

# Rohingya Muslims

March 29, 2021

**In news :** During the visit of Indian Prime Minister to Bangladesh, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh requested India, as a member of the UN Security Council, to play a “strong role” in the early repatriation of the displaced Rohingyas back to Myanmar

## Who are Rohingyas?

- They are an ethnic group, largely comprising Muslims, who predominantly live in the Western Myanmar province of Rakhine. They speak a dialect of Bengali, as opposed to the commonly spoken Burmese language
- Rohingya Muslims represent the largest percentage of Muslims in Myanmar, with the majority living in Rakhine state.
- They are descendants of Arab traders and other groups who have been in the region for generations.

## Language of Rohingyas

- The Rohingya language is part of the Indo-Aryan sub-branch of the greater Indo-European language family and is related to the Chittagonian language spoken in the southernmost part of Bangladesh bordering Myanmar
- Rohingya scholars have written the Rohingya language in various scripts including the Arabic, Hanifi, Urdu, Roman, and Burmese alphabets, where Hanifi is a newly developed alphabet derived from Arabic with the addition of four characters from Latin and Burmese

## More about Rohingyas & their migration

- The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) places them among the “the most vulnerable groups of the forcibly displaced

- Population: Before the displacement crisis in 2017, when over 740,000 fled to Bangladesh, an estimated 1.4 million Rohingya lived in Myanmar
- **Main reasons for their migration are:** Denial of citizenship, restriction of their movements, education, job and their exploitation by Myanmar military, as reported in the news

## **Arguments of Rohingyas & Myanmar govt over their origin**

### **Arguments of Rohingyas:**

- The Rohingya maintain they are indigenous to western Myanmar with a heritage of over a millennium and influence from the Arabs, Mughals and Portuguese.
- The community claims it is descended from people in precolonial Arakan and colonial Arakan; historically, the region was an independent kingdom between Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

### **Arguments of Myanmar govt:**

- The Myanmar government considers the Rohingya as colonial and postcolonial migrants from neighbouring Chittagong/East Bengal respectively Bangladesh.
- It argues that a distinct precolonial Muslim population is recognized as Kaman, and that the Rohingya conflate their history with the history of Arakan Muslims in general to advance a separatist agenda

### **Denial of citizenship to Rohingyas**

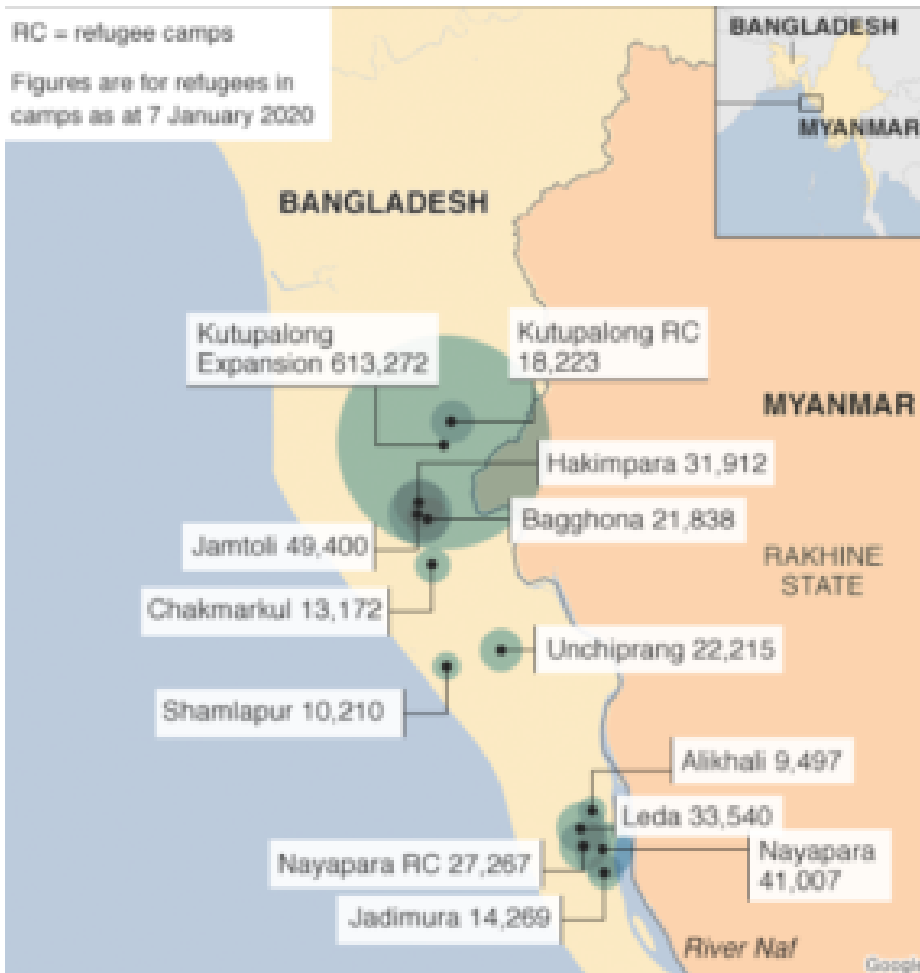
- The government of Myanmar, a predominantly Buddhist country, denies the Rohingya citizenship and even excluded them from the 2014 census, refusing to recognise them as a people
- Myanmar considers them as persons who migrated to their land during the Colonial rule. So, it has not granted Rohingyas full citizenship

- According to the 1982 Burmese citizenship law, a Rohingya (or any ethnic minority) is eligible for citizenship only if he/she provides proof that his/her ancestors have lived in the country prior to 1823. Else, they are classified as “resident foreigners” or as “associate citizens”
- Since they are not citizens, they are not entitled to be part of civil service. Their movements are also restricted within the Rakhine state.

### **Why did they flee their state?**

- The exodus began on 25 August 2017 after Rohingya Arsa militants launched deadly attacks on more than 30 police posts.
- Rohingyas arriving in Bangladesh said they fled after troops, backed by local Buddhist mobs, responded by burning their villages and attacking and killing civilians.
- Hence they migrated to Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries including India

### **Rohingya refugee sites in Bangladesh**



## Global response

The mass displacement of Rohingya in 2017 led the International Criminal Court investigating crimes against humanity, and led to the International Court of Justice investigating genocide.