

# Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

December 9 - December 15, 2019



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## Highlights:

### Accountability:

- A hearing took place this week at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), as lawyers for The Gambia sought provisional measures to protect the Rohingya. A delegation from Dhaka was present at the hearing, to lend support to The Gambia.
- During the ICJ hearing, Aung San Suu Kyi, representing Myanmar, denied the charges of genocide.
- Throughout the week there were protests and rallies in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and the Netherlands both for and against Suu Kyi.

### International support:

- The Nippon Foundation, a Japanese non-profit organization, has announced that it will donate around USD 2 million to Brac towards its education program for Rohingya children in Cox's Bazar.
- The Danish Government has contributed an additional USD 2.35 million to the United Nations World Food Program in order to meet the urgent food needs of Rohingya refugees and host communities.

### Camp Conditions:

- There have been further reports of fences being erected around the camps in Cox's Bazar.
- Internet access was briefly restored at the camps this week, allowing many Rohingya to watch at least part of the hearings at the ICJ.

### Regional matters:

- India's controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Bill was passed this week. The new law fast-tracks citizenship for religious minorities from some neighboring countries, but notably excludes Muslims from eligibility. The new law has raised concerns both in India and throughout the region about India's secular character, and has prompted protests and demonstrations.

## Developments:

[PM seeks Johnson's help to end Rohingya crisis](#) New Age Bangladesh (December 15)

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina congratulated British prime minister Boris Johnson on the impressive victory of his Conservative Party in the United Kingdom national elections and sought his personal intervention to ensure justice for the forcibly displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar.

*Similar:*

[Hasina greets Boris Johnson; seeks support for Rohingya repatriation](#) United News Bangladesh (Dec. 14)

[The Rohingya finally got their day in court. For most of them it was a first](#) The Washington Post (December 14)

[op-ed] An extraordinary event took place in the Netherlands this week: a hearing at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that is a first small step toward justice for one of the world's longest-suffering minority groups. The ICJ

investigation is likely to continue for years. The outcome is uncertain. Yet the mere fact that it took place at all counts as a huge moral victory for the Rohingya. For the first time, this group — which has endured decades of systematic discrimination at the hands of its own government — experienced a fair hearing from an impartial tribunal. The power of that realization prompted tearful reactions from Rohingya activists in The Hague.

**[‘International community must share responsibility for educating Rohingya children’](#)** Dhaka Tribune (December 14)

Both Bangladesh and the international community must share the responsibility of educating all the children of both the host community and the Rohingyas in Cox’s Bazar, Amnesty International has said. More than half a million children have yet to see the inside of a classroom since they arrived in the refugee camps for more than two years. The Global Refugee Forum, which is being hosted by the UN’s refugee agency in Geneva and takes place from December 16-18, has made education one of its six key themes.

*Similar:*

[Bangladesh: Estimates 500,000 Rohingya children are being denied an education](#) Amnesty International (Dec. 14) [press release]

**[All children have the right to go to school](#)** Dhaka Tribune (December 14)

[op-ed] Every child, regardless of their social, racial, or economic background, has the right to an education. Therefore, it is disappointing to know that, since the mass influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh from Rakhine state over two years ago, their children—along with many children from the host community in Cox’s Bazar—are not getting an education due to a lack of resources. While there is no doubt that Bangladesh deserves the plaudits received for going above and beyond to shelter the Rohingya, with the possibility of a swift repatriation back to Myanmar looking more unlikely than ever, the Rohingya children—of which there are close to half a million in the camps—cannot be denied an education. To that end, while Bangladesh too has a responsibility to seek solutions to this issue, the international community must step up and help Bangladesh tackle this problem.

**[ICJ hearings: Bangladesh appreciates The Gambian efforts](#)** Dhaka Tribune (December 13)

Bangladesh has appreciated the accountability efforts at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) lodged by The Gambia on atrocity crimes committed on Rohingya allegedly with genocidal intent. In a press conference, the foreign ministry also said that the Bangladesh delegation, who attended the hearings at the ICJ, provided input on the context of the crisis, and clarified Dhaka's efforts to repatriate forcibly displaced Rohingyas in safety, security, and dignity. The 11-member Bangladesh delegation, headed by Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque, underscored reciprocity between accountability and creation of an atmosphere conducive to sustainable repatriation.

**[Hope, loss and mobile phone blackouts](#)** Frontier Myanmar (December 13)

[op-ed] On September 1, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission ordered telecommunication operators to shut down mobile data services in the camps. Although it’s still possible to make phone calls in the camps, the authorities are also trying to stop refugees from using phones entirely. Bangladeshi SIM cards are being collected on a rolling basis. On October 24, for example, authorities responsible for the camps ordered the collection of SIM cards from refugees in some of the camps. Loudspeakers in the camps announce that refugees using SIMs will be punished, as though we are all criminals. Blocking phone services, particularly internet access, for genocide survivors in the camps isolates us from our families and relatives who are living in Myanmar and elsewhere. It prevents us from accessing the social and support networks that help us to maintain our links to home. This feeling of powerlessness is creating tensions in the camps. Without access to outside information, rumours and fears increase day by day among refugees. All we can do is humbly request the Bangladesh government to restore internet services. To build healthy communities, we need to maintain contact with our family and friends. As genocide survivors, we need to feel safe and connected to events around the world that affect us. We need the mobile phone connections restored, so we can also restore our hope and engagement.

[\*\*Designing a Medium-Term Response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Ideas for Bangladesh, the International Community, and the Private Sector\*\*](#) ReliefWeb (December 13)

Credible estimates suggest that significant numbers of Rohingya will remain in Bangladesh for more than 10 years. Despite this, planning so far has been short-term and focused on aid rather than medium-term economic, environmental, and human development approaches. This lack of medium-term planning leads to problems for refugees, for the host community in Cox's Bazar, and for Bangladesh as a whole. The needs of over a million refugees extend well beyond single-year planning cycles. We propose a three-part approach involving increased private sector investment, employment-oriented skills development, and forest landscape restoration—all underpinned by complimentary policy changes and funding.

[\*\*Chinese envoy: Let us wait and see what results come from ICJ\*\*](#) Dhaka Tribune (December 13)

On China's view towards the case filed by The Gambia against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for violating the Genocide Convention, Ambassador Li said that China upholds the international order based on international law. "Right now, let us wait and see what results come out from the court in The Hague," said the Chinese Ambassador during his recent visit to Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar. China hopes to see an early repatriation of Rohingyas and an eventual solution to the problem.

[\*\*Citizenship Amendment Bill protests: Here's why Assam is burning\*\*](#) India Today (December 12)

Most of Assam's Brahmaputra Valley have erupted in spontaneous protest against the [Citizenship (Amendment)] Bill. Students, activists, writers, actors, musicians and people from all walks of life thronged the streets to voice their angst against the bill, which they believe will pose a serious threat to not only their livelihood and political destiny but also to cultural and linguistic identity. Though this provision covers refugees from three nations, the people in the North-East fear that it will primarily benefit the illegal Bengali Hindu migrants from Bangladesh who have settled in "large numbers" across the region. The Assamese fear that if Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims join hands, Bangla speakers will easily outnumber Assamese-speaking people in the state, as it has happened in Tripura where Bengali-Hindu immigrants from East Bengal now dominate political power, pushing the original tribes to the margins.

*Similar:*

[Politicising Asylum: Citizenship \(Amendment\) Bill](#) India Today (Dec. 13)

[Bangladesh protests after protestors attack their Foreign Secretary's convoy in Guwahati](#) Free Press Journal (Dec. 14)

[\*\*Nippon Foundation to donate \\$2m for Rohingya education\*\*](#) The Daily Star (December 12)

The Nippon Foundation, a Japanese non-profit organisation, is going to donate around USD 2 million (about Tk 17 crore) to Brac towards its education programme for Rohingya children in Cox's Bazar. The grant will help build about 50 two-story moveable steel structures -- to be used as learning centres for about 8,000 Rohingya children. The aid will also help build about 100 pre-primary learning centres for the host community children in Cox's Bazar.

[\*\*Reducing disaster risk for Rohingya refugees\*\*](#) ReliefWeb (December 12)

The 900,000 Rohingya who have fled the pogroms launched against them in Myanmar now live in 34 densely populated camps at risk of floods, landslides and cyclones in neighbouring Bangladesh. Two years after the main influx, major efforts are underway to reduce the impact that the presence of such dense settlements are having on the environment and the raised levels of exposure to floods and landslides. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is working with the University College of London to develop a landslide early warning system based on risk modelling using inputs from satellite imagery, rainfall levels and other meteorological data. They have already succeeded in reducing the number of landslides by an intensive programme of slope stabilization, planting a suitable variety of trees, shrubs and deep-rooted long grass following a mixed vegetation approach. This work is also being replicated by other UN agencies and NGO partners.

[Rohingya refugees, cut off from the world, got to briefly watch Myanmar's rulers go to trial](#) Washington Post (December 12)

When Gambia went before the United Nations' top court and accused Myanmar of committing genocide against Rohingya Muslims, most Rohingya refugees themselves couldn't watch the opening of the unprecedented hearings. That's because Bangladesh had shut off Internet service since September in the sprawling and isolated refugee camps that lie along the edge of the tourist hub of Cox's Bazar. Then suddenly around 10 p.m. Tuesday local time, the camps' connection to the outside world returned. There were cheers of gratitude — toward Bangladesh for reconnecting the Internet and toward Gambia for supporting the Rohingya's case on the world stage. But there was also anger and sadness as people caught up on Myanmar's steadfast denial that it had waged a violent campaign against Rohingya that United Nations investigators concluded had "genocidal intent." The joy was also short-lived: By Thursday, the third day of the hearings, Bangladesh had cut off internet again.

[Myanmar Rohingya: Suu Kyi accused of 'silence' in genocide trial](#) BBC (December 12)

The Gambia has denounced Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi's "silence" over alleged atrocities against Rohingya Muslims. The Muslim-majority African country has accused Myanmar of genocide in a case at the UN's top court. Lawyers said Ms. Suu Kyi had ignored widespread allegations of mass murder, rape and forced deportation.

[Myanmar's Suu Kyi denies Rohingya genocide allegations at UN court](#) PBS (December 11)

Myanmar's former pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi has denied that her country's armed forces committed genocide against the Rohingya minority, telling the U.N.'s top court that the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Muslims was the unfortunate result of a battle with insurgents. In a measured tone, Suu Kyi calmly refuted allegations that the army had killed civilians, raped women and torched houses in 2017 in what Myanmar's accusers describe as a deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide that saw more than 700,00 Rohingya flee to neighboring Bangladesh. She said the allegations stem from "an internal armed conflict started by coordinated and comprehensive armed attacks ... to which Myanmar's defense services responded. Tragically, this armed conflict led to the exodus of several hundred thousand Muslims."

*Similar:*

[Aung San Suu Kyi Defends Myanmar Against Rohingya Genocide Allegations](#) The Wall Street Journal (Dec. 11)

[Myanmar Rohingya: Suu Kyi to defend genocide charge at UN court](#) BBC (Dec. 10)

[Bangladesh: Rohingya Mock Aung San Suu Kyi's Rejection of Genocide Claims](#) Radio Free Asia (December 11)

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh recounted atrocities by Naypyidaw's military as they debunked denials by Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi at the U.N.'s top court that her government's security forces had committed genocide against the minority Muslims. Suu Kyi's statement that "some" people crossed into Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh in fear infuriated dozens of Rohingya refugees who watched the Myanmar leader make her case live on TV from a tea stall at the Kutupalong refugee camp. On the second day of the proceedings at the ICJ trial against Myanmar, Suu Kyi rejected Gambia's allegation that her country's military operations on August 2017 were mounted to exterminate the Rohingya Muslims. Instead, she said, the crackdown was targeted at the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, an insurgent group. But in Cox's Bazar, refugees at the Kutupalong camp shouted "Lies! Lies!" as Suu Kyi spoke.

*Similar:*

[Rohingya refugees reject Aung San Suu Kyi's genocide denial](#) Chicago Tribune (Dec. 13)

[Myanmar: Rohingya refugee recalls 'horrific' mass killings](#) BBC (Dec. 13)

[Fences go up at Bangladesh's Rohingya camps](#) Asia Times (December 10)

The Bangladeshi military has started erecting fences around camps housing hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees despite complaints from community leaders and rights groups. A correspondent saw troops in military fatigues erecting pillars for barbed-wire fences around one large camp at Balukhali in the southeastern border district



Cox's Bazar. Bangladesh's refugee commissioner Mahhub Alam Talukder confirmed that construction had started, but declined to comment further.

*Similar:*

[Bangladesh starts fencing Rohingya refugee camps](#) Gulf Times (Dec. 11)

[Rohingya call for Myanmar's Suu Kyi to acknowledge atrocities](#) Channel News Asia (December 10)

From squalid refugee camps in Bangladesh, Rohingya who fled a brutal Myanmar military crackdown are calling on Aung San Suu Kyi to acknowledge the mass atrocities as she defends her country against genocide charges at the UN's top court. "Suu Kyi cannot deny anything. The international community must listen to our voice because we are the real victims," Sayed Ulla, a Rohingya leader at one of the camps.

*Similar:*

[Rohingya Refugees Demand Justice at Myanmar World Court Case](#) New York Times (December 9)

[Demonstrations Mark Case Against Myanmar at U.N.'s World Court](#) New York Times (December 10)

Hearings have begun at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, where Myanmar is accused of genocide against its minority Muslim Rohingya population during a 2017 military crackdown. Gambia, which launched proceedings in November at the U.N.'s top court, asked the 17-member panel of judges to approve so-called provisional measures - an order instructing Myanmar to halt activities that could aggravate the case or harm the Rohingya people until the case is heard in full. That request is expected to be ruled upon within weeks, but cases at the tribunal can take years to conclude in full. Demonstrations have been held in Myanmar, Bangladesh and outside the courtroom in the Netherlands, both for and against Aung San Suu Kyi.

*Similar:*

[Rohingya Genocide Case Against Myanmar Opens Before U.N. Court](#) The Wall Street Journal (Dec. 10)

[Hearings Open at UN Court Over Myanmar's Rohingya Crackdown](#) VOA News (Dec. 10)

[Myanmar Rohingya: The supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi](#) BBC (Dec. 11)

[Denmark continues support for Rohingya refugees and host community in Cox's Bazar](#) ReliefWeb (December 10)

The Danish Government has contributed an additional sixteen million Danish Krone (USD 2.35 million) to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in order to meet the urgent food needs of Rohingya refugees and host communities.

[Bangladesh: Rohingya Rally, Pray for Justice in ICJ Case against Myanmar](#) Radio Free Asia (December 10)

As a landmark genocide case against Myanmar opened in The Hague, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh watched the proceedings on TV while thousands staged a mass rally and prayed in defiance of government restrictions on such demonstrations. Officials in Cox's Bazar district had turned down a request by the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights to allow the refugees to rally and offer prayers as the case before the International Court of Justice began. That did not stop thousands from thronging hilltops inside the camps while others huddled around television screens to catch a glimpse of the courtroom action. The Rohingya held up banners expressing their support for host country Bangladesh and Gambia, the African nation leading a lawsuit against Myanmar at the ICJ, while chanting "Gambia, Gambia."

[Rohingyas will never be accepted: Home Minister Amit Shah](#) Big News Network (December 10)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, while replying to the discussion on the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha has said that Rohingyas will never be accepted in India. "Rohingya people come through Bangladesh. Rohingyas will never be accepted. I am saying that again," he said in the Lower House.





*Similar:*

[Rohingya will never be welcomed in India: Amit Shah during CAB discussion in Parliament](#) Times New News (Dec. 10)

[China's top diplomat Wang Yi says Beijing will back Myanmar to resolve its problems](#) South China Morning Post (December 9)

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has called for more strategic cooperation with Myanmar as the two Asian neighbours come under growing pressure from the West. Wang made the remarks during a meeting with Myanmar's President Win Myint in the capital Naypyidaw, saying Beijing would back the Southeast Asian nation to resolve its own problems. He told the president that China also appreciated Myanmar's "firm support" for its core interests.

[NRC and the larger crisis brewing in Assam](#) The Daily Star (December 9)

[op-ed] Recent developments surrounding the controversial National Registry of Citizens (NRC) in Assam have made many extremely worried across borders in Bangladesh and India regarding the future of Bengali Muslim settlers and Hindus alike. At risk are nearly 20 million people, including an estimated 12 million Hindus, who have been wrongfully left out of the NRC list announced in August 2019, setting off a huge political outcry in Assam, West Bengal and the rest of India. The impacts of the NRC and the CAB are already being felt at the Bangladesh borders. The domestic "political intrigues" of BJP and the possibility of a Pan-India NRC in the future may likely lead to a Rohingya-type migration to Bangladesh. Indeed, according to some reports, it has already started.

*Similar:*

[Citizenship and ties with Bangladesh](#) The Statesman (Dec. 15) [op-ed]

[India's bill purporting to help refugees really seeks to hurt Muslims](#) The Economist (Dec. 14)

[Who gets to be an Indian, in India](#) New India Times (Dec. 13)

[Bangladesh army chief begins four-day historic visit to Myanmar](#) Arab News (December 9)

Bangladesh's top commander, Gen. Aziz Ahmed, began his four-day visit to Myanmar amid uncertainty surrounding the repatriation of more than 1 million Rohingya refugees from the country. He is expected to hold talks with the deputy chief of Myanmar's armed forces and its army chief. Authorities in Bangladesh considered the visit as a "new line of communication" in a bid to facilitate the Rohingya repatriation. Experts, however, are divided over the visit.

*Similar:*

[Military Tells Bangladesh: Myanmar Ready to Accept Rohingya Refugees](#) The Irrawaddy (Dec. 10)

[Cholera vaccination campaign launched to protect 635,000 people in Cox's Bazar](#) ReliefWeb (December 9)

Over 635,000 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi host community members will be vaccinated against cholera in a 3-week-long campaign beginning today at the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar and nearby areas. In total, 635,085 people are expected to be reached. Led by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, with support of the World Health Organization, UNICEF and other partners, the campaign aims to reach people who missed some or all previous cholera vaccination opportunities. The campaign, including operational costs, is funded by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

*Similar:*

[6.35 lakh Rohingya refugees, host community to get cholera vaccine](#) The Daily Star (Dec. 9)

[Bangladesh Ready to Give 'Technical Support' in ICJ Rohingya Case](#) Radio Free Asia (December 9)

Bangladesh is sending a delegation to The Hague, where Dhaka is prepared to give Gambia "technical support" in its case before the International Court of Justice alleging that Myanmar committed genocide against Rohingya Muslims.

Dhaka's foreign secretary will head the 20-member delegation to the proceedings at the ICJ, Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen said.

**[Rape is not a by-product of conflict in Myanmar – it is a strategy of it](#)** The Independent (December 9)  
[op-ed] Tomorrow, Myanmar's state counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi will appear at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to defend Myanmar against the charge of genocide. Since rape has been central to Myanmar's persecution of the Rohingya, it must be placed at the heart of the case. If it is, it will be the first time the ICJ will hold a state responsible for genocide through a campaign of systematic rape. This has the potential to enhance feminist international law and strengthen justice and accountability in future cases of war-time rape. The Myanmar military's use of rape against Rohingya women is not simply a by-product of conflict: it is a strategy in it, one whose aim is to drive out the target population. The sexual violence committed by the Burmese military against the Rohingya is fundamental to the case against Myanmar, and the ICJ must take every action to ensure these crimes are properly investigated.

**[High stakes: Myanmar's Lady gambles image](#)** The Asean Post (December 9)  
[op-ed] From democracy champion to defending Myanmar against genocide charges, the shock decision by civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi to face the UN's top court risks further damaging her image overseas and deepening the siege mentality at home. Suu Kyi's supporters are printing off T-shirts, organising rallies and even signing up to VIP tours to The Hague to offer their backing. Yet overseas, particularly in the West and in Muslim countries, Suu Kyi's reputation lies in tatters with multiple awards and even an honorary citizenship revoked. Critics say "The Lady", once lauded alongside Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, has become an apologist for a murderous military intent on wiping out the country's Rohingya Muslims.

*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](mailto:advocacy@rsn.ngo). For more information about RSN and our work, please visit <https://refugeesolidaritynetwork.org/>*

