

Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

April 13 - April 19, 2020



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Highlights:

Access to territory:

- A boat carrying almost 400 Rohingya was found by Bangladeshi authorities and brought to shore this week, after floating at sea for approximately two months and being refused entry by Malaysia. Almost 30 people are reported to have died on the journey. The incident has prompted outcry from many, and calls for increased search and rescue operations for those found at sea. There are also concerns that there are other boats currently drifting in the Bay of Bengal.
- Border Guard Bangladesh members fired blank shots near Ghumdhum border in Bandarban's Naikhyangchhari upazila to stop the entry of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar this week.
- Myanmar has stopped the entry and exit of people in its border gates with Bangladesh starting on April 13, as part of the Southeast Asian country's measures to mitigate the COVID-19 epidemic.

Covid-19:

- There are still no reports of covid-19 in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.
- More than 400 Rohingya community volunteers and Imams are disseminating awareness messages on coronavirus in their camps in Cox's Bazar so that they may better protect themselves from the coronavirus epidemic.
- 1,700 isolation beds are being prepared in Cox's Bazar, to address any potential covid-19 spread.
- The government and the humanitarian community, including IOM, are now delivering a "wide array of supports" to ensure that health services for both Rohingyas and the host community are prepared in the event of a covid-19 outbreak.
- COAST Trust hosted a virtual press conference where non-government organizations called upon the government to engage them in tackling the crisis caused by the outbreak of coronavirus.

Situation in Myanmar:

- Fighting continues to escalate in Rakhine state, with an attack on April 13 killing up to 8 and injuring another 13.

Developments:

[NGOs urge govt to engage them in efforts to tackle Covid-19 crisis](#) The Daily Star (April 19)

COAST Trust hosted a virtual press conference, attended by the leaders of National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors, Bangladesh, Bangladesh CSO-NGO Coordination Process, Network for Information, Response and Preparedness Activities on Disaster, Disaster Forum, Association of Development Agencies Bangladesh and Federation of NGOs Bangladesh. At the press conference, non-government organisations called upon the government to engage them in tackling the crisis caused by the outbreak of coronavirus, which is having far-reaching impacts on people, health and economy, especially on the poor and vulnerable communities across the country.

[**COVID-19 could bring about a migration crisis. Here's how we can avoid it**](#) World Economic Forum (April 17)

Former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh Shahidul Haque stresses the importance of an inclusive, encouraging and collaborative, international framework to defeat COVID-19. Closing national borders is a natural response to the coronavirus pandemic, and governments stand on firm legal ground when they do so. However, such restrictions translate fear into national-security policy and ramp up anti-migrant sentiments. They lead to extreme nationalism and insularity, which some world leaders have sought to stoke and exploit. It is also increasingly evident that COVID-19 will cause a global recession that will shrink most economies. And it is equally evident that the consequences for employment, income, and equality will disproportionately affect migrant workers. The pandemic is an unprecedented emergency that demands such exceptional responses. A government must consider the vulnerabilities of refugees and migrants, in addition to legitimate public concerns, balancing national interests and humanitarian responsibilities. It's a challenging task for any government, especially when the economy is shrinking, and mastering it requires innovative forms of international collaboration.

[**UN Refugee Agency Looks to Contactless Biometrics to Mitigate COVID-19**](#) Find Biometrics (April 17)

In a new report entitled, "UNHCR Cash Assistance and COVID 19: Emerging Field Practices", the organization explains that it has been testing contactless biometrics in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Zambia for the identification of refugees and displaced persons in those areas. This has been done primarily via iris recognition, which has been used for the registration of refugees as well as for authentication during cash and in-kind transactions. "Following successful testing, UNHCR Bangladesh has shifted to an iris-only (no fingerprint) registration and assistance management strategy," the agency explained. The UNHCR has been increasingly vocal about the advantages of biometric identification in recent years, primarily for its utility in establishing identity for displaced individuals who often lack official documentation.

[**Rohingyas still at sea: UNHCR seeks strong search, rescue efforts**](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 17)

In light of reports of vessels in similar circumstances carrying Rohingyas still at sea, the UNHCR strongly sought "stepped-up search and rescue efforts" that need to be conducted in a timely manner. "All States should ensure that their responses to migrants in distress at sea are based on international human rights and refugee law, and that they are permitted safe disembarkation," Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Rupert Colville said in Geneva.

Similar:

[**Vessels carrying Rohingyas at Sea: UNHCR seeks strong search, rescue efforts**](#) United News Bangladesh (April 17)

[**UN human rights office calls for compassion following Rohingya deaths at sea**](#) UN News (Apr. 17)

[**'1,700 isolation beds being prepared for Rohingyas'**](#) Prothom Alo (April 17)

A process is underway to prepare 1,700 isolation beds in Cox's Bazar for the Rohingyas and the host community as the displaced Myanmar nationals are at high risk of coronavirus infection in the cramped camps amid the ongoing pandemic. "Mapping of isolation facilities, ambulances and 24/7 health facilities is ongoing. Planning is underway to prepare 1,700 beds for isolation and treatment across Cox's Bazar district," UNHCR spokesperson Louise Donovan has said. She said health partners are now preparing all possible beds in the existing health facilities in the district while setting up 1,000 additional beds at several sites, and the government is being involved in all efforts to prepare isolation and treatment facilities.

[**Hundreds of Rohingya refugees stuck at sea, say rights groups**](#) The Guardian (April 17)

Hundreds more Rohingya refugees remain stuck at sea, rights groups have warned, just one day after it emerged that dozens of people died onboard a boat that was refused entry to Malaysia and left adrift for two months. Malaysia's air force has confirmed it had denied entry to a second boat carrying about 200 Rohingya people, claiming it had done so to prevent further spread of the coronavirus within the country, which remains under lockdown. Researchers believe other boats are likely to also be stuck at sea, packed with refugees who are attempting to escape desperate and

squalid conditions in the city of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. It is feared that the refugees could remain trapped at sea and unable to disembark as countries cite the spread of Covid-19 as a justification for turning boats back.

Similar:

[Calls for rescue effort as Rohingyas at sea die of starvation](#) Dhaka Tribune (Apr. 17)

[2 more boats carrying Rohingyas still adrift at sea, 60 die, claims Fortify Rights](#) United News Bangladesh (April 17)

[Malaysia Urged to Allow Rohingya Refugee Boats to Land](#) New York Times (Apr. 18)

[Malaysia: Allow Rohingya Refugees Ashore](#) Human Rights Watch (Apr. 18)

[Nearly 400 Rohingya refugees receiving assistance in medical facilities in Cox's Bazar, following two months at sea](#) UNHCR (April 16)

At the request of the Government of Bangladesh, UNHCR and partners in Bangladesh are currently providing shelter and assistance for close to 400 Rohingya refugee survivors who disembarked from a boat in the Bay of Bengal on Thursday morning. We understand from those on-board that around 30 more refugees may have passed away at sea as the boat ran out of food, water and fuel during a nearly two-month long journey at sea. The survivors include a large number of women and children. They are all in weak physical condition, many are dehydrated and malnourished and in need of immediate medical attention. The group has been moved to designated medical facilities in Nayapara and Ukhiya where they are receiving medical attention and other assistance. In line with established procedures and in adherence with Government Directives for all individuals entering Bangladesh, they will all receive a full medical screening and will be monitored and quarantined for the next two weeks. Despite some media reports claiming that the group may be infected with COVID-19, there is currently no evidence to substantiate these reports.

Similar:

[30 Rohingyas might have passed away at sea, says UNHCR](#) United News Bangladesh (Apr. 16)

[Bangladesh: Rescued Rohingya refugees require immediate care and protection](#) Amnesty International (Apr. 16)

['400 Rohingyas rescued after two months' stuck on sea'](#) Prothom Alo (April 16)

Coast guard members have rescued 400 Rohingyas from Shyamlapur Halbania Para Ghat in Teknaf upazila. Mohammad Saiful Islam, upazila nirbahi officer, said the Rohingyas returned after failing to anchor in Malaysia. Most of the Rohingyas rescued from the trawler are women and children, he said. Zobair, one of the Rohingyas, said a trawler with 482 of them from Teknaf and Ukhiya camps left for Malaysia two months ago but they failed to enter the country and returned to Cox's Bazar. Twenty-eight people died during this period, he said.

Similar:

[400 Rohingyas rescued in Teknaf](#) United News Bangladesh (Apr. 16)

[Rohingya at sea for 2 months, 32 die](#) Prothom Alo (Apr. 17)

[396 Rohingyas return from Malaysia, quarantined in Teknaf](#) Dhaka Tribune (Apr. 16)

[Bangladesh rescues 300 people from Rohingya boat in Teknaf](#) BDNews24 (Apr. 16)

[396 Rohingyas rescued from trawler in Bay: Coast Guard](#) United News Bangladesh (Apr. 16)

[Bangladesh rescues hundreds of Rohingya adrift at sea; 24 dead](#) AlJazeera (Apr. 16)

[Nearly 400 Rohingya Rescued From Boat Near Bangladesh After 2 Months Adrift](#) NPR (Apr. 16)

[Bangladesh coast guard rescues 396 Rohingya from drifting boat; 32 dead](#) Reuters (Apr. 15)

[Nearly 400 Rohingya Rescued from Boat Drifting Off Bangladesh Coast](#) VOA News (Apr. 16)

[Two dozen Rohingya die on drifting boat, 382 rescued: Bangladesh](#) Bangkok Post (Apr. 16)

[Bangladesh rescues 400 starving Rohingya in boat headed to Malaysia](#) Free Malaysia Today (Apr. 16)

[Starving Rohingya refugees rescued off Bangladesh after two months at sea](#) BBC News (Apr. 16)

[Hundreds of Rohingya refugees rescued after two months at sea](#) CNN (Apr. 18)

[Coronavirus: Imams, volunteers conduct awareness campaigns in Rohingya camps](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 16)

Rohingya community volunteers and Imams are disseminating awareness messages on coronavirus in their camps in Cox's Bazar, so that they may better protect themselves from the coronavirus epidemic. The UNHCR spokesperson said communications are ongoing in the camps and host communities through radio spots, video, posters, and messages, in Rohingya, Burmese, and Bengali languages. She said more than 400 protection community outreach workers are also helping to disseminate message in the camps. To contain the spread of the coronavirus in the cramped Rohingya camps, the local administration has already imposed a lockdown in Cox's Bazar district.

[Arakan Union report: Myanmar continues genocidal crimes amid coronavirus pandemic](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 15)

A report titled "Arakan Rohingya Union Narrative Report to OIC Development on the ground in Arakan state, Myanmar," submitted by Arakan Rohingya Union Director General Dr Wakar Uddin, covers the current situation the Rohingya community is in in Myanmar. In recent months, the Myanmar military has stepped up the fighting with the Arakan Army, killing a number of village residents in several townships in Arakan. Most recently, on April 13, Myanmar military launched heavy artillery at the Rakhine village of Kyaukseik in Punnagyun township, killing eight villagers and injuring thirteen, sources from the ground reported.

[In Refugee Camps, Coronavirus Threatens More Than Just Health](#) Huffington Post (April 15)

Panic and rumors about the illness continue to sweep across Cox's Bazar, where humanitarian organizations are working against the clock to raise awareness on hygiene, hand-washing and social distancing among residents now under lockdown. There are currently some 26 million refugees displaced from their own countries by conflict, and more than 40 million internally displaced people. In total, a tenth of all refugees are confined to refugee camps, including in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Greece, Turkey, Jordan, Gaza, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Each camp has its own vulnerabilities, all of which make the coronavirus even more of a threat: Some are overcrowded, others too difficult to reach due to ongoing conflict or too dispersed to guarantee medical assistance, and many lack clean water. Coronavirus cases have been confirmed in the district of Cox's Bazar although not yet in any of the camps. Reports of the coronavirus in a refugee camp in Greece at the beginning of April sent shivers through the humanitarian community. A quarantine regime has been enforced for those suspected to have the virus in the Greek camp, while isolation facilities and additional hospital beds have been prepared in Cox's Bazar.

Similar:

[Surveillance Won't Stop the Coronavirus](#) NYTimes (Apr. 15) [op-ed]

[World has a moral duty to help refugees during virus crisis](#) Arab News (Apr. 15) [op-ed]

[Refugees face double coronavirus emergency](#) IPP Media (Apr. 13)

[Pandemic could be global catastrophe for children, UNICEF warns](#) Daily Sabah (Apr. 13)

[ASEAN must not neglect migrant workers, refugees in COVID-10 response: Activists](#) The Jakarta Post (April 15)

Having held a special meeting to discuss steps that could be taken at the regional level to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN leaders are now facing pressure not to neglect migrant workers and refugees after the two vulnerable groups were not mentioned at all in the meeting's main outcome document. The meeting, held online and chaired by Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, resulted in a joint declaration that included the widely applauded plan to establish a regional COVID-19 response fund to deal with the scarcity of medical supplies caused by the pandemic. However, labor rights advocacy group Migrant Care criticized the declaration for not tackling the issue of human mobility, especially in regard to migration and refugees. While the approach was certainly important and useful, ASEAN should also find a way to help migrants and refugees, which has become an even more pressing matter during the pandemic, according to Migrant Care.

[Govt, humanitarian community to ensure health services in Rohingya camps: IOM](#) United News Bangladesh (April 15)

The government and the humanitarian community, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), are now delivering a "wide array of supports" to ensure that health services for both Rohingyas and the host community are ready. The initiatives are taken recognising the risks that the COVID-19 outbreak could pose to one of the largest refugee camps in the world. No positive case has so far been reported from the congested camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf Upazilas of Cox's Bazar. IOM Bangladesh's COVID-19 response is supported by Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Similar:

[Coronavirus: Govt and IOM together providing support to Rohingyas, locals](#) Dhaka Tribune (Apr. 14)

[Coordinated Preparation in Full Swing to Combat COVID-19 in Cox's Bazar Refugee Camps](#) IOM (Apr. 14)

[Myanmar stops entry-exit of people in Bangladesh border gates](#) Myanmar Times (April 14)

Myanmar has stopped the entry and exit of people in its border gates with Bangladesh starting on April 13, as part of the Southeast Asian country's measures to mitigate the COVID-19 epidemic, a government spokesperson said. He added that entry of goods between Myanmar and Bangladesh would continue.

[Why The Pandemic Is The Right Time To Issue An Atrocity Determination For Rohingya](#) Forbes (April 14)

[op-ed] Rohingya refugees have endured tremendous brutality at the hands of the Burmese military. The United Nations believes these attacks may constitute genocide. Now, more hardship for the Rohingya looms on the horizon. In refugee camps, social distancing is a literal impossibility, and access to medical care is limited. Clean water is scarce, making sanitation difficult at best. The Rohingya are, essentially, sitting ducks for the potentially deadly virus. The situation demands U.S. leadership. To harness the needed humanitarian assistance, the Trump administration should do what it has put off for far too long and issue a determination on atrocity crimes committed against Rohingya. An atrocity determination from the U.S. carries great gravitas. It would shine a spotlight on the severity of the crimes Rohingya have already endured and attract global attention to their worsening plight in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. Given the momentum building for a global response to COVID-19, it may prove a fruitful moment to bring together a coalition of the willing to share the burden of providing assistance that a refugee crisis of this scale merits. It also aligns with current U.S. policy priorities in Asia. More specifically, a determination comports with U.S. policy toward Burma, where the U.S. has already imposed financial sanctions against architect of the atrocities, Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing, and other senior Burmese military officials involved in carrying out the crimes. The administration should issue a determination soon if it hopes to have partners in providing for the vast and ever-increasing needs of the nearly 1 million displaced Rohingya during COVID-19.

[In Rohingya refugee camps, the internet blackout could kill](#) Frontier Myanmar (April 14)

The internet blackout that Bangladesh has imposed on a million Rohingya refugees since last September has made life difficult, but with COVID-19 detected close to the camps, it could soon prove deadly. At a time when the coronavirus is already present in Bangladesh, including near the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, depriving one million or more Rohingya refugees of the internet also means depriving us of life-saving information. Most Rohingya don't know much about the coronavirus yet. They, like everyone else, should have access to daily updates about the pandemic. Having the latest information will help them to stay safe and also help to prevent panic. If the Bangladesh government leaves the Rohingya disconnected not only from the outside world but also from one another, it is increasing the risks of a deadly outbreak in the Rohingya refugee camps. In such cramped conditions, with so many people who are vulnerable, the potential impact is terrifying.

Similar:

[COVID19 and displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh](#) Observer Research Foundation (Apr. 18)

[Covid19 pandemic and Rohingya refugees](#) Observer Research Foundation (Apr. 13)

[BGB fires blanks to stop Rohingya refugee at Bandarban border](#) The Daily Star (April 13)

Border Guard Bangladesh members fired blank shots near Ghumdhum border in Bandarban's Naikhyangchhari upazila to stop the entry of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. A group of 50 Rohingya people reportedly tried to cross into Bangladesh through Tumbru border near pillar no. 32 and 33 around 5:30am.

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/>