

Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

January 13 - January 19, 2020



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Highlights:

Accountability:

- The ICJ has announced that it will deliver its decision on The Gambia's request for provisional measures in its lawsuit against Myanmar on January 23.

High-level statements:

- The Malaysian Foreign Minister, Saifuddin Abdullah has urged ASEAN to address the civil war in Myanmar's Rakhine state in order to find a long-term solution to the Rohingya crisis during a two-day ASEAN foreign minister's meeting in Vietnam.
- At that same meeting, ASEAN ministers pledged to continue to cooperate on key issues, including facilitating the repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

Country visits:

- Special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee will carry out her final mission to Bangladesh next week.

Camp conditions:

- Bangladesh has again said that Bhasan Char island is ready to accommodate 100,000 Rohingyas, though no date has been set for the relocation.

In Myanmar:

- China's President Xi Jinping has visited Myanmar to meet with Suu Kyi, the first visit by a Chinese head of state in 20 years. The trip resulted in a number of development deals signed and statements from both countries about standing together in solidarity.

Developments:

[New citizenship law is India's internal matter, says Hasina](#) BDNews24 (January 19)

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said she did not understand the purpose of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed in India that aims to offer citizenship to non-Muslim minorities that have faced persecution in Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries. The Bangladesh premier also said that there has been no recorded reverse migration from India.

Similar:

[India's new citizenship law unnecessary, says Sheikh Hasina](#) The Hindu (Jan. 19)

[QRCS, BDRCS distribute food aid to 3,220 refugee families in Bangladesh](#) ReliefWeb (Jan. 19)

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), in cooperation with Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), has recently delivered food parcels for 3,220 families displaced from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Under a winterization aid project,

QRCS's representation mission in Bangladesh distributed parcels of basic food staples like lentils, chickpeas, beans, semolina, sugar, salt, and vegetable oil. These distributions covered around 16,000 refugees at Camp No. 14.

[Rohingya killed in Cox's Bazar 'gunfight'](#) Dhaka Tribune (January 19)

A suspected Rohingya drug trader has been killed in a reported gunfight with Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar district. The incident occurred at Jadimura Point of Naf River in Shekolghera area of Hnila union early Sunday. BGB also recovered a locally made gun and 220,000 yaba pills from the scene.

Similar:

[Rohingya man killed in Cox's Bazar 'gunfight'](#) The Daily Star (Jan. 19)

[Malaysia seeks ASEAN's role to resolve Rohingya crisis](#) New Age Bangladesh (January 18)

Malaysia has urged ASEAN to address the civil war in Myanmar's Rakhine state to find a long-term solution to the Rohingya crisis that affects Bangladesh in many ways. 'The civil war in the Rakhine state needs to be addressed by ASEAN if the long-term status of Rohingyas is to be fully resolved,' said Malaysian foreign minister Saifuddin Abdullah on the second day of a two-day ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting in Vietnam. Minister Saifuddin said Malaysia maintained its position on Myanmar — that the perpetrators of the genocide must be brought to justice, repatriation that is voluntary, safe and dignified should happen as quickly as possible through consultation with the Rohingyas. He also said ASEAN should constructively engage China and Myanmar, together with Bangladesh. The Malaysian foreign minister said Malaysia would continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya in Rakhine state, Bangladesh, as well as in Malaysia.

Similar:

[Malaysia seeks ASEAN role to resolve crisis](#) The Independent (Jan. 19)

[Rohingya Crisis in Rakhine: Asean should push for long-term fix](#) The Daily Star (Jan. 18)

[As Modi govt doubles down on CAA, long-time friend Bangladesh moves closer to China](#) The Print (January 18)

[op-ed by Seshadri Chari] The protests against India's Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA are because the provisions have been misunderstood and much misinformation about the law has been circulated by opposition parties with ulterior political motives. But an entirely domestic matter will have serious external ramifications if it is not handled properly and quickly. Going by the negative publicity generated by the anti-CAA protests in India, it would be very easy for anti-establishment forces in Bangladesh to raise a false alarm about the possible exodus into that country from India. Although there is not even a remote possibility of an exodus, it will only take the rumour mills in Bangladesh a few minutes to demolish the friendly relationship that the two countries have carefully cultivated since 1971.

[India's ominous threat to Rohingya Muslim refugees](#) Asia Times (January 17)

[op-ed by Phelim Kine] The tens of thousands of Rohingya Muslims who have fled to India to escape widespread and systematic violence and discrimination in Myanmar face an existential threat from a new source: India's government. Early this month, a senior government minister announced that Indian authorities would move expeditiously to deport the country's sizable Rohingya refugee population back to Myanmar regardless of the risks to the refugees. India's threatened mass deportation of Rohingya would be a catastrophe for those sent back to Myanmar. The Indian government should be mindful that it would be deporting Rohingya to a country that denies them legal recognition by having unilaterally stripped them of their citizenship in 1982. The Indian government should drop its threat of mass deportations of its Rohingya refugee population. Instead, it should apply its significant diplomatic and economic

leverage with Myanmar's government to pressure it to establish the conditions that will allow voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar.

Similar:

[Is India creating its own Rohingyas?](#) Daily Times (January 14) [op-ed by Mohammad Zaman]

[Asean ministers vow to cooperate on Rohingya issue](#) Dhaka Tribune (January 17)

Southeast Asian foreign ministers ended talks in Vietnam with pledges to continue cooperating on key issues, including facilitating the repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar and reducing South China Sea tensions. A statement issued after the two-day informal meeting by Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh said that besides those issues, the ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations also considered plans for a special summit with the US President Donald Trump.

Similar:

[S. China Sea, Rohingya issues on agenda of ASEAN ministerial talks](#) The Mainichi (Jan. 17)

[Why Rohingya women and girls are risking dangerous smuggling routes](#) The New Humanitarian (January 16)

Facing years of deprivation and bleak future prospects, a growing number of Rohingya women and children are using once-dormant smuggling routes to escape refugee and displacement camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar, rights groups say. On migration trails once dominated by men, a significant proportion are now women and children. Groups that work with Rohingya, as well as women who have made the journey in recent years, say the trend is a sign of rising restrictions and safety fears in Myanmar's Rakhine State and in Bangladesh's refugee camps.

[Myanmar Continues to Investigate Detained Rohingya Boat People](#) Radio Free Asia (January 16)

Local authorities at a refugee repatriation camp in western Myanmar's Rakhine state have resettled 17 members of a group of 170 Rohingya boat people detained by the country's navy last month, and are in the process of investigating the rest. The boat people were discovered on Dec. 15 aboard a boat in the Andaman Sea as they were attempting to leave the country, and have been transferred to the Nga Khu Ya repatriation center in Maungdaw township. Among the group are 82 men, 68 women, 13 boys, and nine girls. Military officials believe they had run away from refugee camps in Bangladesh. The 17 that were resettled reunited with their families in Darpaing and Thaechaung villages in Sittwe township with the cooperation of village heads.

Similar:

[Myanmar sends nearly 200 Rohingya captured at sea to Rakhine camps](#) Yahoo News (Jan. 13)

[Bangladesh fears Rohingya-like crisis over India citizenship law](#) Nikkei Asian Review (January 16)

India's contentious new citizenship law has strained relations with neighboring Bangladesh, which fears a flood of refugees streaming into the country in a repeat of the Rohingya crisis, analysts say. The recent spate of canceled visits by Bangladeshi ministers is indicative of "tensions in relations," said Chowdhury Rafiqul Abrar, professor of international relations at Dhaka University. Touhid Hossain, a former foreign secretary of Bangladesh, warns that the CAA will be a "sword of Damocles hanging over Bangladesh," adding that "It may pose a problem anytime." But Mohammad Sarwar Mahmood, a director general of the South Asia department at Bangladesh's foreign ministry, downplayed fears.

[Myanmar urged to restore full citizenship rights to Rohingyas](#) United News Bangladesh (January 16)

New evidence collected by Fortify Rights, including eyewitness testimonies and internal government documents, confirms that Myanmar authorities are continuing to force and coerce Rohingya to accept National Verification Cards (NVCs), which effectively identify Rohingya as foreigners and strip them of access to full citizenship rights. "The NVC is widely known as an abusive tool, and the government should scrap it without delay," said Matthew Smith, Chief Executive Officer of Fortify Rights.



[Myanmar: First state visit in almost 20 years highlights China's role in human rights crisis](#) Amnesty International (January 16)

Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, is embarking on a two-day visit to mark the 70th anniversary of China-Myanmar relations. It will be the first visit to Myanmar by a Chinese head of state in 19 years. Ahead of President Xi Jinping's two-day state visit to Myanmar, Amnesty International's Regional Director, Nicholas Bequelin, said: "President Xi's government has expressed its desire to help solve the situation in Rakhine State. While this is welcome in principle, the reality is that China's engagement has failed to yield positive results for the people of Myanmar. China must stop using its position in the UN Security Council to shield Myanmar's senior generals from accountability. This has only emboldened the military's relentless campaign of human rights violations and war crimes against ethnic minorities across the country."

Similar:

[China's Xi turns to Myanmar as he pushes for 'Belt and Road' plan](#) AlJazeera (Jan. 16)

[China and Myanmar stand together despite Rohingya backlash](#) Digital Journal (Jan. 17)

[Myanmar: Xi Jinping visit – China must stop blocking justice for Rohingya](#) Amnesty International (Jan. 16)

[Xi Jinping Turns On the Charm in Myanmar](#) The Wall Street Journal (Jan. 18)

[China, Myanmar ink 33 deals to accelerate BRI as Xi, Suu Kyi meet despite Rohingya backlash](#) The Tribune (Jan. 18)

[China, Myanmar to 'stand together' despite Rohingya backlash](#) The Daily Star (Jan. 18)

[Bangladesh Says Once-Submerged Island Ready for Rohingya](#) NYTimes (January 16)

A Bangladeshi island regularly submerged by monsoon rains is ready to house 100,000 Rohingya refugees, but no date has been announced to relocate people from the crowded and squalid camps where they've lived for years, Bangladeshi officials have said. "Bhasan Char is ready for habitation. Everything has been put in place," according to Bangladesh refugee, relief and repatriation commissioner Mahbub Alam Talukder. Flood protection embankments, houses, hospitals and mosques have been built on the island. Mostofa Mohamamd Sazzad Hossain, a spokesman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in Bangladesh, said the agency isn't ready to endorse the relocation and is waiting for a chance to visit the island after a November trip was canceled. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has repeatedly told the U.N. and other international partners that her administration will consult them before making a final decision on the relocation, and that no refugees will be forced to move.

Similar:

[Bangladesh says once-submerged island ready for Rohingya](#) ABC News (Jan. 17)

[Once-submerged island ready to house 100,000 Rohingya refugees: Bangladesh](#) Business Standard (Jan. 17)

[Bhasan Char is ready to take in Rohingya refugees](#) Asia News (Jan. 17)

[Bangladesh Says Regularly Submerged Silt Island Now Ready for Rohingya](#) TIME (Jan. 17)

[Once submerged Bangladeshi island ready to house 100,000 persecuted Rohingyas](#) IBTimes (Jan. 17)

[Bangladesh to house 100,000 Rohingya in once-submerged island](#) Dawn (Jan. 18)

[The Bhasan Char Relocation Project – Implications for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh](#) The Sentinel Project (Jan. 17)

[What Drives Ethnic Cleansing in Post-Colonial South Asia?](#) The Globe Post (January 15)

[op-ed by Rudabeh Sahid] Recent events in both Myanmar and India reflect a triumph of vocal majoritarian nationalism. While Myanmar has already carried out what the U.N. human rights chief called a "textbook case of ethnic cleansing," India seems to be treading the same path. When political analysts scrutinize cases of ethnic cleansing in post-colonial South Asia, they often determine the triggers to be political opportunism via communal vote bank politics, manipulation of institutions to discriminate minority groups, and the inevitability of the clash of contrasting cultures. While all these reasons perhaps are triggers, one other major commonly understated factor is



what can be termed “demographic jitter,” the alarm created among the majority population due to an alteration in demographic balance.

[Australia, Bangladesh are great friends: High Commissioner Niblett](#) United News Bangladesh (January 15)

In her farewell message at the end of her assignment in Bangladesh, outgoing Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Julia Niblett has said Australia and Bangladesh will continue to work together on various fronts, including the humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis.

[ICRC urged to work with Myanmar for Rohingya repatriation](#) United News Bangladesh (January 15)

Foreign Minister Dr. AK Abdul Momen has urged ICRC to work with Myanmar for creating a congenial environment to enable the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar. He raised the issue when the newly-appointed Head of Delegation of International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) in Bangladesh Pierre Dorbes presented his credentials this week.

[Myanmar's Rakhina state teetering towards war](#) Bangkok Post (January 15)

[op-ed by Laetitia van den Assum & Kobsak Chutikul] Rakhine state is descending into growing turmoil. Globally long associated primarily with the brutal oppression of the Rohingya, the much wider dimensions of Rakhine's troubles are now visible, including their international implications. Given their complexity, a broader perspective is badly needed to help bring about stability, development and prosperity for all Rakhine's people. Governments around the world, but especially in the region, have a legitimate role to play in helping to find solutions. Rakhine lies at the crossroads of Asia and its stability, ethnic harmony and economic promise are important for both South Asia and Southeast Asia. As a matter of course, that includes Asean. Thus far, Asean's engagement has mostly focused on humanitarian aspects of refugee returns. Under the present circumstances, that is no longer sufficient. Humanitarian measures alone will not solve the complex conflict in Rakhine. And they risk entrenching it. Moreover, two and a half years of Chinese engagement have not yielded tangible results. Wider regional engagement is needed.

[ICJ To Rule Next Week On Urgent Measures In Rohingya Genocide Case](#) International Business Times (January 15)

The UN's top court has said it will deliver its decision next week on whether emergency measures should be imposed on Myanmar over alleged genocide against its Rohingya Muslims. The ruling comes a month after Myanmar's civilian leader and Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi travelled to The Hague to defend the bloody 2017 crackdown by her nation's army against the Rohingya. "The International Court of Justice... will deliver, on Thursday 23 January 2020, its order on the request for the indication of provisional measures made by The Gambia," the court said in a statement, adding that it would happen at 10:00am (0900 GMT).

Similar:

[ICJ to rule next week on urgent measures in Rohingya genocide case](#) Digital Journal (Jan. 15)

[U.N. Court: Ruling To Be Issued Next Week In Rohingya Genocide Case](#) NPR (Jan. 15)

[Why the Gambia's plea for the Rohingya matters for international justice](#) The Conversation (Jan. 14) [op-ed]

[Myanmar: Seeking International Justice for Rohingya](#) Human Rights Watch (January 14)

The Myanmar government faced increasing pressure during 2019 for international justice for its human rights violations against the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities, Human Rights Watch has said in its World Report 2020. Respect for free expression and assembly also declined sharply during the year as authorities escalated their use of repressive criminal laws.

[Bangladesh: Crackdown on Critics, Activists](#) Human Rights Watch (January 14)

After winning a third term in elections marked with allegations of fraud and a crackdown on the political opposition, the Awami League-led government in Bangladesh stifled dissent and failed to hold security forces accountable for abuses, Human Rights Watch has said in its World Report 2020. Bangladesh is host to nearly one million Rohingya refugees from neighboring Myanmar. Bangladesh has kept its commitment under international law not to force returns, despite serious economic, political, and environmental strains. But conditions in the camps worsened as a

result of Bangladesh's government policies and violence by security forces. In September, the government restricted refugees' access to the internet and online communications, and in November, began building fences around the camps. Bangladesh made repeated threats to relocate refugees to the silt island of Bhasan Char, despite serious concerns over the island's habitability.

Similar:

[HRW says govt stifling dissent, state minister rejects report](#) Dhaka Tribune (Jan. 15)

[Rohingya crisis: The wheels of int'l justice finally turning, says HRW](#) The Daily Star (Jan. 15)

[UN expert on Myanmar on her final mission to Bangladesh](#) Dhaka Tribune (January 14)

Special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee will carry out her final mission to Bangladesh next week. Lee will visit Thailand and Bangladesh from January 15 to 23 on her final leg as the rapporteur. She will come to Bangladesh from Thailand. Despite her last request to visit Myanmar being denied by the government, Lee will visit Thailand and Bangladesh to speak to interlocutors and receive information about the situation in Myanmar from both sides of the border.

[Boat With 66 Suspected Rohingyas from Bangladesh Intercepted Near North Sentinel Island in Andaman](#) News18 (January 14)

A boat carrying at least 66 suspected Rohingyas from Bangladesh was intercepted by Andaman and Nicobar Police near Tarmugli Island, around 34 kilometers away from the restricted North Sentinel Island, the home to uncontacted Sentinelese tribe. Sources said that the boat carrying suspected Rohingyas left from Bangladesh over a fortnight ago and on January 13, the Port Blair police received a call from local sources about a suspicious boat movement near Tarmugli Island.

Similar:

[Andaman: 66 Suspected Rohingyas Detained En Route To Malaysia On Boat](#) RepublicWorld (Jan. 15)

[Myanmar needs to create an environment for early Rohingya repatriation: Japan](#) United News Bangladesh (January 14)

Japan wants Myanmar to ensure the required environment in Rakhine State so that the Rohingyas, now temporarily sheltered in Cox's Bazar, can return to their place of origin as soon as possible, says its Ambassador in Bangladesh. "It's essential for Myanmar to create an environment conducive to the early repatriation of displaced persons," Ambassador Ito Naoki said in an interview, mentioning that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi the same thing during the bilateral summit meeting in October last year.

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/>

