



A Rohingya woman is in agony for leaving her homeland.
PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Myanmar signed a bilateral agreement on April 28, 1992 for the return of the refugees, the repatriation progressed only at a snail's pace.

Refugee registration cards issued by the Bangladesh government were, however, considered as documents in the verification process run by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which set up a sub-office to process the job.

In this process, around 200,000 Rohingya refugees were able to return. Yet, approximately 30,000 were left behind in Bangladesh as they were unable to present sufficient documentation. There were additional Rohingya influxes during 1996-97, and the repatriation process was almost halted from 2005 onwards.

INFLUX IN 2012 AND 2016

Widespread riots and clashes broke out in the Rakhine State between the Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in June 2012, sparked by the rape and murder on May 28, 2012 of a 28-year-old Arakanese woman. The violence forced thousands of refugees to sneak into Bangladesh.

Following the sectarian violence, government authorities destroyed mosques, conducted violent mass arrests and blocked aid to displaced Muslims, according to an HRW report published in 2013, which accused the Myanmar government of engaging in a "campaign of ethnic cleansing."

At least 125,000 Rohingya and other Muslims, and a smaller number of Arakanese, were displaced to internally displaced person camps, HRW said.

In October 2016, large coordinated attacks hit

three Myanmar police posts along the border with Bangladesh, and consequent military operations resulted in another exodus of the Rohingya people who crossed into Bangladesh. Most of the new arrivals settled in Cox's Bazar's makeshift settlement.

According to the UNHCR, more than 74,000 Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh over the next few months. Most of the refugees interviewed by UNHCR said their homes had been looted, burned or demolished.

LARGEST INFLUX

Bangladesh saw the largest and fastest refugee influx that began on 25 August, 2017, when violence broke out in Rakhine State. The military burned entire villages to the ground, killed people, separated families, and gang-raped women and girls.

According to the UNHCR, over 940,000 refugees fled to Bangladesh from August 25 to August 31 that year.

The vast majority of the refugees live in 34 extremely congested camps, including the largest single site, the Kutupalong-Balukhali Expansion Site, which hosts more than 635,000 Rohingya refugees.

With them, Bangladesh is currently hosting more than 1.2 million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals. Five years on, not a single Rohingya refugee has been repatriated despite formal repatriation efforts being made twice, in November 2018 and again in August 2019.