

Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

March 16 - March 22, 2020



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Highlights:

COVID-19:

- As of March 22, there are no reports of COVID-19 cases in the Rohingya Camps in Cox's Bazar.
- NGOs, IOs and the Bangladesh government have been preparing for and attempting to prevent a COVID-19 outbreak in the camps.
- Many have warned that a COVID-19 outbreak in the camps in Cox's Bazar would have devastating effects.
- NGOs and the international community have raised multiple concerns about the additional risks refugees face in light of the global pandemic, including:
 - Additional vulnerabilities due to conditions in the camps, including limitations regarding access to clean water, health infrastructure, and access to information
 - Implications of the shutting of borders (delays and pushbacks, including that UNHCR and IOM have suspended resettlement operations)

Repatriation:

- The government of Bangladesh has provided the government of Myanmar with a list of 492,000 Rohingya to be cleared for repatriation.
- The US Ambassador Earl Robert Miller has again laid emphasis on creating pressure on Myanmar to take back the Rohingya from Bangladesh.

Developments:

[Foreigners asked to defer Rohingya camp visits](#) New Age Bangladesh (March 21)

The government as well as local and foreign humanitarian organisations have stepped up preparations, including setting up of isolation facilities, to contain the spread of COVID-19 at the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh. There are, however, some gaps in the preparations due to the limited testing and intensive care capacities in the district and other hospitals, officials have said, adding that securing skilled medical personnel to manage the situation would be a major challenge. The office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner has asked all local and foreign humanitarian agencies to defer all non-essential visits to the camps by foreigners until further notice.

[Refugees in Asia face delays, pushbacks as coronavirus shuts borders](#) Dhaka Tribune (March 21)

Hundreds of thousands of refugees living in precarious conditions across Asia are particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus outbreak, with border closures raising the risk of their forced repatriation, human rights groups have said. Aid agencies are particularly concerned about large, crowded camps including Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, home to about 700,000 Rohingya Muslims who fled Myanmar in 2017. Refugees and stateless people in camps are among the hardest hit as they are confined to restricted spaces with few amenities and limited access to healthcare. As more

countries close their borders to limit the outbreak, refugees face extensive delays, and risk being stranded or separated from family members. IOM and UNHCR said this week they were temporarily suspending resettlement travel. Some countries have also placed a hold on resettlement arrivals. The border closures and other restrictions threaten the right of refugees to seek protection.

Similar:

[Many refugees in Asia at risk](#) The Star (Mar. 21)

[Panic Grips Rohingya Refugee Camps in Bangladesh over Coronavirus Concerns](#) Radio Free Asia (March 20)

Panic has hit Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, after an international charity's report highlighted that the government had no resources to test for the deadly coronavirus. A Save the Children report, which has been published on its website, generated alarm among refugees in Cox's Bazar district, Rohingya leader Syed Ullah said. "Panic over coronavirus outbreaks have spread in the camps because many Rohingya returning from foreign countries have not been subjected to surveillance," Ullah said "Most of our people do not know how to remain safe from COVID-19."

['COVID-19 outbreak among Rohingya refugees will create havoc'](#) Prothom Alo (March 20)

[op-ed] According to this interview with MA Faiz, professor of Medicine and former Dean of Medicine, Principal, Dhaka Medical College and Director General of Health Services, IOM and UNHCR should take urgent and realistic steps regarding the refugees, quarantine areas have to be arranged outside of the camps for the refugees if the virus emerges there, and there has been no significant statement from WHO or other international organisations regarding steps to prevent coronavirus among the Rohingyas.

[Refugee Groups Warn of COVID-19 "Carnage" in Camps Housing Millions](#) Democracy Now (March 20)

Fears are growing for millions of refugees living in overcrowded and unsanitary camps around the world, including a million South Sudanese and Congolese refugees in Uganda, tens of thousands of Central Americans in Mexico near the U.S. border, and some 1 million Rohingya Muslims in Bangladesh. Jan Egeland, secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, has warned that, "There will also be carnage when the virus reaches parts of Syria, Yemen and Venezuela where hospitals have been demolished and health systems have collapsed."

Similar:

[Coronavirus could cause 'carnage' among world's refugees, aid groups say](#) NBC News (Mar. 20)

[Doctors: Coronavirus Outbreak Among Refugees Would Be Catastrophic](#) VOA News (Mar. 19)

[Coronavirus pandemic leaves refugees vulnerable](#) AlJazeera (Mar. 19)

[Photos from inside refugee camps show how they could be decimated by coronavirus](#) Business Insider (Mar. 19)

[Coronavirus fear cripples refugees living in unsanitary camps](#) TRT World (Mar. 20)

[Qatar – QRCS builds WASH capacity for better Bangladesh refugee camp management](#) MENA FM (March 19)

As part of the ongoing efforts by Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) to improve the living conditions of the refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh, as well as the host communities, it has worked to build the capacity of local personnel and volunteers. In cooperation with Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), the QRCS representation mission in Bangladesh held a workshop for 30 trainees from BDRCS, partner National Societies, and refugee camp managers of water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Similar:

[QRCS partners with local missions for training sessions in Bangladesh](#) Gulf Times (Mar. 18)



[Massive coronavirus prayer gathering sparks outcry](#) Prothom Alo (March 19)

A massive coronavirus prayer session with tens of thousands of devotees has sparked an outcry in Bangladesh as the South Asian nation reported its first death from the global pandemic. Local police chief Tota Miah said some 10,000 Muslims gathered in an open field in Raipur town in Lakshmipur to pray "healing verses" from the Koran to rid the country of the deadly virus. Organisers claimed the number of worshippers was 25,000.

Similar:

[Thousands attend Covid-19 prayer session in Bangladesh](#) RTE (Mar. 19)

[25,000-strong COvid-19 prayer session sparks outcry in Bangladesh](#) Free Malaysia Today (Mar. 19)

[World Vision helps to prevent Coronavirus at Rohingya camps in Bangladesh](#) World Vision (March 19)

Following the World Health Organization's declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, World Vision immediately declared a global health emergency response. In Cox's Bazar, World Vision is acting swiftly to help families in Rohingya and host communities to protect themselves. World Vision, in partnership with UNICEF, is distributing soap to Rohingya refugees to help prevent Corona virus. Each family receives 10 pieces of bath soap (100 grams per piece) and five bars of laundry soap (130 grams per piece) each month for washing hands, bathing and washing clothes.

[NGOs, UN agencies working with govt to tackle coronavirus in Rohingya camps](#) United News Bangladesh (March 19)

The humanitarian community – NGOs and UN agencies - are working closely with the government of Bangladesh on the preparedness and response in Rohingya camps with major current gaps - the extremely limited testing, and intensive care capacity in the Cox's Bazar district- over the coronavirus outbreak. No cases have been confirmed to date in Cox's Bazar district. The government of Bangladesh has completed a National Preparedness and Response Plan for Bangladesh, which includes the Rohingya. The humanitarian community continues to advocate that refugees are fully included in the implementation of the national and all District level plans.

Similar:

[Rohingya Refugee Camps Prepare for Coronavirus](#) The Realist Woman (Mar. 20)

[Refugees at high risk of coronavirus](#) The Daily Star (March 19)

[op-ed] In a report published yesterday, the WHO spokesperson in Bangladesh warned that refugees are more at risk of infection from communicable diseases because they live in overcrowded camps and settlements. This risk is evident in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, which hosts around 1.1 million Rohingya refugees. This population density, which is often coupled with unsanitary conditions, should not be taken lightly now that we are faced with a global pandemic that has already claimed over 7,000 lives worldwide. While the steps taken so far to protect the Rohingya population are commendable—such as restricting entry into the camps and mobilising Rohingya community leaders to spread awareness on basic hygiene—there is still more that can be done. Given that aid workers also play an important role in supporting the refugee community, these restrictions must be implemented in a balanced manner, especially to ensure that camp inhabitants are able to receive crucial healthcare related services. During these trying times, we must show our humanity and ensure that utmost precautions are taken to prevent an outbreak in the refugee camps, and that all refugees have access to basic health and sanitation facilities.

[Bangladesh gives new list of 492,000](#) New Age Bangladesh (March 19)

The Bangladesh government has handed over a list of 492,000 more Rohingyas to Myanmar for verification to facilitate their return to the Rakhine state, although the Myanmar authorities were allegedly apathetic in clearing the names eligible for repatriation. This is the fifth time that Bangladesh authorities have handed over a list for verification of forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals for facilitating their return.

Similar:

[Bangladesh Hands Over List of 492,000 Rohingya to Myanmar](#) The Irrawaddy (Mar. 20)

[Will the ICJ Myanmar Ruling Help Bring Accountability for the Rohingya Crisis?](#) The Diplomat (March 18)

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the genocide case against Myanmar in January is refocusing attention on the desperate situation facing the Rohingya. It is also raising questions about whether the ICJ might be an effective route for pursuing accountability, given that the case was brought by a state not directly affected by the alleged violations of international law. The Gambia's decision to initiate the case illustrates changing dynamics around South-South accountability, the potential of small states to act on human rights issues and the inventiveness being deployed by those working on accountability issues. But the decision itself does not clearly mark a new pathway for pursuing accountability at an international level. The legal route chosen highlights a few challenges. The prospects for ensuring justice for the Rohingya remain unclear. But the ICJ case illustrates, perhaps, that inventiveness may hold the key to moving forward in an increasingly difficult environment for justice and accountability globally.

Similar:

[Discontent Against Myanmar For Rohingya Crisis](#) The New Nation (Mar. 19)

[Virus can cause havoc in Rohingya camps](#) The Daily Star (March 18)

Around a million Rohingya in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, along with aid workers, are likely to be among the worst sufferers if coronavirus spreads in the region, fear experts. Lack of medical facilities, extremely unhygienic living conditions, and population density of the camps can cause havoc in case of a virus outbreak, they said. Catalin Bercaru, spokesperson for the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Bangladesh, said refugees across the globe, including in Bangladesh, live in overcrowded camps or settlements that pose a greater risk of infection from communicable diseases like Covid-19. Tariq Adnan, communication officer of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Bangladesh, said the Rohingyas already live in unsanitary conditions and their access to healthcare is severely compromised. Therefore, it is more difficult to implement preventive measures there. Noting that there was no reported case of Covid-19 infection in the camps, the international organisations – UNHCR, WHO, and MSF – emphasised equipping local hospitals with adequate resources and expanding test facilities to tackle the potential outbreak.

Similar:

[Rohingya refugee camps a Covid-19 time bomb](#) Asia Times (Mar. 20)

[When social distancing isn't an option](#) Southeast Asia Globe (Mar. 19)

[Save the Children: Save millions of refugee and children in overcrowded camps as coronavirus spreads globally](#)

Dhaka Tribune (March 18)

Vulnerable children and their families living in informal settlements such as refugee and displacement camps cannot be forgotten as the world tightens restrictions in a battle to contain the coronavirus outbreak, Save the Children has said in a statement. Refugees and forcibly displaced children are already vulnerable to infectious diseases in a number of ways, including through having reduced access to healthcare, water and sanitation systems and having potentially weakened immune systems. Some response measures currently being adopted by governments, such as self-isolation, are extremely challenging within overcrowded displacement camps. In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, home to the largest refugee settlement in the world, there is currently no system in place to screen or test for Covid-19 and there are no intensive care units for the nearly one million refugees, half of whom are children. With freedom of movement severely restricted and cramped conditions also compromising people's ability to self-isolate, the virus could prove catastrophic. Save the Children is calling on international donors and national governments to scale up investment in health systems to allow countries to respond to the outbreak without compromising other health services, and stopping new infections from occurring.

[COVID-19: Agencies temporarily suspend refugee resettlement travel](#) UN News (March 17)

A "vital lifeline" for vulnerable families forced to flee their homelands has fallen victim to the COVID-19 pandemic as two UN agencies announced that they are temporarily suspending resettlement travel for refugees. The International



Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said the measure will take effect in the coming days and will remain in place “only for as long as it remains essential”. The spread of the new coronavirus has seen countries drastically reduce entry into their territories, while international air travel has been restricted in some regions. Some countries also have placed a hold on resettlement arrivals due to their public health situation. These “quickly evolving regulations” directly impact resettlement travel for refugees, the agencies explained. Some families have experienced extensive delays while others have been stranded or even separated. They plan to resume full resettlement travel “as soon as prudence and logistics permit”.

[Government urges countries to support expatriates](#) New Age Bangladesh (March 17)

The government has requested all foreign governments to extend safety and care to all Bangladesh nationals living in different countries to overcome the coronavirus situation. Foreign minister AK Abdul Momen made the request in a briefing for diplomats of different countries with resident missions in Dhaka. He said he hoped that Bangladesh nationals would not face any difficulty in their job and situation involving COVID-19 pandemic. He also assured all foreign nationals living in Bangladesh of extended support here including extension, if necessary, of their visas for three months. Replying to question by a foreign diplomat on safety of Rohingya people, Momen said the government has taken measures to keep the Rohingya camps free from the spread of coronavirus.

[Another Rohingya youth killed in landmine blast](#) New Age Bangladesh (March 17)

Yet another Rohingya youth has been killed in a landmine blast at Baisfari in Myanmar near the border with Bangladesh, said officials in Bangladesh. The news of the death came amid concerns over reported landmine planting by the Myanmar authorities along the border, breaching international laws and different international organisations. Bandarban’s Naikhyangchari upazila nirbahi officer Sadia Afrin Kochi said that three Rohingya youths went to collect firewood from a forest at Basifari near their camp. At one stage, a landmine blasted and killed the youth on the spot in the evening and the two other youths returned home and reported it to the residents of their camp and the deceased’s relatives. She said that the Rohingyas recovered the body and took it to their camp for burial.

Similar:

[Rohingya man killed in landmine explosion](#) Dhaka Tribune (Mar. 16)

[No coronavirus among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: WHO](#) Arab News (March 16)

Although the Rohingya camps are cramped with limited access to clean water, no coronavirus cases have been reported among refugees or aid workers tending to them, and no one has been quarantined, WHO officials have said. Emergency preparedness measures in Cox’s Bazar have been in place for several weeks. Besides emergency medical teams, more than 100 national and international partners are supporting the health sector in Cox’s Bazar. Health officials are ready to immediately isolate people showing coronavirus symptoms, said Louise Donovan, UNHCR spokeswoman in Cox’s Bazar. Aid agencies have been raising awareness among members of the Rohingya community about personal and food hygiene measures to avoid infection.

Similar:

[No coronavirus among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: WHO](#) alKhaleej Today (Mar. 16)

[WHO: No Coronavirus Among The Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh](#) Al Bawaba (Mar. 17)

[World Vision calls for protection of vulnerable children during pandemic](#) Radio Canada International (March 16)

World Vision Canada is urging the government of Canada to be a part of a global effort to help prevent COVID-19, commonly known as coronavirus, from having an effect on the lives of child refugees, migrants and impoverished children. The government of Canada announced a \$1 billion package to help Canadians deal with the coronavirus outbreak last week. They also announced that, as part of the package, \$50 million will be used to help vulnerable countries to prepare and deal with the virus, and to support the World Health Organization.

Similar:

[Canadian, global pandemic response must include the protection of vulnerable children and those most at risk from COVID-19, says World Vision](#) NewsWire Canada (Mar. 16)

[Amid viral outbreak let's not forget refugees](#) Gulf News (March 16)

[op-ed] For the last six weeks or so, our lives have become dominated by coronavirus. Our news cycles are consumed by the latest figures: where it has spread, what is being closed, who has died? In much of Europe — and across the world — Covid-19 is the only topic of conversation, the only thing that matters as all else pales in comparison. Imagine, if you will, what it must be like living in a no-man's-land of desperation and despair, with only the hope of a new life somewhere, someday, somehow to sustain your spirit. Into this mix of misery and mayhem is the fear that coronavirus might take hold, that the fragile measures that are in place to provide all but the most basic of services, will be overwhelmed and simply unable to cope. What chances of survival exit then? When we talk about stimulus', bailouts and rate cuts to shield our economies in the wake of one of the deadliest virus outbreaks in the last 100 years, we must do more for the homeless, the refugees and displaced too. The world must do more to help. That is our pressing duty now in these pressing times.

Similar:

[COVID-19 And Humanitarian response: Leave No-One Behind – Analysis](#) Eurasia Review (Mar. 21)

[Refugees Are Being Ignored Amid the COVID-19 Crisis](#) World Politics Review (Mar. 20)

[US for putting pressure on Myanmar over Rohingya repatriation](#) Prothom Alo (March 16)

US ambassador to Bangladesh Earl Robert Miller has laid emphasis on creating pressure on Myanmar to take back Rohingyas from Bangladesh. "Pressure should be created on Myanmar to take back (Rohingyas)," he said when he met prime minister Sheikh Hasina at her official residence Ganobhaban. The US ambassador also said the US highly appreciates the generosity of the prime minister for hosting over 1 million Rohingyas.

Similar:

[US for putting pressure on Myanmar over Rohingya repatriation](#) United News Bangladesh (Mar. 16)

[US for putting pressure on Myanmar over Rohingya repatriation](#) Dhaka Tribune (Mar. 16)

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/>

