Failed Rohingya Repatriation

Why in News?

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina blamed Myanmar for the failure of a recent attempt to repatriate Rohingya refugees.

What comment did she make?

- She said in Parliament, “Myanmar couldn’t win Rohingyas’ trust in creating a situation conducive for their dignified return”.
- Her comment came two weeks after Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh had refused to board buses that would have taken them to Mynamar.
- This resulted in Myanmar missing the August 2019 target for repatriation. An earlier missed deadline was in January 2018, when Bangladesh delayed repatriation plans.

What are the repatriation targets?

- According to United Nations estimates, around 1 million **Rohingya have fled Myanmar since August 2017**.
- It also says that they have been set up in two camps by the Bangladesh government in Cox’s Bazar.
- In November 2017, **Bangladesh announced a joint working group** of UNHCR, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, that would be set up to work out the terms of repatriation, which would be completed by 2019.
- In March 2018, Bangladesh submitted a list of 8,000 refugees for repatriation. But Myanmar accepted only 374 names, citing incomplete documentation.
- In May 2018, Myanmar announced that 1,100 verified Rohingya refugees would be repatriated.
- In June 2018, Myanmar and the UN signed a confidential Memorandum of Understanding. When details were leaked online, refugees rejected it.
- In 2018, Reuters reported on a list of demands by Rohingya elders at one refugee camp. They wanted Myanmar to,
    1. Announce that it would give the refugees citizenship
    2. Recognise them as an ethnic group
    3. Return land they once occupied and rebuild their homes, mosques and schools

4. Hold the Myanmarese military accountable for killings.

Why the repatriation failed?

- Bangladesh Foreign Minister said that Bangladesh and Myanmar were fully ready to resume repatriation, but some Rohingya leaders and NGOs were reportedly discouraging them to return.
- The refugee families who almost boarded a bus to Myanmar were discouraged by fellow refugees who told them they would not be able to return to their villages or get citizenship.
- The UNHCR said that so far none of those who were interviewed had indicated willingness to repatriate at this time.
- It also added that it'll continue assisting the government of Bangladesh in this process.

What is the genesis of the crisis?

- The Rohingya are a Bengali-speaking Muslim minority in Myanmar, whose government considers them illegal migrants from Bangladesh.
- It does not recognise them as Myanmar citizens under the Burmese Citizenship Law of 1972.
- The Rohingya live mainly in Myanmar's Rakhine state, which was once part of the Kingdom of Arakan (1429-1785) that included modern-day Chittagong, Bangladesh.
- The refugee crisis followed attacks on Myanmar border police in October 2016 in Rakhine, for which the insurgent group Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army took responsibility.
- In retaliation, several Rohingya villagers were killed, raped and jailed by the military.

What is the status of Rohingya in Bangladesh?

- Since 2017, 4,300 acres of hills and forests have been sacrificed to make space for refugee shelters.
- Some 1,485 hectares of forests have been razed and encroached upon for firewood.
- In March 2019, Bangladesh was struggling to cope with the influx of refugees and wanted to start relocating them to the Bhasan Char Island in the Bay of Bengal, with UN help.
- Refugees began protesting and refused to relocate.
- According to UN and media reports, inside the camps refugees were facing violence, assault and kidnapping by fellow Rohingya.
- Bangladesh had to increase police strength inside the camps.

Source: The Indian Express

