

Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

February 17 - February 23, 2020



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Highlights:

Camp conditions:

- A new armed police battalion is going to start its operation in Cox's Bazar beginning February 28.
- Police intercepted 15 Rohingya refugees, including women and children, on their way to Malaysia.
- Three United Nations agencies have launched the Safe Access to Fuel and Energy Plus Livelihoods (SAFE Plus) project in Dhaka alongside the Government of Bangladesh to mitigate deforestation and improve livelihood opportunities in Cox's Bazar.

Conditions in Myanmar:

- Myanmar's army has said it would hold more court-martials over alleged abuses against Rohingya Muslims, after the government-appointed commission said soldiers committed war crimes against the minority in January.
- Myanmar authorities have arrested nearly 50 Rohingya Muslims in Yangon region as they attempted to flee the country for Malaysia, while a separate group of Rohingya detainees appeared in court in Ayeyarwady to face charges on traveling without official permission over their earlier attempt to flee.
- Independent UN human rights experts have expressed grave concerns over the killing and displacement of civilians in Rakhine state, where the conflict between the military and the Arakan Army is intensifying.

High-level statements:

- UNHCR special envoy Angelina Jolie wrote a letter to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, applauding Bangladesh's generosity and leadership role regarding the Rohingya.
- President Abdul Hamid has expressed the hope that Nepal will support Bangladesh in multilateral fora over the repatriation of Rohingyas to their homeland in Rakhine state.
- China has stressed the need to take concrete and substantive steps for repatriation of the Rohingya, and that Bangladesh and Myanmar, the two main players involved, should engage extensively to resolve it.
- Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen has said Bashan Char could either be a resort or a "good place for homeless people" instead of relocating the refugees there. He also said Bangladesh would not relocate Rohingya to Bashan Char if all concerned think it would be a problem for them.

Developments:

[New armed police start working in Cox's Bazar](#) The Daily Star (February 23)

A new police battalion is going to start its operation in coastal district Cox's Bazar from February 28. The Armed Police Battalion (APBn)-16 is the second such special battalion to maintain law and order of the district and ensure security of Rohingyas. On November 12 last year, the home ministry approved formation of the battalion with 588 manpower. Its prime task will be to maintain law and order of the coastal district, according to a ministry order.

[Jolie lauds Bangladesh's role in dealing with Rohingya crisis](#) Prothom Alo (February 23)

Applauding Bangladesh's generosity and leadership role in dealing with the Rohingya crisis, special envoy of the UNHCR Angelina Jolie has committed to continue her advocacy for the humanitarian response for Rohingyas. The Hollywood star announced her commitment in a recent letter written to Bangladesh's prime minister Sheikh Hasina. She highly lauded the generosity of Bangladesh and the leadership it has demonstrated in the Rohingya crisis.

Similar:

[Rohingya crisis: UNHCR special envoy Angelina Jolie writes to PM](#) Dhaka Tribune (Feb. 23)

[Jolie lauds BD's leadership role in Rohingya crisis](#) Daily Observer (Feb. 23)

[Jolie lauds Hasina in letter appreciating generosity towards Rohingyas](#) The Daily Star (Feb. 23)

[Jolie praises Bangladesh's generosity in dealing with Rohingyas](#) New Age Bangladesh (Feb. 23)

[Rohingya Refugees In Limbo](#) The Organization for World Peace (February 21)

[op-ed] The Hague decision was a step in the right direction, but the international community needs to do more. Firstly, the UN Security Council should vote to impose sanctions on Myanmar until they can prove their fulfilment of the Hague's ruling. Although this may be difficult with China's potential to veto any Security Council actions, it is hoped that they could be persuaded not to veto. In addition, the international community must direct foreign aid toward the refugee camps in Bangladesh in order to improve the conditions of said camps, without further burdening the Bangladeshi government. Finally, the UN should help negotiate better repatriation agreements, in which the Rohingyas receive guarantees of protection once they return to Myanmar. These agreements would be bolstered by the UN sanctions on Myanmar, and potentially the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces for a limited time period to prevent the further massacre of the Rohingyas. Only through this combination of international collaboration and repatriation will the Rohingyas feel safe enough to return to their country and further carnage be limited.

[Myanmar to Court-Martial More Troops Over Rohingya Crackdown, Army Says](#) New York Times (February 21)

Myanmar's army has said in a statement it would hold more court-martials over alleged abuses against Rohingya Muslims, after a government-appointed commission said soldiers committed war crimes against the minority. The panel concluded, in a report published in January, that members of the security forces, among "multiple actors", were responsible for war crimes and serious human rights violations during a military-led crackdown against the group in 2017. The army said in a post on its website that it had studied the panel's report in great detail and was reviewing allegations.

[Bangladesh police intercept 15 Rohingyas on way to Malaysia](#) New Age Bangladesh (February 20)

The Teknaf police intercepted 15 Rohingya refugees, including women and children, on their way to Malaysia in an operation this week. The refugees were trying to migrate to Malaysia through the Bay of Bengal. Police said suspected traffickers gathered them from different refugee camps. The potential migrants paid Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000 to the traffickers to take them to Malaysia through the sea, police said. The refugees were handed over to respective camp authorities for further actions.

Similar:

[Dozens of Rohingyas face charged for illegal travel in Myanmar after fleeing Rakhine state](#) The Star (Feb. 22)

[Tk 2,500cr forest resources, biodiversity 'destroyed'](#) The Independent (February 20)

Rohingya refugees have destroyed about Tk 2,500-crore forest resources and biodiversity in the Cox's Bazar area, according to an estimate by officials of the Bangladesh Forests Department (BFD). The Rohingyas have destroyed around 8,000 acres of natural forests and social forestry by building houses and felling trees for fuel, putting the environment and ecology under great threat, the officials say. Expansion of the old Kutupalong camp has also blocked the only corridor used by endangered Asian elephants as migration routes and trapped about 45 elephants on the western side of the camp. Several international aid agencies, local government bodies, and NGOs have also been constructing infrastructure and other activities around the forest areas without informing the forest department.

[Ensure transparency in relief management for Rohingyas](#) The Daily Star (February 20)

Cox's Bazar Civil Society and NGO Forum has demanded that the government make the relief management for Rohingya refugees transparent and form an authority regarding the matter. The forum announced the demand at a press conference at the Cox's Bazar Press Club. The forum's activists also demanded that the government make public the issues of Rohingya rehabilitation and expenditure of the joint response plan (JRP) for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis.

[Vaccination blitz kicks off to eliminate cholera](#) The Independent (February 20)

A drive to vaccinate more than a million people against cholera, which infects tens of thousands a year, was kicked off in Bangladesh as part of an international campaign to eliminate transmission by 2030. The country aims at reducing the impact of the disease -- which causes acute diarrhoea and spreads through contaminated food and water -- through vaccines and by setting up a dedicated treatment hospital. UN agencies and Bangladesh authorities have already carried out a massive cholera vaccination drive in the country's southeast, where nearly one million Rohingya refugees have lived in overcrowded camps since 2017. Some 800,000 Rohingya and 600,000 locals were vaccinated in that campaign.

Similar:

[Bangladesh kicks off vaccination blitz to eliminate cholera](#) France24 (Feb. 19)

[Myanmar Arrests 49 Rohingya Muslims Attempting to Flee to Malaysia](#) Radio Free Asia (February 20)

Myanmar authorities have arrested nearly 50 Rohingya Muslims in Yangon region as they attempted to flee the country for Malaysia, a lawmaker said, while a separate group of Rohingya detainees appeared in court in Ayeyarwady region to face charges on traveling without official permission over their earlier attempt to flee. The 49 Rohingya picked up included 28 women, 18 men, and three children, said Myat Marlar Tun, a lawmaker in Yangon's regional parliament. "They were arrested last night," he said. "They are being interrogated. The authorities will transfer them this evening." "I don't know if they will be sent to Insein Prison or someplace else," he added, referring to the notorious detention center on Yangon's outskirts. It was not immediately clear whether the 49 Rohingya would be charged with traveling without official permission, or with immigration offenses.

[UN alarmed over spike in civilian casualties in Rakhine](#) UCA News (February 19)

Independent UN human rights experts have expressed grave concerns over the killing and displacement of civilians in Rakhine state, western Myanmar, where the conflict between the military and the Arakan Army is intensifying. "Civilians, including children, continue to bear the brunt of this escalating conflict. We are especially fearful for them as violence has increased in the areas where an internet shutdown was recently reimposed," the experts said in a joint statement. They said credible reports show that fighting and possible use of heavy weapons has taken place near ethnic Rakhine and Rohingya villages. Reports indicate that in the last 10 days up to 1,100 people have been displaced, including 600 civilians from We Ma Kya village in Kyauktaw. At least seven civilians have been killed, including three Rohingya in Buthidaung, and up to 50 injured, including 21 Khami children who came under fire at an elementary school. At least 50,000 people are displaced in 119 sites in Rakhine and more than 1,800 people are displaced in 12 sites in Chin state, according to a UN report.

[Lost decades in Rohingya camps](#) The Daily Star (February 19)

[op-ed] Long before August 2017, there were Rohingya refugees who lived in camps in Cox's Bazar, who had left Myanmar decades ago. Prior to late 2017, registered refugees could more or less move about freely, albeit using their refugee ID. After the influx, starting in August, these refugees who so far had not encountered so many police and army personnel in and around their camps, are now used to the sight. More worrying, however, is the barbed wire currently encircling the camp. In September 2019, the home minister announced that barbed wire fences would be installed around the camps "to maintain law and order in the camps and ensure safety and security." Since the new arrivals have come, other small freedoms enjoyed by the registered refugees have also vanished. Children who manage to persist in local schools and colleges will be unable to continue their education.

[Rohingya woman killed in Cox's Bazar camp](#) Dhaka Tribune (February 18)

A Rohingya woman was killed while trying to settle a dispute between two other women in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar on Tuesday. When Noor Nahar tried to settle the dispute as an impartial party, she accidentally received a severe blow on her shoulder. Locals rescued her and took her to the International Organization for Migration healthcare centre, where the doctors declared her dead.

Similar:

[Rohingya woman killed in C'Bazar clash](#) Daily Observer (Feb. 23)

[For Rohingya refugees, ID systems have brought coercion, violence and denial of ethnic identity](#) Advox GlobalVoices (February 18)

In order to register in the camps in Cox's Bazar, Rohingyas have had to submit their information, fingerprints, and an iris scan, all of which would be collected and logged in biometric "Smart Cards." Within the camps, there have been different views on the Smart Cards. As concerns grew stronger, the opposition to Smart Cards germinated and spread. Many refugees have refused to believe that the card was just a practical necessity for aid management and delivery, that it had no social or political meaning. For many, an even more worrisome aspect of the process was that the database registration form included the option to share one's information with Myanmar authorities. This suggested that Smart Card biometric information would be shared with Myanmar for repatriation, an abiding goal of the Bangladesh government for over four decades. Many feared that data from the Smart Cards would be integrated into the Myanmar government's National Verification Card system. The Smart Card registration process has also been harrowing for many refugees. In 2018, there were reports of various types of "irregularities," coercion and beatings. In interviews a reporter conducted, witnesses reported incidents at the point of information collection, and beatings meted out by officials.

[Rab detains 3 traffickers with 3 Rohingyas](#) United News Bangladesh (February 18)

Three human traffickers along with three Rohingyas have been detained in Cumilla. After detention of the three members of the human trafficking gang, a huge number of fake passports, and fake birth certificates for making fake passports were recovered. Papers and three computers used for making fake certificates were also recovered. The three Myanmar displaced citizens (Rohingya) were caught up with the traffickers out of desperation. They include one under-aged woman and two men.

[UN initiative to improve environment, livelihoods and energy supply in Cox's Bazar](#) The Financial Express (February 18)

Three United Nations agencies have launched the Safe Access to Fuel and Energy Plus Livelihoods (SAFE Plus) project in Dhaka alongside the Government of Bangladesh to mitigate deforestation and improve livelihood opportunities in Cox's Bazar. SAFE Plus is a joint project between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Organization for Migration, and the World Food Programme to address environmental degradation through avenues such as the distribution of Liquefied Petroleum Gas and stoves, reforestation, and improved access to food production through livelihoods programming.

[President expects Nepal to support Rohingya repatriation](#) The Independent (February 18)

President Abdul Hamid has expressed the hope that Nepal will support Bangladesh in multilateral fora over the repatriation of Rohingyas to their homeland in Rakhine state of Myanmar. He indicated this hope when Foreign Minister of Nepal Pradeep Kumar Gyawali met him at Bangabhaban.

Similar:

[President expects Nepal's support](#) Daily Observer (Feb. 19)

[Int'l community's stronger role sought for Rohingya repatriation](#) United News Bangladesh (February 18)

Speakers at a programme in Dhaka this week urged the global community to play a stronger role for the sustainable repatriation of Rohingyas to their place of origin in Rakhine state of Myanmar. While addressing the panel discussion titled 'Rohingya: The Need for Justice and Rights in Rakhine 2020' at the Brac Centre Inn, they also called for imposing strict economic sanctions on Myanmar and putting pressure on its military to resolve the Rohingya crisis. The Centre for Peace and Justice of Brac University and the Centre for Genocide Studies of Dhaka University organised the programme.

[Chinese envoy for concrete steps](#) New Age Bangladesh (February 18)

China has stressed the need for taking concrete and substantive steps for repatriation of Rohingya people from Bangladesh to Myanmar instead of paying lip service to the issue. 'They are facing difficulty,' admitted Chinese ambassador Li Jiming referring to the displaced Rohingya community at a meeting with the press in Dhaka, where he also stressed the need for concrete and substantive steps. Claiming that China is not a major player in resolving the Rohingya crisis, he said China is engaged in a tripartite mechanism involving Bangladesh and Myanmar to facilitate a bilateral dialogue towards finding a solution. But Bangladesh and Myanmar, which are two main players on the matter, should engage extensively to resolve it, ambassador LI said, mentioning that the meeting of the Bangladesh-Myanmar joint working group should be held frequently.

Similar:

[Chinese envoy terms Rohingya crisis "a quarrel between two neighbors"](#) NewsNext Bangladesh (Feb. 17)

[China wants prompt repatriation of Rohingyas: envoy](#) The Daily Star (Feb. 17)

[Bashan Char could be a resort or home to homeless: Momen](#) The Daily Star (February 17)

Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen has said Bashan Char, could either be a resort or a "good place for homeless people" instead of relocating the refugees there. "We can think of an alternative instead of sending Rohingyas there. This is my personal thinking and there has been no decision from the government yet," he told reporters at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while sharing his experience of a recent visit to the island. Mentioning economic activities there, the foreign minister said it would be better if other people are sent to Bashan Char instead of only Rohingyas. Earlier, the foreign minister said Bangladesh would not relocate Rohingya people to Bashan Char if all concerned think it would be a problem for them.

Similar:

[Bangladesh reconsiders refugee move Mizzima](#) (Feb. 17)

[Bangladesh likely to drop Rohingya rehab plan](#) The Tribune (Feb. 18)

[Trawler capsizes: Bodies of 2 more Rohingyas found in St Martin's Island](#) Dhaka Tribune (February 17)

The Bangladesh Coast Guard has recovered bodies of two more Rohingyas, who went missing as a trawler en-route to Malaysia carrying Rohingyas capsized near Saint Martin's Island on February 11. The death toll now stands at 21. Police have already arrested nine among 19 alleged brokers in connection to the case

[Focus on danger](#) The Telegraph (February 17)

[op-ed] In what can be described as a symbolic and momentary victory for Rohingyas, arguably the largest stateless community that saw one of the largest human displacements of the 21st century, a panel of 17 judges at the International Court of Justice has voted unanimously to order Myanmar "all measures within its power" to prevent genocide. The present ruling is significant for the Rohingya community as it concedes the danger to their lives. This time, the international community seems to have learnt from past mistakes and best practices have become refined, although there may be duplication of some multilateral mandates on the issue. Myanmar has no option except to implement the ICJ order as it is legally binding, although the enforceability of the final order will have to be ensured by the Security Council. However, broader protection of the remaining Rohingyas in Rakhine is linked to the question of

the political, humanitarian, human rights and developments rights of the community. In a country where the discrimination against Rohingyas is institutionalized for decades, it will be difficult to execute the court's order in letter and spirit.

[Bangladesh: Offering a Comfortable Space for Women and Children](#) AAR Japan (February 17)

As of September, 2019, more than 910,000 refugees from Rakhine State, in the western part of Myanmar, live in Cox's Bazar Province. Since the mass human exodus in August 2017, the most vulnerable people, particularly women and children, are living a perilous life that is fraught with fear. For example, some people report that they can never feel secure, not even in their temporary accommodation, because they cannot expect to have their privacy protected when the refugee camp is so overcrowded with shelters. To make matters worse, traffickers of women and children, who try to lure them into taking up a "well-paid" job outside the camp or abroad, are rampant in refugee camps. Moreover, in refugee communities, where men play a dominant role under the patriarchal norms, domestic violence and abuse are seldom taken seriously, and as a result, gender-based violence never ceases to exist. In collaboration with our local partner "NGO Forum for Public Health", since November 2018, AAR Japan has been running four facilities to allow women and children to live in peace – two Children Friendly Spaces and two Women Friendly Spaces.

[The fate of the Rohingya still left hanging](#) Dhaka Tribune (February 17)

[op-ed] The ICJ ordered Myanmar to implement vital measures to protect its Rohingya population from facing any further atrocities. This ruling has been hailed as an "accomplishment of international justice." The court further ordered Myanmar to ensure protection from destruction of any evidence of "possible" genocide. The ruling means that a global body, for the first time, has officially recognized the threat of abuse against the Rohingya, and ordered Myanmar to protect the community. Myanmar has questioned the legitimacy of the world court but is obliged under international law to comply with the ICJ ruling to provide regular reports to the ICJ, starting next May, to say what steps it has taken to prevent further abuse against the Rohingya. It is highly unlikely that Myanmar will make any major policy changes to combat the discrimination against the Rohingya community, or provide support for international justice efforts. Whether Myanmar abides by the ICJ rulings remains to be seen.

In compiling this digest, RSN has attempted to include the most relevant news accounts from the past week concerning Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. From time to time, news beyond Bangladesh or the Rohingya community is included, but currently RSN does not have the capacity to expand the scope. We recognize that some developments may have been overlooked, and that some sources may not be viewed by all as credible or balanced. Inclusion of a news story and its summary does not constitute any kind of endorsement or position taken by RSN, and the text and positions included in the above are solely those of the authors of the respective articles. If you have any comments or feedback for us regarding this digest, please email advocacy@rsn.ngo. For more information about RSN and our work, please visit <https://refugeesolidaritynetwork.org/>

