

The British parliament on Wednesday approved a controversial bill to allow the country send asylum seekers arriving illegally in the UK to Rwanda for scrutiny and processing.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government won the vote in parliament by a majority of 320 to 276, on Wednesday night January 17, 2023.

The victory was a huge relief for PM Sunak. Just 24 hours earlier, 60 of his own Conservative Members of Parliament had rebelled by backing amendments to strengthen the bill.

Despite the parliamentary win, the plan to send refugees to Rwanda remains littered with legal hurdles.

Though, this immigration policy on which the British Prime Minister has staked his authority still faces political and legal hurdles. The bill now goes to the unelected House of Lords, Parliament's upper chamber, where it faces more opposition.

Sunak remains at the helm of a divided and demoralized party that is lagging in the polls. According to opinion polls, the Conservatives trail far behind the Labour opposition.

He argues that deporting unauthorized asylum-seekers will deter people from making risky journeys across the English Channel.

"We have a plan. It's working," Sunak said Wednesday in the House of Commons

The UK and Rwanda made a deal almost two years ago under which migrants who reach Britain across the Channel would be sent to Rwanda.

Britain has paid Rwanda at least 240 million pounds (\$305 million) under the agreement, but no one has yet been sent so far.

But Rwanda has said it will consider returning the funds if no one is sent to the country through this arrangement.

While attending the World Economic Forum in Davos, President Paul Kagame said Rwanda could return money to the UK if no asylum seekers are sent to his country under the deal.

However, Kagame emphasized that the current obstacles are not Rwanda's problem but rather The UK's challenge to address.

In April 2022, The UK and Rwanda signed an agreement to deport to Rwanda asylum seekers arriving in Britain through illegal channels. But in November 2023, The UK Supreme Court deemed the policy unlawful.

The first planned flight to take migrants to Rwanda was blocked when the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) issued "interim measures" under its Rule 39 provision.

The Prime Minister agreed a new treaty with Rwanda and brought forward new legislation - the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill - designed to override any legal obstacles and declare the country to be safe.

The scheme has been widely criticized as a threat to the welfare of vulnerable people who arrive in the UK hoping to find safety.

Human rights groups and charities warn of the ethical implications of sending vulnerable individuals to Rwanda.

The essence of the bill is to override a decision by the UK Supreme Court which in November declared the policy of sending asylum seekers to Rwanda unlawful.

Observers say that the House of Lords could try to make amendments to the bill in what is known as a "pingpong" process.

Prime Minister Sunak told the press that the bill would make it "vanishingly rare" for any asylum seeker to be able to block deportation by an appeal to the courts.