China Mediates for the Rohingya Crisis

Why in news?

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China’s is mediating between Bangladesh and Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya crisis.

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What are the developments?

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- A military operation by Myanmar in Rakhine, resulted in around 600,000 Rohingya fleeing the province to Bangladesh.
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- This snowballed into a humanitarian crisis and a war of words between Dhaka and Naypyidaw.
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- In this background that China stepped in with its three-point plan.
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- Subsequently, an agreement was reached between Myanmar and Bangladesh to repatriate Rohingya refugees.
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- If the agreement took effect successfully, China had promised economic assistance for the long-term development of Rakhine.
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Why has China been pro-active?

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- China has put pressure on Myanmar because a protracted conflict in Rakhine will be decidedly against Beijing’s economic interests.
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- Rakhine is an important link in its Belt and Road Initiative and China is building a $7.3 billion deep-water port in the province.
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- It has also invested $2.45 billion to build an oil and gas pipeline connecting coastal Rakhine to Yunnan province in Southern China.
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What are the challenges?

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- While the signing of a repatriation deal suggests some positives, the details of the agreement are very preliminary.
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- The agreement had mandated an immediate ceasefire in Rakhine to halt further displacement which hasn’t been declared yet.
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- Also, the number of Rohingya who will be sent back or the timeline for repatriation hasn’t been revealed.
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- It is also not clear whether the refugees themselves want to go back to a place they had fled in such perilous circumstances.
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- There is also no indication thus far, that a resettlement plan is taking shape.
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What is the way forward?

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- China sees the Rohingya crisis as an economic problem, given that it has been proposing a development centric solution.
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- While economic assistance is essential, the real problem is arguably deeply political, and thereby needing a political solution.
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- Unless Myanmar takes efforts to recognize Rohingya as full fledged citizens, any deal is doomed to fail.
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Source: The Hindu

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