

The Rohingya refugee crisis throughout the years

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Five years ago, in August 2017, the Myanmar military unleashed a brutal offensive against the Rohingya communities across the country's Rakhine State. The violent crackdown, which the United Nations later described as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing," saw soldiers raze homes and shoot at villagers, forcing more than 700,000 Rohingyas to flee across the border into Bangladesh.

Despite Bangladesh having to face a myriad of its own challenges, the country sheltered the Rohingyas on humanitarian grounds, hosting the biggest refugee camp in the world.

Although the 2017 incident is by far the largest, this was not the first time the Rohingya people, one of Myanmar's many ethnic minorities, had been driven out of Myanmar and had to take refuge in Bangladesh.

Waves of violence, repression, and restrictions on freedom of movement led the Rohingyas to flee their homes in Arakan, a region officially known as the Rakhine State, which has been home to Rohingyas for generations, and seek refuge in Cox's Bazar. The Rohingya refugees have fled to Bangladesh in, contestably, five waves – 1977-1978, 1991-92, 2012, 2016, and 2017.

INFLUX IN 1977-1978

Over 200,000 people fled to Cox's Bazar between 1977 and May 1978, following a spate of torture, rape, and evictions from their homes after the Myanmar military launched Operation Dragon King (Naga Min) in Rakhine State. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), these evictions took place during efforts to register citizens and screen out foreigners for a national census.

Historical documents show that over 10,000 Rohingyas were killed during this operation, apart from those who fled to Bangladesh. Around 40,000 Rohingya women, children, and elderly perished during the journey.

The refugees were sheltered in 18 makeshift refugee camps of Cox's Bazar established with UN assistance, in other camps in Bandarban as well as in some outer areas. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Bangladesh government supplied emergency relief but were quickly overwhelmed.

However, the Burmese regime took back these

