

Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

March 9 - March 15, 2020



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Highlights:

Camp conditions:

- While there are no reported cases of COVID-19 in the camps yet, health officials in Cox's Bazar are taking preventative measures to protect the Rohingya in the camps from infection.
- Police detained 12 Rohingyas including nine children from Mongla port in Bagerhat as they were entering the country through an India-Bangladesh border.

International support:

- Bob Rae, who spent seven months in 2017 and 2018 examining the forces that drove over 600,000 Rohingya from their homes in Myanmar to refugee camps in neighbouring Bangladesh, is being named Canada's special envoy for humanitarian and refugee issues.
- Bangladesh has requested Vietnam to initiate a process under the ASEAN framework for creating a civilian observer group who would monitor the return of the 1.1 million Rohingyas from Bangladesh to their homeland Myanmar.

High-level statements:

- The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee on Tuesday called on the Myanmar government to change its course and embrace democracy and human rights during the presentation of her final report to the Human Rights Council.
- Visiting French Minister of Armed Forces Florence Parly today put emphasis on mounting more international pressure on Myanmar to take back its Rohingya nationals from Bangladesh.

Developments:

[Coronavirus – My dear world: be safe, be kind, be strong. This too shall pass](#) Gulf News (March 15)

[op-ed] One of the biggest humanitarian crises of the world, the Rohingya have ceased to exist on the global barometer of human beings whose suffering matter. And just as you think the world is oblivious to the pain of millions of people, something happens that shakes the very core of the tenuousness of human existence. In March 2020, beyond these almost-forgotten crises of unquantifiable tragedy, is that one phenomenon that has reshaped the way the world looks at human suffering: the outbreak of coronavirus, COVID-19. The one point of solace as COVID-19 spreads across different continents is the cautious, reluctant but constant reaffirmation: our lives are not the same, issues are different, priorities are not similar, dilemmas are varied, but a terrifying disease has reiterated the fragility of our humanity: our pain is identical. It is concurrently disquieting and reassuring to suddenly see a global collective response to a global pandemic. With my faith in the inherent good of humanity, I believe that a vaccine will be discovered soon. Until then, I hope people will be good to one another. My dear world: be safe, be kind, be strong.

This too shall pass. And once it does, may you continue to be kind. The forgotten, the invisible, the long-suffering need you.

[What is being done to prevent coronavirus outbreak in Rohingya camps?](#) Dhaka Tribune (March 13)

Health officials in Cox's Bazar Rohingya camps are putting precautionary plans into action to prevent a potential Covid-19 outbreak, as the world faces a pandemic. Both the government and the international agencies are putting great emphasis on placing preventive measures in the refugee camps, since it will be very difficult to deal with a situation that may arise from any infection. So far, no Rohingya person has been found with symptoms of the coronavirus infection in any of the 34 camps. But compared to the rest of Bangladesh, about a million Rohingya refugees, sheltered in the southernmost district of the country, are at a greater risk of being infected by the deadly Covid-19, a new coronavirus strain that originated in China, mainly due to the crowded and unhygienic conditions at the camps, the health officials said.

[Voices from Assam's detention camps are a reminder of events that led to the Rohingya refugee crisis](#) Scroll (March 13)

The exercise carried out to publish the National Register of Citizens in Assam has effectively created a stateless population twice the size of the Rohingya refugees. After the exercise, the Indian Parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act. This is frighteningly similar to what occurred with the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar who, in 1982, were denied citizenship after a new law did not recognise the ethnic minority as one of Myanmar's national races. Myanmar's citizenship law classified only those people as citizens who could provide evidence that their ancestors settled in Myanmar before 1823, the beginning of British occupation of present-day Rakhine, the province where most Rohingyas live. The ferocity and scale of the violence against the Rohingya Muslims were based on longstanding denial of the Rohingyas' right to belong in Myanmar, after facing decades of being called illegal Bengali immigrants, just as it is currently playing out in Assam. Another distressing parallel is the impact on regional cooperation. The Rohingya crisis has effectively destroyed any prospect of deep engagement between Bangladesh and Myanmar, and Bangladesh is deeply afraid of a repeat with India.

[Coronavirus fear grips Rohingya camps in Bangladesh](#) Anadolu Agency (March 13)

Although only three COVID-19 cases have so far been confirmed in the Muslim-majority South Asian nation, refugees in the southern Cox's Bazar district are distressed. The displaced community is still struggling for clean drinking water and flowing water in toilets let alone masks, liquid soaps or hand sanitizers. At the refugee camps, activists say, there is an urgent need for more water to ensure adequate hygiene, and to prevent viruses from spreading. International aid workers also expressed concerns over the looming virus threat to the refugee community in Bangladesh. In Cox's Bazar, humanitarian agencies are finalizing a multi-sector plan, in support to the government. Meanwhile, the European Rohingya Council has also expressed concerns over the safety of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. In a statement, the council urged Bangladesh to lift the bar on Internet access in refugee camps, considering the prevailing situation. Bangladesh, meanwhile, says all necessary preventive measures have been taken in the Rohingya camps.

Similar:

[ERC Urges the Government of Bangladesh and Myanmar to Grant Internet Access to Rohingya](#) Rohingya Post (Mar. 12)

[India wants permanent solution to Rohingya crisis](#) United News Bangladesh (March 13)

India says it is putting in its best efforts to find a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis "standing beside" Bangladesh, and ruled out the notion of any non-cooperation from its side. During interactions with Indian government officials and experts in New Delhi, the Indian side explained its balanced position on the issue and conveyed that they are not blocking any process in finding a solution to the Rohingya crisis.

[12 Rohingyas detained at Mongla](#) The Daily Star (March 12)

Police detained 12 Rohingyas including nine children from Mongla port in Bagerhat last night as they were entering the country through an India-Bangladesh border. The detainees, who are members of two families, were held from Digraj area of Mongla port around 11:30pm, said Iqbal Bahar. A legal process on this matter is underway.

[Of epidemics and development](#) Dhaka Tribune (March 12)

[op-ed] Walking from Banani to Gulshan the other day I was thinking to myself that all the hygiene advice being given in the media in relation to the coronavirus may result in everyone adopting cleaner habits. This current unpleasant experience reminded me of the epidemics we faced in 1971 in the Bangladesh refugee camps in India. It is vitally important that all aspects of personal and public hygiene and cleanliness are taught at school from a very young age. Only then will attitudes change. At the moment I see college students spitting and dropping paper everywhere. This has to stop.

[Two Rohingya 'robbers' killed in alleged shootout with RAB in Cox's Bazar](#) BDNews24 (March 12)

Two members of the Rohingya community with suspected ties to crimes have died in a so-called shootout with the Rapid Action Battalion, or RAB, in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf. The dead men have been identified as Nur Kamal alias Shonaia, 34, and Saiful Islam Sohel alias DB Saiful, 38. Nur was a member of a robbery gang styled 'Jakir Bahini', of which Saiful was the second-in-command, according to the elite police unit. They took refuge in Bangladesh after fleeing from Myanmar about 25 years ago and had been staying outside a refugee camp for a long time, RAB said.

Similar:

[2 Rohingyas killed in Cox's Bazar gunfight: RAB Prothom Alo](#) (Mar. 12)

[2 suspected Rohingya robbers killed in Cox's Bazar 'gunfight'](#) Dhaka Tribune (Mar. 12)

[2 'Rohingya robbers' killed in Cox's Bazar 'gunfight'](#) United News Bangladesh (Mar. 12)

[2 more Rohingyas killed in 'gunfight'](#) New Age Bangladesh (Mar. 13)

[Bob Rae named special envoy for humanitarian and refugee issues](#) Radio Canada International (March 11)

Bob Rae, who spent seven months in 2017 and 2018 examining the forces that drove over 600,000 Rohingya from their homes in Myanmar to refugee camps in neighbouring Bangladesh, is being named Canada's special envoy for humanitarian and refugee issues. The announcement was made Tuesday in a news release by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who in 2017 appointed Rae as a special envoy to Myanmar to explore the underlying causes of what has come to be known as the Rohingya crisis.

Similar:

[Trudeau names Bob Rae special envoy for humanitarian, refugee issues](#) Kamloops This Week (Mar. 10)

[Lives of Rohingya 'Better' in Bangladesh Camps than Myanmar, UN Official Says](#) Radio Free Asia (March 11)

The largest refugee settlement in the world is a "vibrant" place where the lives of Rohingya Muslims are "in some ways better" than they were in Myanmar, the World Food Program's representative in Bangladesh has said in a recent interview. "Rohingya will tell you, for the first time in their life, they feel free, they are able to worship, they are able to move ... the situations that brought them there are clearly not good, but the end state of it is, their life in some ways is better," he said.

[Women in Bangladesh promote hygiene in refugee camps amid coronavirus fears](#) Reuters (March 11)

Women in Bangladesh are promoting hygiene in the world's largest refugee settlement to prevent coronavirus from spreading there, aid workers have said, after the nation reported its first case of the disease. A confirmed case of Covid-19 on the Greek island of Lesbos has sparked fears about the impact of an outbreak in refugee camps from Mexico to France where people live in dire conditions with poor hygiene and little medical care. So far there are no reported cases



of the virus in Bangladesh's densely-populated Cox's Bazar camps but medics are setting up isolation units in hospitals and teaching children about cleanliness through a network of mostly women volunteers.

[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh](#) US Dept. of State (March 11)

[The US State Department has released its 2019 country reports on human rights practices. The report on Bangladesh includes information on the December 2018 elections, fundamental freedoms, and security issues. It includes a section on the limiting of the right to association for NGOs working with Rohingyas in the camps.]

[Bangladesh requests Vietnam to create observer group over Rohingya return](#) New Age Bangladesh (March 11)

Bangladesh has requested Vietnam to initiate a process under the ASEAN framework for creating a civilian observer group who would monitor the return of the 1.1 million Rohingyas from Bangladesh to their homeland Myanmar. Vietnamese ambassador to Bangladesh Pham Viet Chien met foreign minister AK Abdul Momen at his office in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and discussed the issue. The Vietnamese ambassador assured Bangladesh all out support on Rohingya issue.

Similar:

[Rohingya: Momen requests Vietnam to start process for creating observer group](#) Prothom Alo (Mar. 10)

[Bangladesh requests Vietnam to start process for creating observer group over Rohingya return](#) United News Bangladesh (Mar. 10)

[United Nations Security Council's failure to redress the Rohingya refugee crisis](#) Modern Diplomacy (March 10)

[op-ed] The United Nations was established with the primary purpose of maintaining world peace and security. It has the obligation to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace. The Preamble to the Charter also mentions that the Charter reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, and in the dignity and worth of the human person. The UN Security Council has been conferred with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the UN Charter. Thus, an issue of the magnitude of Rohingya crisis falls into the ambit of the United Nation's goals. The UNSC taking action on the matter in no way oversteps boundaries and in fact would be a step forward in realizing its objectives. Considering the facts, question arises as to why permanent members such as China and Russia have been using their veto powers to stop the UNSC from discussing the issue. It goes on to demonstrate how the Security Council has been unsuccessful in performing its responsibilities because two of the permanent members used their veto power to further their interests. Veto power has been used by the permanent five as a tool for manipulation, rather than as the shield it was meant to be. If the Security Council is to work towards its goal, the veto power needs to be re-imagined.

[For Rohingya Refugees internet ban severs ties to the outside world](#) The New Humanitarian (March 10)

Since September, Bangladesh's government has banned the sale of mobile phone SIM cards to refugees, and ordered telecom companies to impose severe restrictions on internet and phone connections. The mobile internet service in the camp has been squeezed to nearly zero – except for an infrequent, low-speed connection that cuts in and out when available at all. Even phone lines have grown patchy. The restrictions have made it difficult for aid staff and government officials working in the camps to coordinate. But hardest hit are the refugees, who say the phone ban is part of a government crackdown that has severed their only link to the outside world. Bangladeshi officials have said the mobile phone ban is in place because of security concerns. Many Rohingya believe it's another punitive measure in a camp crackdown that escalated last year, after a government plan to send thousands of refugees home to Myanmar fizzled, and refugees staged a separate mass demonstration commemorating the two-year anniversary of their flight from Myanmar.

[Embrace democracy and human rights, UN to Myanmar](#) Prothom Alo (March 10)

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee has called on the Myanmar government to change its course and embrace democracy and human rights during the presentation of her final report to the Human Rights Council. “When I took up my mandate in 2014, I had thought that by 2020 a rights-respecting democracy would have been firmly established in Myanmar. But devastation and tragedy transpired,” she said in a statement in a video conference from Seoul. However, it is not too late for the country to change course and reorient itself to transform into a democracy that embraces human rights for all, she told the Human Rights Council. Lee proposed that Myanmar undertake a national dialogue that is inclusive and firmly grounded in human rights to address ongoing issues including discrimination and inequality. She also proposed ways to move towards an equal, tolerant and pluralistic society, including through victim-centred transitional justice mechanisms. The UN expert highlighted the need to bring the entire Government and security forces under civilian control.

Similar:

[Democracy is sliding away in Myanmar, warns top rights investigator](#) UN News (Mar. 11)

[UN Investigator Wants Myanmar Brought Before International Criminal Court](#) VOA News (Mar. 10)

[Civilians pay the price of conflict in southern Chin](#) Frontier Myanmar (March 10)

A desperate situation is emerging for residents of Chin State’s isolated, southern Paletwa Township, where fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army has severed the ferry service on the Kaladan River which is the town’s main lifeline with the outside world. The disruptions to everyday life caused by the suspensions of the boat service from Kyauktaw have gone beyond food security and affected education, administration and development work. Some Khumi worry that the situation could result in heightened tensions with the Rakhine, who they say comprise about 10 percent of the population in the town and in Sami.

[ASEAN Must Do More to Help the Rohingyas](#) The Diplomat (March 9)

[op-ed] Put simply, Myanmar authorities have done nothing to improve the situation for the Rohingyas living in Rakhine state in recent years, and in many ways the conflict and the government’s imposed restrictions mean that the situation has only gotten worse. Amid this environment, how can ASEAN and other countries even begin to talk about repatriations taking place? ASEAN’s efforts to facilitate and promote the repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar is rushed and one-sided. It has totally embraced Myanmar’s narrative on the ongoing situation in Rakhine state and failed to consult and engage with Rohingya refugees. The lack of progress clearly calls for ASEAN governments to do more to help resolve the protracted crisis.

[Rohingya killed in Cox’s Bazar ‘gunfight’](#) Dhaka Tribune (March 9)

A suspected Rohingya drug dealer has been killed in a reported gunfight with Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) in Cox’s Bazar. The deceased is Md Jubayer Mia, 22. BGB Cox’s Bazar 34 Commanding Officer Lt Col Ali Haider Azad Ahmed has confirmed the matter.

[France will continue to support for Rohingya repatriation](#) The Independent (March 9)

Visiting French Minister of Armed Forces Florence Parly has put emphasis on mounting more international pressure on Myanmar to take back its Rohingya nationals from Bangladesh. In a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Prime Minister’s Office, the French minister also said her country will continue to support to Bangladesh on the Rohingya issue. The press secretary said that the French minister highly appreciated Bangladesh for handling the Rohingya crisis efficiently. “Our support to Bangladesh on the issue will continue,” the press secretary quoted her as saying.

Similar:

[Rohingya issue: France wants greater pressure on Myanmar](#) United News Bangladesh (Mar. 9)



[Dhaka seeks Paris' stronger action over Rohingya repatriation](#) United News Bangladesh (March 9)

Bangladesh has sought stronger action from France and other EU Member States to ensure that Myanmar takes back Rohingyas who have been provided shelter by Bangladesh. Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen held a meeting with Florence Parly, Minister for Armed Forces of France, in the city and discussed the issue. Defence Minister Parly expressed her deep appreciation for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her humanitarian position in accommodating over 1 million Rohingyas who fled into Bangladesh after being persecuted by their own government machinery in Myanmar. In reply to the request from Foreign Minister Dr Momen, the French Defence Minister assured France's active role in ensuring that Myanmar follows the decisions of the International Court of Justice declared on January 23, 2020.

Similar:

[Rohingya crisis: Dhaka for stronger action from France, EU members](#) Dhaka Tribune (Mar. 9)

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/>