

Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

April 20 - April 26, 2020



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY
NETWORK

Highlights:

Access to territory:

- Two more boats carrying approximately 500 Rohingya in the Bay of Bengal have been refused access to Bangladesh by the navy, prompting concern and outcry from many.

Camp conditions:

- Efforts to protect against COVID-19 have again been increased in the Rohingya camps and the local communities in Cox's Bazar this week.
- There are reports of shortages of drinking water in the camps.
- UNHCR has warned of life-threatening consequences if annual monsoon preparations cannot be completed on time in Bangladesh amid the global outbreak of COVID-19.
- There have been continued calls to allow internet connectivity in the camps, to increase public health communications to protect against COVID-19 infection.

In Myanmar:

- Myanmar has returned 800 Rohingya to Rakhine state, as it empties out detention centers to reduce risk of COVID-19 spread.

Developments:

[Efforts to tackle COVID-19 stepped up in Rohingya and host communities in Cox's Bazar](#) United News Bangladesh (April 26)

UN agencies, local, national and international NGOs with the government of Bangladesh have stepped up their efforts to respond to priority COVID-19 needs in local communities and for Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar district. The UN agencies along with other humanitarian and development partners are supporting the government efforts to expand existing isolation and treatment capacities and construct new facilities in and nearby the camps, to serve both refugees and local Bangladeshi communities, taking into account gender considerations, the UNHCR has said. No cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) in the Rohingya camps as of April 26, according to a joint humanitarian community media release issued by UNHCR.

[UN tells Bangladesh to take in 500 Rohingyas adrift at sea](#) Prothom Alo (April 26)

The United Nations has asked Bangladesh to take in, on humanitarian grounds, the over 500 Rohingyas who are adrift at sea in two trawlers. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet made this appeal in a letter to the foreign minister AK Abdul Momen. These Rohingyas, lured by human traffickers, had set sail for Malaysia some time back, but after being turned away by the Malaysian authorities they have been adrift in two trawlers. The two trawlers have tried to enter the Bangladesh's waters, according to diplomatic sources and local sources in Cox's Bazar. However, their attempts were thwarted by the law enforcement agencies. Latest reports are that they are now near St Martin's island but in Myanmar maritime territory.

[COVID-19: India gives Bangladesh one lakh anti-malarial tablets, 50,000 surgical gloves](#) New Indian Express (April 26)
India has gifted one lakh anti-malarial tablets of hydroxychloroquine and 50,000 surgical gloves to Bangladesh to help it combat the coronavirus pandemic which has infected nearly 5,000 people and killed over 100 in the country. India's High Commissioner Riva Ganguly Das handed over the supplies, consisting of 100,000 hydroxychloroquine tablets and 50,000 sterile surgical latex gloves, to Health Minister Zahid Malik.

[Envoy: Beijing with Dhaka to fight coronavirus](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 26)

The Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh, Li Jiming, has said China is firmly standing by Bangladesh and other Muslim countries to combat the pandemic during the holy month of Ramadan. China will continue to stand and work closely with Bangladesh and the world to fight together against the pandemic for a better and shared future, according to the Ambassador. The China-Bangladesh Friendship International Exhibition Centre in Dhaka, fully funded by China, will turn into a makeshift hospital for coronavirus patients, he said.

Similar:

[Beijing with Dhaka to fight COVID-19 for better future: Envoy](#) United News Bangladesh (Apr. 26)

[Covid-19: Rohingyas face greater rapid transmission risk](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 26)

Although no cases of Covid-19 have been confirmed yet, Rohingyas are facing a greater risk of rapid transmission of the virus due to lack of adequate health facilities and congested living conditions in the camps, according to the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG). Furthermore, despite great efforts by host community and refugee volunteers to share pertinent Covid-19 messages, the lack of internet connectivity remains a key impediment to ensuring access to reliable information. It is crucial that connectivity is reestablished in the Rohingya camps and adjacent host communities, to allow rapid access to information which can help fight Covid-19, as well as ensure preparedness in view of the imminent cyclone and monsoon season. Health Sector partners are boosting stocks of medical supplies and equipment, including personal protective equipment for the safety of frontline health workers who play a crucial role in the coronavirus response in Cox's Bazar district. UN agencies and other humanitarian and development partners are supporting government efforts to expand existing isolation and treatment capacities and construct new facilities in and nearby the camps, to serve both refugees and local Bangladeshi communities.

[Rohingya in Bangladesh camps complain of water crisis](#) New Age Bangladesh (April 25)

Rohingyas are suffering from a drinking water crisis in camps at Ukhia and Teknaf in Cox's Bazar amid spread of the novel coronavirus, Rohingya community leaders have alleged. Officials working with the government and international agencies for Rohingyas said that dry season caused the water crisis but food distribution continued amid shortage of manpower due to the coronavirus scenario. Rohingya community leaders, however, were compiling the list of their community members who were yet to receive the ration or relief. The office of Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner in Cox's Bazar said there was no shortage of food but food supply was disrupted in certain cases due to the shutdown enforced from March 25.

[Put in place proper health measures before gradual withdrawal of lockdown: WHO](#) United News Bangladesh (April 25)

The WHO has said any country needs to make sure that good and appropriate health measures are already in place demonstrating its ability to tackle the situation confidently before it slowly starts withdrawing its lockdown. "When we start slowly opening the lockdown, we need to make sure that this doesn't resurge again. We have to ensure that," WHO Representative to Bangladesh Dr. Bardan Jung Rana said in an interview. He referred to country's ability to detect, isolate, test and treat people which should be in place so that anything, if suddenly comes in, can fully be responded to.

[HRW urges Bangladesh to take in Rohingyas stranded in the Bay](#) The Daily Star (April 25)

The Bangladesh government should immediately allow the Rohingya refugees stranded on board two trawlers in the Bay of Bengal to come ashore and receive necessary food, water, and health care, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said today. The UNHCR warned that the Rohingyas may have been at sea for weeks without adequate food and water, according to a HRW news release. On April 23, 2020, Foreign Minister Abdul Momen said the country would refuse entry to more Rohingyas.

Similar:

[Bangladesh: Rohingya Refugees Stranded at Sea](#) Human Rights Watch (Apr. 25)

[HRW urges Bangladesh to take Rohingyas stranded in Bay](#) Prothom Alo (Apr. 26)

[HRW urges Bangladesh to allow Rohingya stranded on boats to come ashore](#) BDNews24 (Apr. 26)

[HRW urges Bangladesh to take Rohingyas stranded in Bay](#) United News Bangladesh (Apr. 26)

[HRW Urges Bangladesh to Take In Rohingyas Stranded at Sea](#) VOA News (Apr. 25)

[Tackling Covid-19: Hasina calls for a global partnership](#) The Daily Star (April 24)

At a virtual regional conference, titled "Enhancing regional cooperation in South Asia to combat Covid-19-related impact on its economics", organised by The World Economic Forum, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called for forging a collective global partnership and greater unity to fight the coronavirus pandemic, as she placed a five-point proposal that includes devising meaningful strategies.

Similar:

[PM Hasina calls for 'global coordination' to fight future catastrophe](#) Prothom Alo (Apr. 26)

[COVID-19: Bangladesh bans Iftar gatherings during Ramzan as coronavirus cases climb to 4,689](#) New Indian Express (April 24)

Bangladesh has banned Iftar gatherings during the holy month of Ramzan to curb the spread of coronavirus infections as the Muslim-majority country recorded the highest single-day spike of 503 positive cases, increasing the total cases to 4,689. Bangladesh's Ministry of Religious Affairs said in a statement that in order to maintain social distancing during the coronavirus outbreak, no individuals or institutions will be allowed to arrange or participate in any gathering over Iftar meals at dusk.

[Coronavirus: Much more must be done to protect Rohingya camps](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 23)

Although there have been no confirmed cases of Covid-19 infection among the Rohingya population sheltered in Cox's Bazar, the persecuted community from Myanmar still remains extremely vulnerable to the global pandemic. Against such a grim scenario, it appears that enough is not being done to protect the Rohingya camps from the deadly viral infection. Officials of the government, UN agencies and the international humanitarian community are of the opinion that much more must be done to stop the novel coronavirus from entering the Rohingya settlements and the areas where the host communities live. The fact that one of the staff of an international NGO working in a Rohingya camp got exposed to Covid-19 calls for taking measures most urgently. The officials have also said that testing of six out of about a million Rohingya people, who live in very congested and unhygienic situations, is negligible. Placing great emphasis on more testing, they have called for ensuring adequate medical equipment, isolation facilities, ventilators and intensive care units.

Similar:

[Coronavirus closes in on Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's cramped, unprepared camps](#) The Conversation (April 20)

[Violence forced the Rohingya to flee Myanmar. Now the coronavirus is threatening their refugee camp](#) ABC (Apr. 25) [op-ed]

[**Int'l Ngo staff working in Rohingya camp exposed to Covid-19**](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 23)

One of the Bangladeshi staff working for World Vision, an international NGO, in a Rohingya camp has been exposed to Covid-19. The staff is now in quarantine at home for 15 days and as a precautionary measure, the NGO closed its office in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar on Thursday. According to a source, the staff in question was involved in distribution of hygiene materials in a camp. Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) based in Cox's Bazar Mahbub Alam Talukder said that his office is aware of the development and the necessary measures have been taken.

[**On the eve of Ramadan, UNHCR calls for support for refugees and displaced people as millions are exposed to deprivation amid the COVID-19 crisis**](#) UNHCR (April 23)

Coinciding with the holy month of Ramadan, UNHCR launched has a global fundraising campaign 'Every Gift Counts' to help raise funds for the most vulnerable refugees and IDPs. Millions of people who fled wars and violence are among those around the world preparing to observe the holy month of Ramadan, under the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis. Refugees and internally displaced people are frequently among the most marginalized and vulnerable members of society and are particularly at risk during this pandemic. Together with the local communities that host them, they often have limited access to water, sanitation and health systems, and with scarce socio-economic resources to survive. Many of those observing Ramadan will be doing so without the certainty of food on the table at the end of the day to break their fast.

Similar:

[UNHCR urges continued Zakat contributions amid COVID-19 emergency](#) Salaam Gateway (Apr. 20)

[**Turkey donates emergency food for 3,000 Bangladeshis**](#) Anadolu Agency (April 23)

Turkey has donated emergency food aid for 3,000 poor households in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka on the eve of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. "We stand by our brothers and sisters in Bangladesh, who are the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic consequences," said Mustafa Osman Turan, Turkish Ambassador in Bangladesh, in an address to the recipient families at a ceremony.

[**Navy, Coast Guard preventing 2 boats carrying Rohingyas from entering Bangladesh**](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 22)

Two boats carrying around 500 Rohingyas have been trying to reach the shores of Bangladesh from international waters since April 20, multiple sources told Dhaka Tribune. But the Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Coast Guard are not allowing them to enter Bangladeshi waters from international waters, they said. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen has said that the Rohingyas at sea will not be allowed into the country. The exact number and other details of the Rohingyas in the boats could not be ascertained. However, according to two sources, the boats are carrying about 500 Rohingyas. It is also not clear where they came from.

Similar:

[Rohingya stranded at sea, Bangladesh says not its responsibility](#) AlJazeera (Apr. 25)

[Bangladesh: 'Not a Single Rohingya Will be Allowed to Enter'](#) Radio Free Asia (Apr. 23)

[Bangladesh refuses to accept Rohingya Muslims stranded at the sea, Foreign Minister says not a single Rohingya will be allowed to enter](#) OplIndia (Apr. 24)

[**Rohingya refugees stranded at sea show urgent need for regional response**](#) Amnesty International (April 22)

The Bangladesh authorities should rescue and welcome Rohingya refugees currently stranded at sea, Amnesty International has said. Other governments must fulfil their shared responsibility to carry out search and rescue efforts, in line with their international obligations to protect life, and allow safe disembarkation of refugees and asylum seekers at sea. Two fishing trawlers carrying an estimated 500 Rohingya women, men and children are currently in the Bay of Bengal after being pushed away by Malaysia, which has imposed restrictions on all boats in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The two trawlers are headed towards Bangladesh a week after an earlier vessel carrying nearly 400



Rohingya refugees arrived there on 15 April. Monitors also believe there could be another vessel still at sea with hundreds more Rohingya stranded, further highlighting the need for governments in the region to get involved in search and rescue operations if needed.

Similar:

[Bangladesh: Rohingya refugees left to starve at sea](#) Medecins Sans Frontiers (Apr. 22)

[UN concerned over Rohingyas drifting on boats](#) Prothom Alo (Apr. 23)

[Photo contest for Rohingya](#) Dhaka Tribune (April 22)

A photography competition for Rohingya refugees will be held from April 23- August 23, featuring two broad categories -Rohingya life and Response to Coronavirus. Rohingya from anywhere in the world may participate for a chance to showcase their talent and win cash prizes. A selection of photographs will be exhibited at the Human Rights Research and Education Centre (HRREC) in Ottawa, Canada and the Oxford Human Rights Festival, Oxford, United Kingdom as well as online on social media. It is anticipated that other cities will also feature the exhibition. A London photography studio will run a series of the best photographs on its Instagram account. Entries will be made by WhatsApp or Twitter or Facebook.

[COVID-19: UNHCR warns of severe implications for annual monsoon response in Bangladesh](#) UNHCR (April 21)

UNHCR has warned of life-threatening consequences if annual monsoon preparations cannot be completed on time in Bangladesh amid the global outbreak of COVID-19. Annual monsoon preparations have been impacted by the suspension of disaster risk reduction efforts, including improvements to drainage systems and slope stabilization work. Similarly, the relocation of refugees living in areas at high risk of flooding and landslides has also been delayed. Delivery of supplies has also been challenging, as the COVID-19 related “lockdown” has impacted road transport. While it is vital to prioritize public health-related preparations in the camps at this time, cyclone and monsoon preparedness activities must also continue. Both together will ensure that refugees have safe and sanitary living conditions in an additional, potential public health emergency.

Similar:

[Monsoon Amid Outbreak: Preparation lapses can be deadly, UNHCR warns](#) The Daily Star (Apr. 22)

[Coming monsoon risks worsening Bangladesh refugee situation: UNHCR](#) Prothom Alo (Apr. 21)

[Monsoon rain risk worsening already difficult refugee situation: UNHCR](#) The Daily Star (Apr. 21)

[500 Rohingyas drifting at sea in two trawlers](#) Prothom Alo (April 21)

Two more trawlers carrying around 500 Rohingyas have been spotted by local fishermen south of St Martin’s island in the Bay of Bengal, according to law enforcement agencies and local people’s representatives. The Myanmar navy is guarding the coast so the Rohingyas cannot go there. Meanwhile, the two trawlers are not being able to approach Teknaf as the Bangladesh Coast Guard and navy are patrolling the coast off St Martin’s.

[CSO leaders for lifting ban on 4G network in Rohingya camps](#) United News Bangladesh (April 21)

Leaders of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have urged the government to lift the ban on 4G network in Rohingya camps to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19 among Rohingyas. In a media statement, CSO activists thanked the people of Bangladesh, national and international partners and state authorities for rescuing about 400 Rohingyas recently from the sea. They also demanded that law and order be beefed up to stop illegal human trafficking. Expressing concern over the possibility of COVID-19 contamination due to overcrowding at Rohingya camps in Cox’s Bazar, the statement said about 70,000 people live per square kilometre in Rohingya camps for which it is almost tough to maintain social distancing there. If coronavirus spreads in Rohingya camps, it will spread widely among the local population, CSO feared. The statement also said due to the restrictions on mobile and internet communication in Ukhia and Teknaf areas, it is difficult for Rohingyas to contact the hotline numbers of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research.



Similar:

[Restore telco services to Rohingya camps to prevent coronavirus spread: Human rights activists](#) The Daily Star (Apr. 20)

[Dying for a Better Life – How Rohingya Refugees Risk Their Lives to Cross into Malaysia](#) Inter Press Service (April 21)

Last week more than 396 starving Rohingyas were rescued off the coast of Bangladesh after being at sea for two months. At least 32 had died on the boat after it failed to reach Malaysia. While it was unclear at the time of the breaking news whether the refugees were from Myanmar, where they are originally from, or Bangladesh, the attempt to reach Malaysia is not a new one. For years, Rohingya refugees have boarded boats, organised by traffickers, in the hope of finding refuge in Southeast Asia. While there are no official figures from local police about the number of trafficking victims, a local crime reporter who asked not to be named said that the numbers rank in the thousands. Some of those living in the Cox Bazar camps have attempted the irregular migration journey to Malaysia in the hope of earning an income and having a better life. But many of the so-called “work opportunities” they have been offered have proven to be trafficking scams. A gang of human traffickers based in Malaysia have reportedly been luring Rohingya youth and young girls to the South Asian nation, working with local traffickers who visit Rohingya camps and identify possible targets. In a recent statement, the U.N. Refugee Agency said they, along with the Bangladesh government, had been working to raise awareness among the refugees and local people on the issues of trafficking and risks they face. The U.N. is also supporting the strengthening of law enforcement capacities to address smuggling and trafficking, while support is also available to trafficking survivors, the statement read.

[WFP distributes food in Cox’s Bazar](#) United News Bangladesh (April 20)

The WFP has started handing out food to the most vulnerable families in Cox’s Bazar affected by shutdowns due to coronavirus. Alongside making changes in the food distribution process in the Rohingya camps, WFP is working with local government authorities to provide support to the host communities as needed, the agency has said. As well as providing food to vulnerable households, WFP is also supplying food to patients in the government and humanitarian-managed quarantine and isolation facilities in the district. This includes dry food rations for up to 1,500 patients to the isolation facilities and hot meals (locally known as Khichuri) to up to 3,000 people in the government quarantine centre. These distributions are complementing ongoing food assistance provided by the government of Bangladesh.

[Myanmar ships 800 freed Rohingya prisoners back to Rakhine](#) New Indian Express (April 20)

Myanmar has shipped hundreds of recently released Rohingya inmates back to the country’s restive western borderlands, after fears that its overcrowded prisons could become hotbeds for runaway coronavirus outbreaks. Men, women and children belonging to the stateless and long-persecuted Muslim minority were among nearly 25,000 prisoners freed last week by a presidential pardon to mark the country’s April New Year celebrations. A Navy vessel transported the group from Yangon to western Rakhine state, where most Rohingya live under tight movement restrictions.

Similar:

[Hundreds of Rohingya return to Rakhine as Myanmar releases inmates](#) UCA News (Apr. 21)

[Could Virus See Rohingya ‘Floating Coffins’ Crisis Return to ASEAN?](#) VOA News (April 20)

Malaysia is using COVID-19 as an excuse to reject Rohingya Muslim refugees, human rights groups say, bringing flashbacks of 2015 when boat refugees died after escaping Myanmar in what the United Nations called “floating coffins.” The Malaysian military confirmed it had turned back at least one “suspicious boat” full of Rohingya, though Amnesty International said it had received information that there are a handful of other boats in limbo, possibly heading to Malaysia and Thailand. “Refusing to help the people on these boats would not be willfully blind, it would be consciously making their plights even worse,” Clare Algar, senior director for research, advocacy and policy at



Amnesty International, said. She added, “The battle against COVID-19 is no excuse for regional governments to let their seas become graveyards for desperate Rohingya people.”

[Kiosks set up in Bangladesh for COVI-19 tests](#) Arab News (April 20)

Bangladesh has begun setting up kiosks at designated points across the country to collect samples from suspected COVID-19 patients. This follows in the footsteps of South Korea, which had implemented a similar and highly successful initiative as part of its measures to combat COVID-19. “Nearly 200 health professionals and technicians collect samples from people who visit these booths and send them to the nearest testing facility,” Humayun Kabir, spokesman for JKG Healthcare, the nongovernmental health care service provider that launched the initiative said, adding that, once completed, all test results are shared with the respective patients “within 24 hours.”

[Thani Bin Abdullah Bin Thani Al Thani Fund makes largest single contribution to ‘Refugee Zakat Fund’](#) The Peninsula (April 20)

The Thani Bin Abdullah Bin Thani Al Thani Humanitarian Fund has made the largest-ever single contribution to the Refugee Zakat Fund in 2019, according to the 2020 Islamic Philanthropy Report. The UNHCR has announced the findings of its 2020 Islamic Philanthropy Report, which highlights the impact of the Refugee Zakat Fund on vulnerable refugees and internally displaced persons across the globe. The donation has provided much-needed cash assistance to fulfil immediate needs, such as rental subsidies, debt repayments, health and nutritional services, as well as the provision of food. In Bangladesh, shelter materials were provided, along with hygiene packages, household kits, and integrated primary and secondary health services through camp health facilities for Rohingya refugees.

Similar:

[Qatari humanitarian organization pledges \\$43mn to UNHCR Refugee Zakat Fund](#) MenaFM (Apr. 19)

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/>