

# Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

May 11 - May 17, 2020



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK

## Highlights:

### High-level statements:

- 84 International organizations wrote a letter to the government of Malaysia this week, asking Malaysia to end a campaign of 'hate speech and violent threats' against the Rohingya.
- UN Secretary General Guterres appealed to the Government of Bangladesh to return the Rohingya from Bhashan Char to the camps in Cox's Bazar once their quarantine period is complete.
- The Canadian Foreign Minister said that the repatriation of the Rohingya is a collective responsibility.
- The UNHCR, UNDP and Myanmar signed a 3<sup>rd</sup> year extension of the MoU on Rohingya repatriation.

### Access to territory:

- Amnesty International reported this week that there are approximately 1,000 Rohingya on boats floating off the coast of Indonesia.

### Camp Conditions:

- This week saw multiple reports of COVID-19 infections inside the camps. As of the latest reporting, between 4 and 5 Rohingya have tested positive, and approximately 5,000 people in the camps are under lockdown.
- UNICEF is building a 210-bed COVID-19 isolation and treatment center for the Rohingya in Cox's Bazar.
- There was a big fire in the camps this week, which destroyed over 400 houses and shops, and injuring up to 10 people.

## Developments:

### [Covid-19: Another Rohingya refugee tests positive](#) The Daily Star (May 17)

Twenty-four people, including a Rohingya refugee, tested positive for Covid-19 on May 17 in Cox's Bazar. The latest positive case of a Rohingya refugee contracting the virus is increasingly worrying for the 900,000 Rohingya refugees living in 34 camps in Teknaf and Ukhia upazilas of Cox's Bazar. All the 1,275 houses in the camp which were locked down yesterday have been marked with red flags to make sure people do not come near the homes. The residents are being provided with all their necessities. A disinfection tunnel has also been set-up at the entry to Cox's Bazar district.

*Similar:*

[One more Rohingya tests COVID-19 positive](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 17)

[At least 3 more Rohingyas infected](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 17)

### [UN's Guterres asks Bangladesh to move Rohingya to refugee camps](#) AlJazeera (May 17)

Hundreds of Rohingya rescued by Bangladesh and sent to a flood-prone island after being stranded at sea for weeks should be moved to existing refugee camps, the UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres has said. Guterres made the appeal to Bangladesh's foreign minister by letter. Guterres said the refugees should be moved to the camps after their

time in quarantine is completed. Momen said he had yet to receive the letter but said those concerned about Bhashan Char - where facilities for 100,000 people were built last year - should host the Rohingya in their own countries. "We don't want any more Rohingya," Momen said. "We don't have any other place to keep them. If they (other countries) don't like Bhashan Char, let them take them back to their countries. (Or) else, let them return to Myanmar."

*Similar:*

[Move Rohingya on Bangladesh island to refugee camps: UN chief Arab News \(May 17\)](#)

**[‘Rohingya drug trader’ killed in Cox’s Bazar ‘gunfight’](#)** United News Bangladesh (May 17)

A suspected Rohingya drug trader was killed in a reported gunfight with members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) at Nayapara Beribadh in Teknaf upazila. A team of BGB went to Nayapara after being tipped off about a drug smuggling bid. After a while, some people were seen entering the area with sacks after crossing the Naf River. When BGB stopped them, the criminals opened fire, triggering a skirmish.

*Similar:*

[Rohingya killed in ‘gunfight’ New Age Bangladesh \(May 17\)](#)

[Suspected Rohingya drug dealer killed in Teknaf ‘gunfight’ Dhaka Tribune \(May 17\)](#)

[Bangladesh: Suspected Rohingya drug peddler killed during gunfight IndiaBlooms \(May 17\)](#)

[Rohingya youth killed in BGB ‘gunfight’ Prothom Alo \(May 17\)](#)

**[Indonesia, Australia explore solution to Rohingya refugee crisis under Bali Process](#)** The Jakarta Post (May 17)

Amid pressure from humanitarian organizations, Indonesia and Australia have moved to follow-up talks under the Bali Process framework to prepare for the possibility of another refugee crisis in the Andaman Sea, where hundreds of asylum seekers died in 2015. In the past few weeks, hundreds of Rohingya refugees made perilous journeys across the Bay of Bengal seeking refuge in nearby countries, only to be denied entry due to the coronavirus. Malaysian and Thai authorities rejected 382 refugees traveling by boats in mid-April, citing coronavirus concerns. The refugees were later rescued by Bangladesh. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi and her Australian counterpart Marise Payne spoke on the phone about the Rohingya crisis and refugees on May 15. The Bali Process, cochaired by Indonesia and Australia, was established in 2002 to facilitate discussion and information sharing about refugees, human trafficking and related transnational issues. Dozens of countries – including Bangladesh, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand – and numerous international agencies are members.

*Similar:*

[Australia resisting talks to save Rohingya refugees stranded at sea Brisbane Times \(May 14\)](#)

**[ISCG: Coronavirus test, treatment equally available to Rohingyas, locals](#)** Dhaka Tribune (May 16)

The government, UN agencies, and NGOs have worked "intensively" to increase coronavirus testing, expand isolation and treatment capacities for all people in Cox’s Bazar, which are available for Bangladeshis and Rohingyas on an equal basis, the Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) has said. Testing capacity for Covid-19 was established in Cox’s Bazar at the beginning of April and as of May 15, 145 Rohingyas had been tested.

*Similar:*

[COVID-19 test, treatment equally available to Rohingyas, locals: ISCG Prothom Alo \(May 15\)](#)

[Coronavirus test, treatment equally available to Rohingyas, locals: ISCG United News Bangladesh \(May 16\)](#)

**[Coronavirus: 5,000 Rohingya under lockdown after 2 more test positive](#)** United News Bangladesh (May 16)

Two more Rohingyas were diagnosed with coronavirus at Kutupalong Rohingya camp in Cox’s Bazar on May 15, forcing the local administration to put some 5,000 Rohingyas at the camp under complete lockdown. With the two new cases,



three Rohingyas have so far found infected in the overcrowded refugee camp over the last two days, said Dr Abu Toha MRH Bhuiyan, health coordinator of the Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.

*Similar:*

[COVID-19: 5000 Rohingyas under lockdown as 3 test positive in camp](#) Prothom Alo (May 16)

[5,000 Rohingyas under lockdown after Covid-19 arrives in the camps](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 16)

[3 more Rohingyas test positive for Covid-19 in Cox's Bazar](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 15)

[3 more Rohingyas test positive for COVID-19](#) Prothom Alo (May 15)

[3 more infected with Covid-19 at Rohingya camp](#) The Daily Star (May 15)

[Bangladesh government puts 5,000 Rohingya under lockdown after 4 refugees test positive for Covid-19](#) India Today (May 16)

**[At least 1000 Rohingya stranded at sea as Southeast Asia seals borders: Amnesty](#)** Prothom Alo (May 16)

At least 1,000 Rohingya are stranded at sea as Southeast Asian nations tighten their borders to keep out the new coronavirus, Amnesty International has said, urging action to ensure they were not buried in an "invisible graveyard" at sea. Rights groups believe at least two boats carrying Rohingya are off the coast of the Indonesian province of Aceh, but officials said they had no clear information. Saad Hammadi, from the South Asia Regional Office of Amnesty International, said the refugees could have been sailing for several weeks or even months without food or water, citing information from humanitarian agencies and local news reports. In a virtual news conference, he urged Indonesia and Australia, who chair an anti-people smuggling and trafficking forum known as the Bali Process, to ensure the refugees are allowed to land safely "so that we don't see the sea become an invisible graveyard."

*Similar:*

[Amnesty: 1,000 Rohingyas stranded at sea as Southeast Asia seals borders](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 15)

[At least 1,000 Rohingya stuck at sea, says Amnesty International](#) The Tribune (May 16)

[At Least 1,000 Rohingya Stuck At Sea, Says Amnesty International](#) The Kashmir Observer (May 16)

**[Fears Rohingya refugees face disaster after Covid-19 reaches Cox's Bazar](#)** The Guardian (May 15)

Aid groups have warned of a looming humanitarian disaster after coronavirus was detected for the first time in the sprawling camps that host about one million Rohingya refugees. The camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, which are more densely populated than some of the world's busiest cities, have been under lockdown since 14 March in an attempt to stop the virus from spreading. As the number of coronavirus infections has continued to rise in Bangladesh, health experts and Rohingya community leaders have become increasingly concerned about possible outbreak among refugees. Such fears were confirmed when the UN announced that an ethnic Rohingya refugee and another person have now tested positive for Covid-19. Humanitarian groups warn the virus could race through the camps, where families live with up to 10 people in a room in sweltering heat, with limited access to clean water. Households are forced to queue to access food at communal distribution points, making social distancing impossible. On top of overcrowding, many refugees, who fled persecution in Myanmar, have underlying health conditions or have not received standard immunisations, according to health experts.

*Similar:*

[Vulnerable And Exposed In The World's Largest Refugee Camp](#) The Organization for World Peace (May 17)

**[UNICEF preparing 210-bed facility for Rohingyas](#)** Prothom Alo (May 15)

UNICEF said it is preparing a 210-bed Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Isolation and Treatment Centre after the first coronavirus cases were confirmed among the Rohingya population in Cox's Bazar. The first 90 beds will be ready by 22 May and the rest by 30 May.

*Similar:*

[Coronavirus: 210-bed facility underway for Rohingyas](#) United News Bangladesh (May 15)

[Containing the spread in Rohingya camps will be crucial](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 16) [op-ed]

[Rohingya repatriation a collective responsibility: Canadian FM](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 15)

Repatriation of Rohingya refugees to their home in Myanmar from Bangladesh is a collective responsibility, Canadian foreign minister Francois-Philippe Champagne has said during a telephone conversation with Bangladesh foreign minister AK Abdul Momen. The Canadian minister said that his country had been engaged with countries in the region for expediting the process of repatriation, according to the foreign ministry.

[Aid Agencies Ramp Up Efforts to Tackle Coronavirus in Rohingya Refugee Camps](#) VOA News (May 15)

U.N. aid agencies are intensifying COVID-19 operations to prevent the spread of the deadly disease in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. The move follows the confirmation of the first case of the coronavirus in the camps, as well as a second infection in the local Bangladeshi host community. The UNHCR and partners are carrying out a range of preparedness and prevention measures to curb the spread of the disease. For example, aid workers have been trained to teach refugees about COVID-19, how they can protect themselves and how to seek health care if they are ill. Radio spots, videos, posters and messages are being beamed through the camps explaining how the virus spreads. The UNHCR says efforts are underway to clean and disinfect communal areas and neighborhoods throughout the camps. The agency is also setting up isolation and treatment centers.

*Similar:*

[Public health response in Rohingya camps on alert](#) United News Bangladesh (May 15)

[Race is on to prevent coronavirus nightmare](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 15)

[Aid workers race to stop coronavirus spreading in Rohingya refugee camps](#) The Financial Express (May 16)

[Myanmar violence: EU, Britain condemn, China against UN move](#) Prothom Alo (May 14)

UN Security Council European member states and Britain have denounced violence in Myanmar and expressed concern over the coronavirus pandemic in the country, in a document China refused to endorse, diplomatic sources said. Britain, which initiated the session, said it was concerned about "the heavy toll" an escalation of violence between the Myanmar military and the insurgent Arakan Army was "taking on civilians at the time of a global COVID-19 crisis." The country's northwest has been embroiled in an increasingly brutal civil war between the military and Arakan Army rebels demanding more autonomy for the region's ethnic Rakhine Buddhists.

[TIKA Supports Rohingya Muslims in the Fight against COVID19](#) ReliefWeb (May 14)

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) has distributed 5,000 hygiene parcels to Rohingya refugees who combat COVID-19 in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

[COVID-19: First 2 positive cases detected in Rohingya camps](#) United News Bangladesh (May 14)

The first two positive cases of Covid-19 were identified in the Rohingya camps in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar on May 14. UNHCR confirmed it, quoting the government. One patient is from the refugee population and the other one from the surrounding host population. Both have presented to health facilities run by humanitarian partners in Ukhiya, where samples were taken that were subsequently tested in the IEDCR Field Laboratory in Cox's Bazar. Following the laboratory confirmation, Rapid Investigation Teams have been activated to investigate both cases, initiate isolation and treatment of patients as well as contact tracing, quarantine and testing of contacts as per WHO guidelines. Established procedures are in place to respond to suspected and confirmed cases of CoVID-19 in the host as well as refugee population of Cox's Bazar, said a UNHCR official.

*Similar:*

[Bangladesh reports coronavirus cases in Rohingya camp](#) Prothom Alo (May 14)

[First coronavirus case detected in Bangladesh Rohingya camp](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 14)

[Rohingya camps report first Covid-19 case Dhaka Tribune \(May 14\)](#)

[Bangladesh says coronavirus detected in Rohingya refugee camp: official Reuters \(May 14\)](#)

[First coronavirus case found in Bangladesh Rohingya refugee camps AlJazeera \(May 14\)](#)

[COVID Emerges in Rohingya Refugee Camp in Bangladesh VOA News \(May 15\)](#)

[First coronavirus case at Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh The Guardian \(May 14\)](#)

[Bangladesh: Coronavirus reaches largest refugee camp in the world Deutsche Welle \(May 15\)](#)

[The coronavirus reaches the Rohingya refugee camps The Economist \(May 17\)](#)

[B”desh detects 1<sup>st</sup> COVID-19 case among Rohingya refugees Outlook India \(May 15\)](#)

### [Two Rohingya Children Die in Mine Blasts as UN Extends Arrangement with Myanmar](#) Radio Free Asia (May 13)

A mine blast in western Myanmar’s Rakhine state killed two Rohingya children and injured another child as they picked mangoes in a deserted village, with the government military and the rebel Arakan Army blaming each other for the explosion, locals said. The deadly blast highlighted the peril and instability in Rakhine as two United Nations agencies and Myanmar extended an agreement to work together for the return of more than 740,000 Rohingya expelled in what U.N. reports called an ethnic cleaning campaign in 2017. According to an RFA tally, 47 civilians have died and 88 have been injured since April amid the armed conflict between Myanmar and Arakan forces.

*Similar:*

[Mine Blasts Kill 2 Rohingya Girls in Rakhine as UN Extends Arrangement with Myanmar BenarNews \(May 13\)](#)

### [UNSC to discuss violence, coronavirus in Myanmar](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 13)

The UN Security Council will hold a videoconference to discuss the escalation of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state and the effect of the coronavirus pandemic in the country, diplomatic sources have said. The closed-door meeting, planned for May 14, was requested by the UK. The UN envoy for Myanmar, Switzerland’s Christine Schraner Burgener, is scheduled to give comments.

*Similar:*

[UN Security Council to discuss violence, virus in Myanmar Prothom Alo \(May 12\)](#)

[UN Security Council to discuss violence, coronavirus in Myanmar Pakistan Today \(May 12\)](#)

### [Concerns grow among Rohingya in Malaysia as online threats intensify](#) Arab News (May 13)

Rohingya refugees in Malaysia have said that they are “living in fear,” following a slew of online hate speech and xenophobia, prompting several local and international rights groups to urge the Malaysian government to take action. The issue first arose in early April, when a video of that allegedly showed a Rohingya community leader demanding citizenship rights from the Malaysian government surfaced online. Soon after the clip was posted, online petitions and posts using dehumanizing and offensive language directed at Rohingya refugees appeared, with several community leaders and local NGO leaders targeted in the witch-hunt. The growing threats of violence and increasing amount of hate speech online prompted 84 local and international non-profit organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Fortify Rights, to pen a joint letter to Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, urging him to take action.

### [Amid COVID-19 Bangladesh turns its back on Rohingya](#) Atlantic Council (May 13)

[op-ed] As COVID-19 dominates global policy discourse, the largest refugee camp in the world languishes in silence. In early April, the government of Bangladesh cut off Cox’s Bazar from the rest of the country, putting 1 million Rohingya under twenty-four-hour lockdown. The physical segregation followed a digital one: despite the country’s pledge to provide digital services to rural areas through Digital Bangladesh, the camps have been without internet for almost seven months. Confronted with the need for increased coordination between aid agencies and government entities, Bangladesh has instead chosen to alienate the Rohingya community even further. On April 9, citing coronavirus concerns, a government directive mandated reduction of humanitarian efforts in Teknaf, the sub-district where Cox’s Bazar is located, by 80 percent. Almost immediately aid workers reported being harassed by law police at camp

checkpoints. The policy's impact has been instantaneous: food is running out, water is running low, and essential programming to prevent gender-based violence in the camps has ground to a halt. For Cox's Bazar, the pandemic could not have come at a worse time. If previous years are any indication, the impending monsoons will bring outbreaks of cholera, diphtheria, and measles. Landslides and flooding will destroy huts and cut off refugees from lifesaving supplies. The future facing the Rohingya is grim: barring urgent action in the coming months, if COVID-19 doesn't kill thousands, other preventable causes will.

#### [Rohingya camp fire destroys over 400 shops, houses](#) Prothom Alo (May 12)

A fire gutted 362 makeshift houses and 60 shops at Kutupalong Lambashia Rohingya camp in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar early May 12. Md. Nikar Uz Zaman Chowdhury, Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Ukhiya upazila, said the fire broke out at the camp around 5:00am and spread quickly. A firefighting unit rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze after one hour of hectic effort with the help of local people. However, it is still not clear what caused the fire. Six Rohingya men were injured while extinguishing fire.

#### *Similar:*

- [Devastating fire at Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 12)
- [Fire at Rohingya camp guts shops, houses](#) United News Bangladesh (May 12)
- [Fire destroys hundreds of Rohingya shanties in Bangladesh camp](#) The Jakarta Post (May 13)
- [Massive Fire Devastates Overcrowded Rohingya Refugee Camp](#) VOA News (May 13)
- [Fire Guts 400 Shanties, Shops in Bangladesh Rohingya Camp](#) NYTimes (May 12)
- [Bangladesh: Fire damages 673 shanties in Rohingya camp](#) Anadolu Agency (May 12)
- [10 hurt as fire destroys hundreds of Rohingya shanties in Bangladesh camp](#) Khmer Times (May 14)

#### [Deal for Rohingya Repatriation: UN signs up for 3<sup>rd</sup> year extension](#) The Daily Star (May 12)

The UN has signed for the third year extension of a tripartite deal with Myanmar on creating conditions conducive to Rohingyas' return to Rakhine. The signing of the deal comes at a time when the ongoing armed conflict in Rakhine and Chin states has deepened the operational challenges faced by aid agencies. Representatives of the UN Development Programme, the UN Refugee Agency and Myanmar's ministry of labour, immigration and population signed the Memorandum of Understanding extension documents in Naypyidaw for a year.

#### *Similar:*

- [Myanmar, UNHCR, UNDP extend MoU on Rohingya repatriation](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 11)
- [Rohingya Repatriation: UNDP, UNHCR, Myanmar extend MoU](#) United News Bangladesh (May 11)
- [UNHCR, UNDP extend deal with Myanmar over return of Rohingyas](#) The Daily Star (May 11)

#### [OPINION: The crippling cost of COVID-19 on refugees](#) Thomson Reuters Foundation (May 12)

[op-ed] In crowded camps from Syria to Bangladesh to Colombia, evidence is emerging of displaced people being severely impacted by the pandemic before the lethal force of the virus hits them. Over 70 million people globally fleeing conflict and persecution are not only at greater risk of contracting the disease, but many will be disproportionately harmed by policy decisions and their consequences long after the rest of us may have returned to a 'new normal'. We recognise that public health restrictions are vital to curb the spread of the coronavirus. But these measures must be non-discriminatory and temporary – not misused or exploited for political gain.

#### [Int'l organisations urge Malaysia to stop anti-Rohingya campaign](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 11)

The government of Malaysia should immediately address 'hate speech and violent threats' against Rohingya refugees, Fortify Rights and 83 other organisations have said. The organisations made the call in an open letter to Malaysian prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin. In April 2020, hateful messages targeting the Rohingya community in Malaysia proliferated social media platforms, causing widespread fear of physical violence and discrimination among Rohingya refugees. In the open letter, Fortify Rights, Article 19, Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists, and others called upon the Malaysian government to 'consistently, unequivocally and publicly condemn all forms of

hate directed at the Rohingya' and prevent 'incendiary' social media from triggering 'discriminatory acts or physical attacks' against Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, among other recommendations, according to a media release issued from Bangkok. In April, users of social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, began posting hateful messages that included discriminatory and dehumanising language and images as well as calls for Rohingya in Malaysia to be forcibly returned to Myanmar.

*Similar:*

[84 organisations call on Malaysia to end anti-Rohingya campaign](#) Prothom Alo (May 11)

[Stop violent threats against Rohingyas: Rights bodies to Malaysia](#) United News Bangladesh (May 11)

[Malaysia urged to end violent threats, anti-Rohingya campaign](#) United News Bangladesh (May 11)

[Joint Letter Re: End Violent Threats and Anti-Rohingya Campaign](#) Human Rights Watch (May 11)

*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](mailto:advocacy@rsn.ngo). For more information about RSN and our work, please visit <https://refugeesolidaritynetwork.org/>*