of religion in Malaysia such as fasting in the month of Ramadan, celebrating Eid-al-Fitr, making animal sacrifice on Eid-Adha and gathering to commemorate Mawlid al-Rasul (PBUH), practice of chanting Adhan five times daily from mosques, performing Friday prayers in public mosques, and reciting and listening to the verses of the Holy Quran are the pulling factors for the ethnic Rohingya to Malaysia (Intan Suria et al. 2016b).

Malaysian society lives in harmony and practise racial and religious tolerance in their multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. According to Andika (2019), Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh received favourable news from friends and family members already residing in Malaysia, that Malaysians are very gracious and sympathize with the fate of Rohingyas in Myanmar and Bangladesh. They describe the Malaysian society as kind, affectionate and caring people who try to understand their lives (Azharudin & Azlinariah 2010; Wake & Cheung 2016).

Malaysians always give big donations to the ethnic Rohingya (Wake and Cheung 2016) to enable them to subsist their lives in Malaysia, such as employing refugees in certain jobs, assisting them to get jobs and providing investment capital for business. Malaysians also help refugees to overcome bureaucratic restrictions of the authorities, for example to buy things forbidden to them such as motorcycles, besides facilitating access to institutions like UNHCR, and giving direct assistance such as cash donations and necessities and charging lower house rentals. The Rohingya refugees are very appreciative of the good deeds and support given by the locals. In addition, some of the refugees have strong relations with Malaysians. In one situation, an employer came to the

police station to bail out his refugee employee who was arrested for the offence of riding a motorcycle, in violation of licensing laws as refugees are not entitled to obtain a motorcycle licence. Besides that, there are families of employers who treat the Rohingya youth as their own family offspring.

These matters only reinforce the confidence that they will have a better life in Malaysia. Besides sharing the same religion, the cultural similarity is another pull factor for these refugees to migrate to Malaysia. Rohingyas feel comfortable with societies in South-east Asian countries including Malaysia, share a similar culture such as language, vocabulary, values, customs, and traditional gear such as head cap (*songkok*), sarong (*kain pelikat*), long loose collarless shirt with side slits (*kurta*), female headscarf (*tudung*), and so on (Intan Suria et al. 2020, 86). This situation encourages Rohingya presence in Malaysia besides getting the sympathetic reaction of Malaysian society toward the issues of ethnic cleansing and genocide of the ethnic Rohingyas by the military regime in Myanmar.

3. Family Members in Malaysia and Their Influence

Another pull factor for more arrival of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia is the presence of family members and blood relatives already in Malaysia, especially those who have successfully built a better life in Malaysia and thus inclined to call relatives and friends to join them. Usually, their migration is initiated by the head of the family, followed by other family members until all three generations are united in Malaysia, from the grandparents to the grandchildren (Azlinariah 2019).

Their decision to flee from the conflict and persecution in their country of origin is to seek security for themselves and their families, and unite to build a family life in Malaysia. Some among them bring along their wives and children upon entering Malaysia the first time, instead of going first and bringing the families afterwards. The majority of them do not wish to return to Myanmar after being cut off from their original families there, besides having adapted themselves to the situation and environment in Malaysia (Norazira 2014).

Family members left behind in Myanmar wish to come to Malaysia for the purpose of re-uniting with loved ones after a long separation (Azizah 2015; Aizat & Andika 2018; Andika 2019; Andika & Aizat 2020). Separation from family members presents a challenge to refugee, usually due to death in the country of origin, stay in refugee camps or during the process of registration as refugees which is complicated and too lengthy. This affects psychological health such as suffering from psychological distress due to prolonged sadness and depression (Balqis Aini et al. 2022). Therefore, to be united with other family members in Malaysia is the best way for them to build a better life in the future.

4. Political Stability in Malaysia

Peace and political stability of a country are the main attractions to foreigners coming to Malaysia from neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Phillipines, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Myanmar to Malaysia. The Global Peace Index (2021) relating to the level of peace and stability of countries, ranked Malaysia in the 23rd position of the Global Peace Index (GPI), lower to Singapore at 11th place while Myanmar ranked at position 131. Malaysia ranked second place for good political stability in the Asia Pacific region (Institute for Economics & Peace 2021). This shows that Myanmar lags far behind Malaysia in terms of peace and stability in a country, causing the ethnic Rohingya people to worry and fear that their security is not guaranteed in their own country.

The annual increase in number of Rohingya refugees who enter Malaysia is attributed to the policy shown by the Malaysian government in accepting them (Azlinariah 2014). The Malaysian government through the Ministry of Interior declared that they be allowed to work in order to fill the labour shortage in Malaysia. This change in policy appears to have attracted the interest of Rohingya refugees to Malaysia (Azlinariah 2019). However, this policy could not be implemented until today due to the Immigration Act 1959/1963 which does not acknowledge this group as refugees but instead considers them as ‘illegal immigrants’ (Amnesty International 2010; Intan Suria et al. 2020).

The Ummah Solidarity gathering in December 2016 organised by the leaders of the Malaysian government together with the Islamic NGOs of Malaysia indicated sympathy for the calamity that befell the Rohingya people in Myanmar (Anuar 2017). This gathering was also joined by political figures, religious figures, NGOs and the public as a sign of support and togetherness of the Malaysian people with their Muslim brothers who are struggling with the discriminatory policy of the Myanmar ruling regime, besides giving support to the work of the local NGO movement in advocating for the fate of these refugees. In addition, based on humanitarian grounds, Dato’ Sri Najib Razak, during his tenure as Prime Minister, allowed 55 thousand Rohingyas into Malaysia for their refuge and

security as well as RM10 million for the subsistence of Rohingyas in Myanmar. However, the government has no specific policy on refugees in Malaysia as Malaysia has not ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (Amnesty International 2010; Child Right Coalition Malaysia 2012; Letchamanan 2013).

In going through a tortuous life as refugees, the Rohingyas are seen as having freedom to search for opportunities and to network with each other in Malaysia. This social network among them is very intact as they live as a sharing community (Tan Pok Suan 2006; Azlinariah 2014; Norazira 2014; Noor Farhana 2020). The solidarity or brotherhood among them is built on their interdependence and mutually helping each other for survival. In addition, the formation of social organizations is seen as advocacy for their fate as Rohingya refugees. The social organizations are Equal Rights Trust (ERT), Rohingya Information Center (RIC), Ethnic Rohingya Human Rights Organisation (ERHRO), Rohingya Solidarity Democratic Movement (RSDM), United Nation Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI), Pertubuhan Hak Asasi Untuk Rohingya (HURAR), Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), Majlis Ulama Rohingya Malaysia (MUR) as well as Future Global Network Foundation (FGN) (Noor Farhana 2020). The formation of this social network is actually ensuring preservation of identity as they are said to have failed to sustain their identity in their country of origin, so they are using a transit country to ensure their identity is truly safeguarded. In Myanmar, their right of religious freedom is denied and violated, whereas in Malaysia they have the opportunity to practise their religion such as performing prayers, fasting and making animal sacrifice for Eid al-Adha together with the local community and other Islamic practices without hindrance (Azlinariah 2014). Therefore, the political stability and prosperity of a country attract refugees to migrate to Malaysia.

5. Opportunity for Education

As a result of the Myanmar government's action depriving Rohingyas of basic education, between 85% to 90% are illiterate (Islamic Relief Malaysia 2017). Thus, the need for education forced the Rohingya people to migrate to a transit country, including Malaysia. There is little opportunity for educating Rohingya children in refugee camps in Bangladesh. The educational institutions in refugee camps comprise of religious schools (*madrasah*) and learning centres run by NGOs. However, the capacity of schools is full following the annual increase in the number of school aged children, thus not all children can get school education (Andika & Aizat 2019).

In addition, the main challenges in providing educational opportunity to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh particularly Cox's Bazar are the limited infrastructure, lack of accreditation and standards of learning assessment, government policy which restricts opportunity for vocational skills training and low quality teaching. These challenges eventually cause a low level of registration and poor attendance for elementary and secondary education (International Rescue Committee 2020). This gives an impression that alternative education for Rohingya children at refugee camps is very poor. Thus, Rohingyas are forced to seek an opportunity to leave Bangladesh for Malaysia and look for other alternative education, besides seeking economic improvement. However, refugee children are hindered from accessing education in a transit country or host country due to legal and policy restrictions as well as a very complicated procedure (Koehler & Schneider 2019). And some host countries are not quite willing to receive and manage education for this group due to their big population which increases from year to year, while the solution taken is only ad hoc. This happened in countries such as Sweden, Germany, Greece, Lebanon and Turkey (Crul et al. 2019).

Refugees in Malaysia are well aware that they are not entitled to enter the formal education system, but their offspring have the option of entering any private educational institution, centres run by NGOs and other voluntary bodies for appropriate education (Mohd Nur Hidayat & Iknor Azli 2017). This opportunity gladdens Rohingya parents as they are keen and confident that education will enable a better future for their children. This opportunity in Malaysia for their children is provided by *Pusat Bimbingan Alternatif* (PBA), which means Alternative Guidance Centre. It was formed in line with Alternative Education Policy namely to provide education to children of non-Malaysians who are not entitled to Malaysian formal education. This centre provides pre-school, primary and lower secondary education levels covering reading, writing and counting skills as well as life skills (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 2017). According to UNHCR Malaysia, up to the year 2022, there are 133 alternative education centres in the whole of Malaysia including Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Perak, Pahang, Terengganu, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Johore, Penang, Kedah and Kelantan. Thus, besides other factors, this opportunity for education encourages Rohingya refugees to migrate to Malaysia.

Their migration and stay in Malaysia is intended to be only temporary because they are likely to be placed in a third country later on or return to their country of origin, if and when in the future, the conflict de-escalates and there is no imminent danger when security prevails. However, some studies indicate that they do not wish to return to Myanmar (Tan Pok Suan 2006; Norazira 2014; Mixed Migration Centre 2020). Meanwhile, they are fearful and severely traumatised after various forms of atrocities committed by the Myanmar government and await to be sent to a third country. Other factors also have an influence, such as being cut off from family in Myanmar, born in a transit country and adapted to the situation, and even blended with the lifestyle and culture, and even accustomed to their favourite food cuisine in the transit country (Norazira 2014; Intan Suria et al. 2016a). Therefore, all these pull factors influence the Rohingyas' choice of Malaysia as their destination for a better life.

Modus Operandi of Rohingya Migration to Malaysia:-

The cross-border flow of migration can be categorised into two types based on the factors for departure from the country of origin to another country. The first factor is that migration is encouraged by economic opportunity for improvement which migrants voluntarily choose in order to build a better life for themselves and their families. Second, they were displaced from the country of origin by various factors such as natural disaster, war or conflict, oppression, persecution and torture by the ruling regime of the country of origin. This category covers political asylum seekers and refugees (Azizah 2012). This part of the article elaborates on the different migration routes and the process as well as the challenges experienced by Rohingyas to arrive in Malaysia. Ethnic Rohingya migration to Malaysia can take various ways or routes. The first route is to go through Bangladesh (specifically at Cox's Bazar) as the first transit country before continuing their journey to Malaysia. Second route is to migrate to Malaysia without using Bangladesh as a transit country, namely from Arakan, Myanmar and transit in Thailand before continuing to Malaysia. Third, directly from Arakan to Malaysia without transiting another country (Andika & Aizat 2019). In terms of the mode, the Rohingya exodus could enter Malaysia by four ways, overland in a vehicle, by boat on sea route or combination of both (Andika 2019). The fourth is by air transport (Aizat & Na'eim 2016; Aizat 2019).

There are six migration routes Rohingya refugees frequently use to reach Malaysia, namely (i) Myanmar-Malaysia; (ii) Myanmar-Thailand-Malaysia; (iii) Myanmar-Bangladesh-Malaysia; (iv) Myanmar-Bangladesh-Thailand-Malaysia; (v) Myanmar-India-Myanmar-Thailand-Malaysia and (vi) Myanmar-Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Thailand-Malaysia (Aizat and Andika 2018). One popular choice is the route Myanmar-Thailand-Malaysia by using combined overland and sea route to cross the Myanmar-Thailand border, trespass into Thailand and then cross the Malaysia-Thailand border. In addition, Rohingya refugees need to cross four international borders, namely Bangladesh, India, Thailand and Malaysia. It is undeniable that the Malaysian border is the easiest to breach because there are relatively less restrictions than other borders (Andika 2019; Azizah 2012). The Malaysian authorities periodically monitor border control if there are reported cases. This reflects the value of transparency among officers and authorities involved in controlling border entry gates, whereby they frequently extort bribes from foreigners to allow illegal entry or activity (Andika 2019).

Some of the states (provinces) in Malaysia are usually entry points at the Malaysian border, namely Kelantan (Sungai Golok, Bukit Bunga, Pengkalan Kubur), Kedah (Langkawi, Bukit Kayu Hitam), Perlis, Penang (Butterworth, Georgetown) and Selangor (Port Klang) (Azizah 2015; Andika 2019). But on average, Rohingyas refugees do not know or are unaware of the actual entry point they entered the first time in Malaysia but they might be able to cite the name of the state (Aizat & Andika 2018). The choice of border entry gate depends on certain reasons such as the route taken, the assistance service of smuggler agent (*dalal*) or unplanned entry point in a case without agent (Andika 2019).

Moreover, smuggler agents prefer to be called travel coordinators or tourist agents compared to *dalal* (middleman) as the latter has a negative reputation in Rohingya society. It is associated with criminal violence, exploitation and danger. However, there is no standard term for someone paid by a Rohingya asylum seeker to arrange his itinerary from Myanmar to Malaysia. The term used varies, depending on who uses the term whether refugee, media, NGO or United Nations, such as agent, smuggler, kidnapper and human trafficker. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) uses the term 'smuggler' based on the United Nations' definition on smuggling of migrants as procuring, to obtain, directly or indirectly, monetary or other benefit, from the illegal entry of a person into a country of which the person is not a citizen or permanent resident (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2004; Wake & Cheung 2016).

1. Sea Route

The unstructured sea route is the modus operandi used by an estimated majority of Rohingya refugees to begin their journey. Most of them are women and children and the journey was arranged by their husbands or prospective husbands already in Malaysia (Mixed Migration Centre 2021). The sea route is the most challenging as refugees endure harsh weather conditions, long duration and food shortage. They have to cross the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea for more than two weeks. In addition, they are exposed to the risk of famine if food rations run out, apart from the risk of the boat sinking before they reach Malaysia (Aizat et al. 2018; Aizat 2019).

Before the journey, they have to save money for their group to purchase a boat and pay an agent to guide or navigate the boat to Malaysia. It is undeniable that this way is very difficult because of the long duration and dangerous weather such as seastorms and high waves, in addition to the overloading of passengers in excess of the boat's capacity (Aizat & Na'eim 2016). For those who do not use the services of a smuggling agent, each one has to contribute RM400 for the purchase of a fishing boat from a Rakhine Buddhist fisherman, food supply and petrol. They have to manage by themselves the journey from (formerly Akyab) Sittwe, Arakan in Myanmar to Malaysia. One of them who is able to navigate the boat and use the compass to reach the Malaysian shore. Besides the challenges of unpredictable weather and strong winds, the boat can run out of petrol supply and then would then have to depend on the wind direction to move until it can successfully dock at one of the islands in Langkawi, Kedah (Andika 2019).

2. Land Route

The modus operandi of migration over land route requires crossing four international borders of Bangladesh, India, Thailand and Malaysia. This causes anxiety about security and the risk of being caught by authorities as border regions are usually tightly controlled by Myanmar and Thailand authorities. So, smugglers act to arrange the safest route to smuggle Rohingya refugees until they reach Malaysia. They begin the journey from Sittwe, Myanmar to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh and then enter Manipur, India for a few days. Later, they are smuggled to re-enter Myanmar through the entry gate in Mandalay, a small province in Myanmar. From Mandalay they are smuggled into Thailand and next to Malaysia. This journey takes about three weeks at a cost of RM9,000 per person payable to the smuggling agent (Andika 2019).

There is another route that Rohingya refugees need to pay Myanmar agents to send them to Malaysia. They will be gathered first at Yangon before they are brought by car or van to the Thailand-Malaysia border at Bukit Kayu Hitam. It takes about one to two weeks. Then, other agents will take over the task to send them to cross over into north Malaysia, such the states of Kedah and Penang Island (Aizat & Na'eim 2016). Generally, for refugees who already have family members in Malaysia, the entry process is handled and managed by smuggling agents. Refugees who do not pay agents will have an unplanned journey with no other arrangements and thus exposed to various unexpected risks.

3. Combined Sea and Land Route

A combination of sea and land route is also used by Rohingya refugees to reach Malaysia. They begin the journey from Arakan to Bangladesh (Cox's Bazaar), then board a boat to Thailand where they work a few years washing dishes in restaurants, or collecting discarded items, or as construction labourers, or as plantation workers. After that, they enter Malaysia through Rantau Panjang, Kelantan and go by vehicle to Kuala Lumpur as arranged by an agent in Kelantan. The situation in the vehicle is very congested and packed like sardines in a can. They sit curled up at the front seat, they lie down lengthwise overlapping at the backseat and in the bonnet at the back covered with a cloth and things as if the vehicle is full of many things. During the journey, they feel warm, hungry and short of air, smell the bad odour, suffer cramps and bodyache, and some even die from it (suffocation). They are strictly warned not to make any sound or create noise by knocking on the car body, nor ask for food or drink or to go to toilet. They only know that the vehicle stopped when they hear the sound of the pump and petrol flows into the car tank (Intan Suria et al. 2016a).

Payment for entry into Malaysia has to be settled with the agent before entering into Malaysia and the amount varies according to agents. Some charge RM2,200 for adult and RM1,000 for a child (Azharudin & Azlinariah 2012). There are also split payments such as the Thai agent charges RM500 for handling Rohingya refugees from Thailand to Rantau Panjang and RM1,500 per person from Rantau Panjang to Kuala Lumpur. Looking at the high cost of payment, a refugee will work for a certain period of time during transit in Thailand to enable them to save money (Intan Suria et al. 2016b). Other sources explain that syndicates for smuggling migrants charge more, between

RM8,000 to RM16,000 for each individual who wishes to enter Malaysia. The excuse given for the high charge is that they use a commercial three-storey boat not a fishing boat anymore. This commercial boat takes eight to ten hours to arrive in international waters not far from Malaysia. This activity is masterminded by some Rohingyas themselves as stooges for Thai nationals (Skuad Harian Metro 2019). This shows that the hardship situation of refugees throughout their journey to enter Malaysia is actually incomparable to the high cost they have to pay.

4. Air Route

A minority of Rohingya refugees arrive in Malaysia by plane. They are also identified as using the services of a smuggling agent in Bangladesh as they were staying in a Bangladesh refugee camp before departing for Malaysia. The agent's fee is about RM30,000 which covers the whole journey right up to entering Malaysia. The modus operandi by air is more planned with periodical monitoring at airport entry gates, prior inquiry, appointing middlemen to deal with security officers or the authorities who take bribes and collaborate to ensure that the refugees pass through security control's sophisticated technology by falsifying travel documents such as passport and visa (Andika 2019).

In addition, refugees also begin their journey by boat from Maungdaw, Myanmar to Teknaf, Bangladesh, to obtain a false Bangladesh passport and book a flight ticket to Malaysia (Aizat & Na'eim 2016). Briefly, refugees' entry by air seems very easy without detection because immigration officers receive bribes and is associated with 'insider' corruption. It is as if immigration officers betray their own country allowing foreigners to illegally stay in Malaysia, purely for bribe or personal gain (Rohani et al. 2015). The selection of migration route whether over land, water or air or combination of routes depends on aspects such as safety, duration of journey, service fees for smuggling of humans and the risk of getting caught by authorities.

Conclusion:-

Malaysia is indeed the choice destination of most Rohingya refugees though there are other countries in the region such as Indonesia and Bangladesh. The aspects of economic, religious sentiment, political stability and educational opportunities in Malaysia are important factors that make Malaysia the choice of Rohingyas refugees for international refuge. Their displacement to transit countries occurs in a series of involuntary migration waves caused by the issues of persecution, discrimination, deprivation of citizenship and identity, violations of civil rights, and political conflict and social tension. Migration to Malaysia is handled by smuggler agents whether by sea, land or a combination of both, or by air is fraught with hardship, pain and mistreatment but Rohingya refugees are still determined to bear all challenges for a better life in Malaysia. The choice of migration route depends on some aspects such as safety of journey, duration of journey, payment for smuggling services and the risk of getting caught by authorities.

As a whole, this article discussed the issues relating to the migration of Rohingya refugees to Malaysia, by explaining the factors or reasons for their choice of Malaysia as a transit country and the modus operandi used to enter Malaysia. Discussion is divided into two parts: The first part concerns the factors for their arrival in Malaysia, encompassing the aspects of economic sources, sharing a common religion, the attitude of the Malaysian society, family influence, political stability and opportunity for education. The second part explains the modus operandi of their entry into Malaysia covering the different migration routes, entry process and challenges faced. This research gives some input in order for various concerned parties to conduct a more comprehensive research that can significantly impact the universal well-being of people and countries.

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