

Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

May 4 - May 10, 2020



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Highlights:

High-level statements:

- The Bangladesh Foreign Minister has called for other countries to take in Rohingya, and has said that any Rohingya arriving in Bangladesh will now be sent to Bhasan Char island.
- The UNHCR, IOM, and UNODC have issued a joint statement on Protection at Sea in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea.
- Six top members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives have urged the Bangladesh government to lift the restrictions on internet use in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.

Access to territory:

- Two groups of Rohingya from boats floating off the coast of Bangladesh were sent to Bhasan Char island this week to be quarantined as a precaution against the coronavirus, according to the government. A first group of approximately 28 were sent to the island on May 2, and then another group of approximately 280 were sent to the island on May 8.
- There has been continued outcry from the UN, the international community, and NGOs about pushbacks and denial of access to territory for Rohingya stranded in boats in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. As the government has accepted Rohingya onto Bhasan Char Island, that outcry has shifted to speak out against confining Rohingya to that island.

Developments:

[Turkey to raise Rohingya issue at UNSC](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 9)

Turkey has assured Bangladesh that it will raise the Rohingya issue at the next meeting of the UN Security Council, as the Rohingya refugee crisis remains unresolved and is putting a significant burden on the host country. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu gave the assurance during a telephone conversation with Bangladesh counterpart Dr AK Abdul Momen. The Turkish Foreign Minister also assured Bangladesh of extending all required support to repatriate the Rohingyas who are currently living in Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh to their place of origin in Rakhine State.

Similar:

[Turkey to take Rohingya issue to UNSC](#) Prothom Alo (May 9)

[Turkey to take Rohingya issue to UNSC](#) United News Bangladesh (May 10)

[COVID-19 Challenges: ICRC steps up support beyond Rohingya camps](#) United News Bangladesh (May 9)

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has stepped up its support to Bangladesh going beyond Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar to help address the challenges amid coronavirus pandemic and the growing needs at the national level, says its Bangladesh chief. The ICRC is extending support at the national level with a "very strong focus" on medical facilities and food supply.

[Two Rohingya drug dealers killed in 'gunfight'](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 9)

Two suspected Rohingya drug dealers were killed in a reported gunfight with police in Teknaf of Cox's Bazar on May 9. The identities of the deceased are yet to be ascertained.

Similar:

[Two Rohingya yaba traders killed in Cox's Bazar gunfight: Police](#) The Daily Star (May 9)

[Call to save refugees stranded at sea](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 9)

Eighteen humanitarian agencies have urged the countries on the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea to conduct search and rescue operations to save the lives of refugees and asylum seekers stranded at sea. The organisations also called on the countries to allow the stranded people to disembark on their shores and provide necessary help. In a joint press statement, they urged the states to take urgent collective solutions to address the issue and better share responsibility for hosting refugees. The organisations involved are: Action Contre la Faim, Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, Asian Dignity Initiative, CARE, ChildFund International, COAST Trust, Danish Refugee Council, Humanity and Inclusion, ISDE Bangladesh, Medecins du Monde France, Medecins du Monde Switzerland, Mukti Cox's Bazar, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, PHALS, Plan International, Save the Children, and Solidarites International.

Similar:

[Humanitarian agencies: Save those stranded in the Bay of Bengal](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 8)

[Save stranded people in Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea: Rights bodies](#) Prothom Alo (May 8)

[Top US lawmakers write to life internet restrictions in Rohingya camps](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 8)

Top members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives have urged the Bangladesh government to lift the restrictions on internet use in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, underscoring the critical role of communications technology as a public health tool to combat the spread of Covid-19. In a recent letter to Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen, the US lawmakers emphasized that technologies like mobile phones and internet are necessary for sharing life-saving medical information, conducting contact tracing, and facilitating health and humanitarian services. The letter was signed by six senators and representatives. In reply, the foreign minister said the restrictions were in place for the safety and security of the Rohingyas as well as Bangladeshis.

[Military says ARSA preparing big attack in Rakhine](#) Myanmar Times (May 8)

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) is moving provisions near the Myanmar-Bangladesh border in what appears to be preparations for a big attack, a Myanmar military spokesperson has said. Major General Zaw Min Tun, a senior member of the Tatmadaw's (military's) True News agency, said security forces had seized food suspected to have been stashed by ARSA near Kha Maung Seik village in Maungdaw township in Rakhine State on May 6. Maj Gen Zaw Min Tun said ARSA might be planning another big attack to distract attention from the report that Myanmar will submit to the International Court of Justice this month.

Similar:

[Curious revival of Myanmar's rag-tag Rohingya rebels](#) Asia Times (May 5)

[Bangladesh quarantines hundreds of Rohingya boat people on Bhasan Char](#) BDNews24 (May 8)

The Bangladesh navy has rescued around 280 Rohingya Muslims from the Bay of Bengal, towing their stranded boat to Bhasan Char island, where they will be quarantined as a precaution against the coronavirus, coast guard and naval officials have said. Back in February, Bangladesh appeared to be backing off plans to settle Rohingya refugees on Bhasan Char, having come under fierce criticism from the United Nations and aid agencies. But the subsequent coronavirus scare appears to have persuaded Bangladesh authorities to at least use the facilities on the island for quarantining rescued Rohingya boat people. Last weekend, 29 Rohingya found on another vessel adrift at sea were also taken to the island, which now has electric lighting and cell phone towers.

Similar:

[Rohingya refugees arrive at 'de facto detention island' in Bangladesh](#) The Guardian (May 8)
[Around 280 Rohingyas quarantined on Bay of Bengal island: Official](#) United News of India (May 8)
[More than 250 Rohingya refugees land in Bangladesh after weeks at sea](#) The Globe and Mail (May 8)
[Bangladesh quarantines hundreds of Rohingya rescued from sea](#) AlJazeera (May 8)
[Bangladesh ferries more Rohingya refugees to remote island](#) The Sentinel (May 9)
[Bangladesh quarantines hundreds of Rohingya boat people on island: Officials](#) Reuters (May 8)
[Rohingya stranded on boat for weeks taken to Bangladesh island](#) Times of India (May 7)

[Bangladesh: All Rohingya Found at Sea Will Be Taken to Bhashan Char Island](#) Radio Free Asia (May 7)

After insisting for weeks that it would not help Rohingya refugees stranded at sea, Bangladesh authorities have relented and towed a boat packed with people to a flood-prone island, saying all refugees found at sea would be taken to the controversial site from now on. Authorities believe the wooden boat, which was carrying 279 men, women and children, was one of at least two cramped trawlers reportedly adrift at sea after not being allowed to land in Malaysia or Bangladesh. A naval boat spotted the fishing trawler adrift in Bangladesh's territorial waters, officials said.

['Drug trader' killed in Cox's Bazar 'gunfight'](#) United News Bangladesh (May 7)

A suspected Rohingya drug trader was killed in a reported gunfight with members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) at Palongkhali in Ukhiya upazila early May 7. The identity of the deceased could not be known immediately.

Similar:

[Rohingya 'drug peddler' killed in Ukhiya 'gunfight'](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 7)
[Rohingya drug trader killed in 'gunfight'](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 7)
[Rohingya man killed in gunfight: BGB](#) Prothom Alo (May 7)

[Let Other Countries Take Rohingya, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Says](#) Benar News (May 6)

Bangladesh will not accept any more Rohingya refugees, the foreign minister has said, despite pleadings from international agencies who expressed concerns about the lives of hundreds of refugees stranded on at least two trawlers reportedly adrift in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. The refugees on the wooden boats were aiming to reach Malaysia, but the Southeast Asian nation and neighboring countries had tightened borders to curtail the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. "We don't have any information that more boats are floating within Bangladesh territory. We don't even know that," Bangladeshi Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen said. "But we won't take any more Rohingyas. Let other countries take them." Momen said, reacting to a joint statement released hours earlier by three United Nations agencies. They warned that the refusal of countries in the region to let the boats land could bring about a repeat of a mass migration by sea that took place in the region five years ago.

[Rohingya camps: Steps successful so far in stopping coronavirus](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 6)

While the country has crossed a grim milestone of 10,000 coronavirus infections, there are so far no confirmed cases of the deadly virus in the densely-populated Rohingya camps that have been and still are considered one of the most vulnerable places to the ongoing pandemic. Undoubtedly, preventing the virus so far from entering the camps can be called a success given the congested and unhygienic conditions nearly a million residents live in. How has this been possible? The simple answers are: Authorities in charge of managing 34 Rohingya camps took precautions early, enforced stringent measures within the camps and made the Rohingyas aware of the consequences of the outbreak of the deadly virus that has claimed lives of some 200 people across the country.

[UNHCR opposes Rohingya transfers to Bhashan Char](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 5)

The UNHCR has voiced its opposition to the transfers of a group of Rohingyas rescued by Bangladesh Coast Guard to Bhashan Char Island. The UN refugee agency is of the opinion that preparations are in place for the safe quarantine of



the Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar and questioned the safety and sustainability of life on the island developed by the government for the relocation of a portion of the persecuted people to decongest the camps in the coastal district.

[Bangladesh: Rohingya Refugees in Risky Covid-19 Quarantine](#) Human Rights Watch (May 5)

Bangladesh authorities have quarantined 29 Rohingya refugees without adequate access to aid on an unstable silt island in the Bay of Bengal. The authorities said that they are holding the refugees, who had been adrift at sea for over two months, on Bhasan Char to prevent a Covid-19 outbreak in the camps. "Bangladesh faces the tremendous challenge of assisting Rohingya boat people while preventing the spread of Covid-19, but sending them to a dangerously flood-prone island without adequate health care is hardly the solution," said Brad Adams, Human Rights Watch Asia director. "Any quarantines need to ensure aid agency access and safety from storms, and a prompt return to their families on the mainland." Bangladesh should not quarantine refugees at Bhasan Char until they coordinate with the UN and other agencies to ensure that proper medical and food assistance are provided. Once the quarantine period is over, they should immediately be taken back to reunite with their families in the Cox's Bazar camps.

Similar:

[Rohingya refugees not safe in Coronavirus quarantine at Bhasan Char: Human Rights Watch](#) United News of India (May 8)

[Being cyclone-ready in the time of Covid-19](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 5)

[op-ed] The entire country, indeed the whole world, is busy dealing with the various ramifications of the Covid-19, but some communities are more vulnerable than others. The Rohingya refugees sheltered in Bangladesh have always been particularly vulnerable to an outbreak, due to a lack of adequate hygiene, and close, cramped living conditions. On top of that, there are looming worries of what a cyclone might do. Bangladesh has always been a cyclone-prone country, but our cyclone and monsoon preparedness have never been adequate. In the time of a pandemic, there is a danger that one disaster will be neglected by dealing with another. We should not, however, let that happen.

[Joint Statement by UNHCR, IOM and UNODC on Protection at Sea in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea](#) IOM (May 5)

The UNHCR, IOM, and UNODC have issued a joint statement on Protection at Sea in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. In the statement, they say that: Five years on from the 2015 'boat crisis' in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, in which thousands of refugees and migrants in distress at sea were denied life-saving care and support, we are alarmed that a similar tragedy may be unfolding once more. We are deeply concerned by reports that boats full of vulnerable women, men and children are again adrift in the same waters, unable to come ashore, and without access to urgently needed food, water, and medical assistance. We call on States in the region to uphold the commitments of the 2016 Bali Declaration as well as ASEAN pledges to protect the most vulnerable and to leave no one behind. Not doing so may jeopardize thousands of lives, including the hundreds of Rohingya currently at sea.

Similar:

[U.N. Calls for Countries to Accept Rohingya Refugees as They Flee Burma by Boat](#) Democracy Now (May 4)
[18 aid agencies call on governments in the region to allow refugees stranded in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea to disembark](#) ReliefWeb (May 7)

[Life of the first Rohingya batch in Bhashan Char](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 5)

Bhashan Char has received its first batch of 28 Rohingya residents. On May 2, the group was rescued from two boats off the coast of Teknaf in Cox's Bazar while trying to enter Bangladesh after being at the sea for about two weeks. Upon rescue, all 28 Rohingyas and a local broker were sent directly to Bhashan Char. A top district administration official claimed that the first batch was settling in well on the island. The group includes a total of 15 women, five children, nine men from the Rohingya community and the broker. "Adequate supply of food for the next six months has been ensured there, in addition to other facilities," Noakhali Deputy Commissioner Tonmoy Das said. A team of doctors from Bangladesh Navy have also visited to take note of any healthcare issues the residents might have. "We

have developed working facilities for them as well as entertainment ones so that they do not feel depressed. There is also a playground for the children there,” he added.

[German Minister Wants More EU Aid For Poorer Nations](#) Republic World (May 5)

Germany has said that the European Union should do "much more than it has done so far" in providing coronavirus relief aid for countries outside its borders. German Minister Mueller was speaking at the presentation of "BMZ 2030," a structural reform of Germany's development policy, where he announced the government has already reorganised one billion euros to help other countries fight the coronavirus pandemic. According to the Development Ministry, the BMZ 2030 strategy calls on Germany's international partners to provide measurable evidence for progress made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Nations receiving aid must demonstrate, for example, that human rights of citizens are observed and efforts are being made to fight corruption. In light of the new criteria, Germany is ending support for 25 nations worldwide, either because a particular country no longer needs aid or because it is resisting reform. Mueller specifically cited Myanmar and its treatment of the Rohingya people. Mueller said that despite calling on the government of Myanmar to allow the Rohingyas to return safely, the country has refused to comply.

[COVID-19 Is No Excuse to Abandon Basic Principles Protection Refugees and Asylum Seekers](#) The Diplomat (May 4)

Undoubtedly, public health serves as a valid cause to invoke extraordinary national security measures, nonetheless in delicate times such as these, the international community should hold nations accountable in order to avoid closing ports of entry. As the western world has been heavily impacted by the ripple effects caused by COVID-19, nations must work closely to uplift the importance of respecting international law, specifically when it comes to implementing new national norms. A shift in stance on refugee policy has been emerging over the past couple of months. Concerns remain as to whether countries will deploy the “public health” rationale for a prolonged period, resulting in temporary policies becoming indefinite ones. The repercussions of implementing a closed port policy could let “seas become graveyards” as noted by Amnesty International’s Clare Algar.

[After weeks at sea, Rohingya refugees sent to flood-prone island in Bangladesh](#) South China Morning Post (May 4)

About 28 Rohingya refugees stranded at sea for weeks have been relocated to a controversial flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh officials have said. The Rohingya were taken to the island late on May 2 instead of to the camps as authorities were afraid they might be infected with the coronavirus, Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen said. “Most likely they will stay there until they return to Myanmar,” he said. They are the first group of Rohingya to be sent to the island, local government administrator Tanmoy Das said, adding they were being looked after by navy personnel who had built the facilities.

Similar:

[Dozens of refugees stranded at sea to be quarantined on controversial island](#) CNN (May 4)

[Rohingya refugees relocated to controversial Bangladesh island after weeks at sea](#) Channel News Asia (May 4)

[More Than Two-Dozen Rohingya Refugees Sent to Flood-Prone Island Off Coast of Bangladesh](#) VOA News (May 4)

[Bangladesh Sends 28 Rohingya Refugees To Cyclone-Prone Island Over COVID-19 Fears](#) NPR (May 4)

[Rohingya refugees sent to ‘flood-prone’ island off Bangladesh](#) Al Jazeera (May 6)

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/>