Rohingya Refugee Crisis

Why in news?

Recently Rohingya refugees are rescued in the waters of West Aceh, Indonesia has once again drawn attention to the plight of the refugees who are increasingly embarking on dangerous sea journeys to seek a better life.

Who are Rohingya refugees?

- The Rohingya are a *Muslim minority ethnic group* with historical ties to the *Arakan kingdom in Myanmar* (formerly known as Burma).
- The term "Rohingya" is derived from the word "Arakan" in the Rohingya dialect, with "ga" or "gya" meaning "from."
- Despite claiming generations of residence in Myanmar's Rakhine State, the Rohingya face challenges due to successive governments labelling them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.
- **Unique tradition**- Their cultural and religious distinctiveness sets them apart from the majority Buddhist population in Myanmar, and they speak a Bengali dialect different from the common Burmese language.
- Unfortunately, Myanmar has denied them recognition as an ethnic group, rendering them the world's largest stateless population, devoid of fundamental rights and security.
- **Myanmar's 1982 citizenship law**- Rohingya community members (along with other ethnic minorities) can only attain citizenship if they can prove their ancestors resided in Myanmar before 1823.
- Otherwise, even if one of their parents is a Myanmar citizen, they are classified as "resident foreigners" or "associate citizens".
- **Forced displacement**- The Rohingya have been fleeing Myanmar in large numbers since violence erupted in 2012 and escalated dramatically in 2017, resulting in what the UN described as "ethnic cleansing."
- **2017 crisis-** A massive wave of violence erupted in Rakhine, forcing over 750,000 people to seek sanctuary in Bangladesh.
- The brutality of security forces resulted in entire villages being razed, families torn apart, and severe human rights violations, including mass rape.
- Over the years, Rohingya seeks refuge in neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and India.
- **UN fact finding commission**- In 2018, the commision accused Myanmar of having genocidal intent against the Rohingya, it uncovered clear patterns of abuse by the military, including systemic targeting of civilians, sexual violence etc.,

- **Refugee camps in Bangladesh**- An estimated 960,000Rohingya live in refugee camps in Bangladesh where they are primarily located near Myanmar border in *Cox's bazar* which houses some of the world's largest and most densely populated refugee camps.
- **Overcrowded camps**- The refugee camps lack basic human necessities



What are the issues that Rohingya face in high sea journeys?

- **Risk high sea journeys**- Returning to Myanmar is virtually impossible and worsening conditions in Bangladeshi relief camps, many Rohingya risk dangerous journeys.
- **Reach other countries**-They undertake treacherous voyages across the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea to reach Muslim-majority nations like Indonesia and Malaysia.
- **Exploitation**- Human traffickers exploit their desperation, charging exorbitant amounts to ferry, they are often given inadequate space and basic supplies, violence against women have been documented.



- **Stranded refugees**- Some Rohingya remain stranded at sea for weeks because countries are reluctant to accept refugees.
- **Illegal immigration**- Some countries detain the refugees along the route on illegal immigration charges, enduring lengthy incarceration without resolution.
- **Deadliest stretch of waters**- UN has estimated that 1 in 8 Rohingya individuals attempting the sea route either dies or disappears rendering Andaman sea and Bay of Bengal among the deadliest stretches of water globally.

What lies ahead?

- The UN refugee agency urgently calls upon regional coastal authorities to take timely action, emphasizing that saving lives and rescuing those in distress at sea is both a humanitarian imperative and a longstanding duty under international maritime law.
- Rohingya crisis requires concerted efforts from the international community to ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of Rohingya refugees are upheld.
- This includes providing adequate humanitarian assistance, addressing the root causes of the crisis in Myanmar, and holding accountable those responsible for human rights violations against the Rohingya population.

Reference

[The Hindu- Rohingya crisis]

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