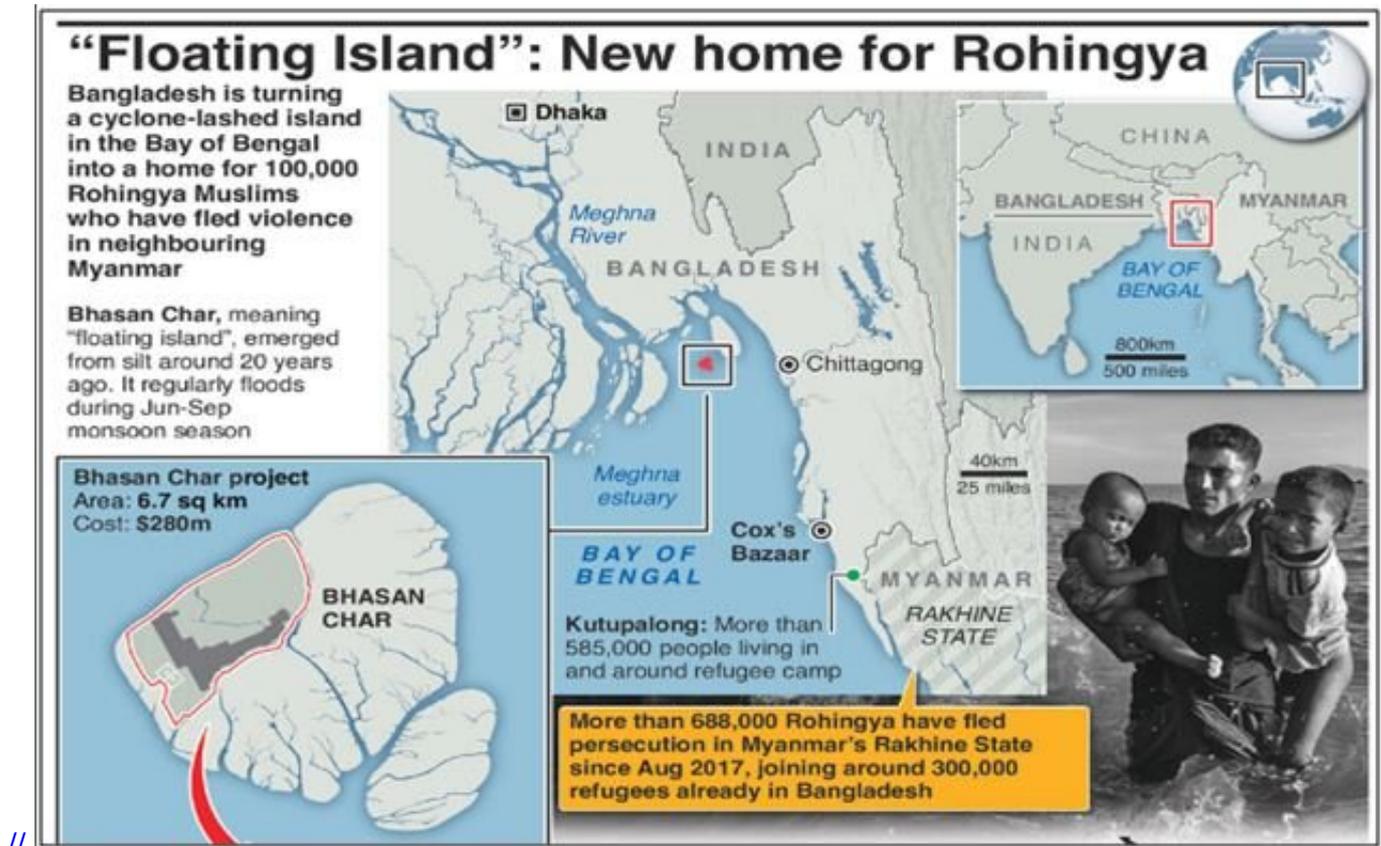




Rohingyas at Isolated Bangladesh Island

Why in News

Recently, authorities in **Bangladesh** sent the first group of more than **1,500 Rohingya refugees** to an isolated **Bhasan Char island** in the Bay of Bengal.



Key Points

▪ Background:

- The **Rohingya** people are stateless, **Indo-Aryan ethnic group** who reside in **Rakhine State, Myanmar**.
- There were an estimated **1 million Rohingya** living in Myanmar before the **2016-17 crisis**. An estimated **625,000 refugees** from Rakhine, Myanmar, had crossed the border into Bangladesh since August 2017. The majority are Muslim while a minority are Hindu.
- They are described by **the United Nations (UN)** as **one of the most persecuted minorities in the world**.
- The Rohingya population is **denied citizenship** under the **1982 Myanmar nationality**

law. They have denied the Rohingya the possibility of acquiring a nationality.

- Although **Rohingya history in the region can be traced back to the 8th century**, Myanmar law does not recognize the ethnic minority as one of the eight national indigenous races.
- The flow of Rohingya from Myanmar intensified in 2017 and the **coast near the Bangladeshi city of Cox's Bazar** was taken over by refugee settlements.
- In **June 2015**, the Bangladesh government **suggested** resettling **Rohingya refugees** on the **Bhasan Char island** under its **Ashrayan Project**.

▪ **Recent development:**

- The Bangladesh government is moving these refugees to an isolated island known as **Bhasan Char** which is located **21 miles (34 kilometers) from the mainland**.

- **Bhasan Char:**

- **Bhasan Char (Floating Island)** also known as **Char Piya or Thengar Char Island**, is an island in **Hatiya, Bangladesh**. It surfaced only **20 years ago and was never inhabited**.
- It was formed with **Himalayan silt from the mouth of river Meghna in 2006 spanning 40 square kilometres**.
- The island, which was once regularly **submerged by monsoon rains, now has flood protection embankments, houses**, hospitals and mosques built at a cost of more than 112 million dollars by the **Bangladesh navy**.

- It is **underwater from June to September** because of the [monsoon](#).

▪ **Concern:**

- As **Bhasan Char** falls in an **ecologically fragile** area prone to **floods, erosion and cyclones**, it is **not** considered **safe for human settlements**.
- **The UN** and various other human rights agencies are against this relocation as they believe that **Rohingya refugees must be able to make a free and informed decision** about relocating to the island based upon relevant, accurate and updated information.
- Earlier this year, [Amnesty International](#) released a **damning report** on the conditions faced by **Rohingyas** already living on the island.

- The report contained allegations of cramped and unhygienic living conditions, limited food and healthcare facilities, a lack of phones, as well as cases of sexual harassment by both the Navy and local labourers engaging in extortion.

▪ **India's Stand:**

- India maintains that Rohingyas are a **threat to its national security and have links with international terror groups**.
- India has so far **refused to exert any pressure on Myanmar** for taking the Rohingyas back and giving them recognition as the citizens of Myanmar.

▪ **International Provisions to Protect the Rights of Rohingyas:**

- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#): Even though the refugees are foreigners in the country of asylum, by virtue of **Article 2 of the ICCPR, 1966**, they could enjoy the **same fundamental rights and freedoms as nationals**.

- The right to equality before the law, equal protection of the law and non-discrimination which form a cornerstone of international human rights laws call for banning discrimination against refugees based on their status as such.

- [The 1951 Refugee Convention](#) : The core principle of the convention is **non-refoulement**, which asserts that a **refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom**.

Way Forward

- While **pressing for eventual repatriation**, Bangladesh and external partners should move past short-term planning and **work together to build safe housing, improve refugees' educational and livelihood opportunities, and support refugee-hosting communities**. Bangladesh should also roll back its counterproductive security measures and plans for **relocations to Bhasan Char**.
- It is not too late for **Myanmar** to change course and **reorient itself to transform into a democracy that embraces human rights for all**, by **addressing issues of discrimination, implementing victim-centered justice mechanisms, rewriting laws and holding those who have violated human rights accountable**.

[Source:BS](#)

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