

Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

May 18 - May 24, 2020



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY
NETWORK

Highlights:

Accountability:

- Myanmar was supposed to submit a report to the ICJ on the measures it is taking to comply with the courts preliminary order on May 23. The ICJ reported that they did so on May 22. It is unclear if the report will be publicly-available.

Cyclone Amphan:

- This week a cyclone Amphan hit India and Bangladesh, damaging parts of the country and displacing millions, but both Bhashan Char and Cox's Bazar suffered minimal impact.
- Because of the cyclone, the approximately 300 Rohingya on Bhashan Char were all transferred to one cyclone shelter on the island.
- Various actors have raised concerns regarding the impact of the cyclone hitting areas already struggling to fight COVID-19 outbreaks.

Camp Conditions:

- As of May 22, twenty-one Rohingyas have tested positive for COVID-19.
- The government, in collaboration with the UNHCR, has formally inaugurated first two Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Isolation and Treatment Centres of Covid-19 in Cox's Bazar for Rohingyas and host Bangladeshi communities.

In the region:

- There are reports from Malaysia of xenophobic targeting of Rohingya and other migrants, as they are being blamed for COVID-19 transmission. This targeting has resulted in multiple raids and mass detention.

Developments:

[Rohingyas targeted in Malaysia as virus stokes xenophobia](#) Prothom Alo (May 24)

Malaysia has long been seen as a haven of relative freedom and prosperity by Rohingya and it is now home to more than 100,000 of them despite the fact that it brands them illegal immigrants rather than refugees. But, as in some other parts of the world, the novel coronavirus outbreak has turned sentiment against foreigners, who have been accused of spreading disease, burdening the state and taking jobs as the economy plummets. As the mood turned against migrants, the government carried out raids this month in which at least 2,000 foreigners were arrested, some led away in handcuffs by agents in protective gear.

Similar:

[Rohingyas targeted in Malaysia as coronavirus stokes xenophobia](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 23)

[Myanmar ignored UN court's order to protect Rohingya, say refugees](#) The Star (May 23)

Myanmar was due to submit a report to the United Nations' top court on May 23 detailing what it has done to protect the minority Rohingya from genocide. Rohingya groups say Myanmar has ignored the ICJ's orders and the military is still committing atrocities in Rakhine state, where it is fighting ethnic Rakhine rebels. "Myanmar has not taken any serious action to protect the Rohingya," said Muhammed Nowkhim, a Rohingya activist based in Bangladesh. Nowkhim said refugee groups in Bangladesh have documented dozens of cases of Rohingya being killed or injured in Rakhine since the ICJ order, often by military shelling. It is unclear if the court will make Myanmar's report public.

[Bhasan Char unaffected by Amphan; FM questions aid agencies' opposition](#) United News Bangladesh (May 22)

Though the cyclone Amphan badly affected coastal districts of Bangladesh, Bhasan Char Island remains unaffected amid concerns raised by the international community, said Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen. "Nobody has a headache of over 16 crore people of Bangladesh but only concerned about 306 Rohingyas who were shifted to Bhasan Char and those who are in the camps," Dr Momen said, apparently expressing displeasure regarding some over-concerned diplomats. In a stinging rebuke, Foreign Minister Momen said the opposition of foreign aid agencies to the government's scheme of relocating the Rohingya refugee population to Bhasan Char is not in the interests of the distressed population. "Aid agencies are very unhappy. They cited communication problem," the Foreign Minister said, adding these agencies could in that case spend the funds to introduce the better communication and transport services they require, as they have no fund crisis.

Similar:

[Amphan impact: All Rohingya refugees at Bangladesh's Bhasan Char island safe, assures Minister](#) New Indian Express (May 22)

[Take in Rohingya yourselves: FM lashes out at countries asking Bangladesh to rescue Myanmar refugees](#) BDNews24 (May 22)

The Foreign Minister has said if European and American governments are so worried about the wellbeing of these refugees, they are welcome to accept them into their countries. Dhaka has been critical of growing calls by countries that Bangladesh shelter more Rohingya rather than piling the pressure on Myanmar to repatriate the Muslim outcasts. Bangladesh has called on other countries to rescue the Rohingya in boats who are stranded at sea. "The problems occur in the Andaman Sea and the Indian Ocean. And whenever any tricky situation emerges, everyone looks to Bangladesh, as if the rest should be in Bangladesh because we have sheltered 1.1 million of them. No matter where in the world there is an issue with the Rohingya people, we have to solve it," Foreign Minister Momen complained. "We said we cannot do it; we have no more space left. And the others also have a responsibility (towards the Rohingya). It is not our problem alone, it's a global issue."

Similar:

[Momen blasts aid agencies for opposition to Rohingya relocation](#) Prothom Alo (May 22)

[Momen blasts aid agencies for opposing Rohingya relocation plan](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 22)

[B'desh FM slams nations for asking to rescue Rohingya refugees](#) Outlook India (May 23)

[EU allocates 334m Euros for Bangladesh](#) The Daily Star (May 22)

On top of the ongoing cooperation programme in Bangladesh, the European Union has allocated 334 million Euros and promised mobilising more funds in near future to mitigate the economic and social impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Of the new allocated amount, 64.8 million Euro (16.5 million Euro from the EU plus 48.3 million from Germany) will be used to scale up interventions through the UN and NGO partners for vulnerable Bangladeshi host communities and Rohingya in Cox's Bazar.

[New funds to help Rohingya, Syrian and Venezuelan refugees](#) Development and Peace (May 22)

Development and Peace — Caritas Canada will receive \$3.9 million from the Government of Canada's response to annual humanitarian appeals. Of the new money, \$1 million will go to a one-year Caritas Bangladesh project for

Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar. The community-based project will provide culturally sensitive training and requisite materials to enable participants to conceive and build stronger, safer, more gender-sensitive shelters; and cleaner, healthier camp surroundings. Besides improving their living conditions and making their communities more resilient to natural disasters, the project will help over 8,200 refugees reclaim a sense of dignity, agency and self-reliance.

[ASEAN criticized for inaction in Rohingya crisis](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 22)

New York-based Global Justice Centre organised the video conference with participation of former UN special Rapporteur on Myanmar Yanghee Lee, where international rights experts criticised the ASEAN for its failure to take action for resolving the crisis created by the forced displacement of the minority Rohingya people in Myanmar. 'ASEAN has been notably disappointing on taking action on the Rohingya crisis,' Laetitia Van Den Assum, a member of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine led by former UN secretary general Kofi Annan, said in the web-based discussion. Global Justice Centre president Akila Radhakrishnan moderated the discussion on this week's deadline for Myanmar to report on its compliance with the order of International Court of Justice to prevent genocide against Rohingya people.

[CGP report: Myanmar response likely insufficient to meet ICJ requirements](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 22)

The Center for Global Policy (CGP) recently published an analysis of the expected Myanmar response on May 23 to an International Court of Justice (ICJ) order. The order pertains to provisional measures regarding treatment of the Rohingya. The report titled "No Place for Optimism: Anticipating Myanmar's First Report to the International Court of Justice" states that Myanmar will respond within the designated timeframe, and those responses will attempt to build a narrative of "war crimes" that differs from the accusation of "genocide." It also presents information on what Myanmar has done since the ruling, data related to ongoing atrocities, and a discussion on why Myanmar's response is likely to be insufficient in meeting the requirements of the ICJ.

[8 Rohingyas among 36 fresh COVID-19 patients in Cox's Bazar](#) Prothom Alo (May 22)

A total of 36 people, including eight Rohingyas, were diagnosed with coronavirus in Cox's Bazar on Friday, reports UNB. With the latest ones, the number of COVID-19 patients in the district reached 304. A total of 21 Rohingyas have so far been infected with the virus, he said, adding that they are being treated at isolation centres.

Similar:

[8 Rohingyas among 36 new Covid-19 patients in Cox's Bazar](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 23)

[Foreign minister for ensuring transparency in dev partners' aid activities](#) Prothom Alo (May 21)

The foreign minister held a meeting through videoconferencing with the ambassadors of Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the European Union delegation in Dhaka on May 20. On the issue of the concern of COVID-19 being spread in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, Momen assured the ambassadors that the government is taking all the necessary steps to ensure that the pandemic is contained, and there is minimal spread of COVID-19 in the Rohingya camps. On the issue of cell phone network in the Rohingya camps, the minister explained that the government has to downgrade 4G services in the camp area for security reasons to stop drug trafficking, stop trafficking of women and children, provoking people to create lawlessness and stop blue films. The Rohingya, however, have 2G services which is enough for day-to-day communications. Besides, for 4G facility, Rohingyas cannot afford to buy cell phone sets as these are 5-10 times more expensive vis-a-vis 2G cell phone sets. He assured that the government would always protect the Rohingyas who have taken shelter in Bangladesh. Momen stressed that providing shelter to Rohingyas was not the responsibility of Bangladesh alone. He appealed to the ambassadors to exert more pressure on Myanmar for their safe repatriation. The ambassadors reiterated their appreciation for the humanitarian gesture by Bangladesh for the cause of the Rohingyas.

[3 more Rohingya refugees test Covid-19 positive in Cox's Bazar](#) The Daily Star (May 21)

Three more Rohingya refugees tested positive for Covid-19 in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar. With them, in total 13 Rohingyas have been found infected with coronavirus, said Dr Abu Toha MR Bhuiyan, chief health coordinator at the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner's (RRRC) office in Cox's Bazar. All of them are being treated at isolation centres in the camp while their contacts were traced and placed in quarantine, he added.



[Cyclone Amphan's trail of destruction in Bangladesh and India](#) UN News (May 21)

The cyclone, which lashed coastal areas with brutal winds and rain, left at least 84 people across India and Bangladesh dead, and has impacted around 10 million, according to news reports. Noting that while the cyclone had been downgraded to a tropical depression, the UN asserted that "it is still expected to bring heavy to moderate rain over the next 24 hours". The Bangladesh Government has already evacuated nearly two million people to more than 12,000 cyclone shelters that are supplied with, among other things, masks and sanitizers, to combat the spread of the coronavirus. The Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh flagged that preliminary reports indicate that damage is minimal in Cox's Bazar, with some 300 shelters damaged, approximately 60 of which were fully destroyed. Flooding and small landslides have been reported in several refugee camps, as well as blocked drains and damaged stairs, latrines, and bridges – but no word of casualties or deaths. Humanitarian partners are on standby to ensure access to information, temporary shelter, food, safe drinking water and other vital services for affected refugees according to need.

Similar:

[Cyclone Pummels India, Bangladesh](#) VOA News (May 22)

[Cyclone Amphan Brings Heavy Rain, Destruction to India, Bangladesh](#) VOA News (May 20)

[Category 4 Cyclone Amphan takes aim at northeastern India, Bangladesh, with life-threatening storm surge](#) Washington Post (May 18)

[Thailand: Let UN Refugee Agency Screen Rohingya](#) Human Rights Watch (May 21)

Thai authorities should allow the UNHCR unhindered access to Rohingya from Myanmar in Thailand to determine whether they qualify for refugee status, Human Rights Watch has said. The government's inhumane policy of holding Rohingya arriving in Thailand in indefinite detention should be immediately repealed. The latest group of Rohingya arrived in Thailand by land, crossing from Myanmar into Mae Sot district of Tak province on May 20, 2020. Thai authorities arrested at least 12 Rohingya and sent them to the Mae Sot immigration detention facility. Approximately 200 Rohingya are being held in immigration detention and other facilities across Thailand.

[Mobile internet ban hits COVID-19 relief efforts in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar](#) Deccan Herald (May 21)

Six COVID-19 positive cases in the congested Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar this week has prompted an alert by international aid agencies with their emergency response impacted by the restriction on mobile internet due to "security reasons." "Communication is key to the timely and effective management of this situation and so the restriction on mobile data communications in the refugee camps should be lifted. Life-saving health interventions require rapid and effective communication. Humanitarian partners continue to advocate for restoration of internet connectivity within the camps, to ensure that all refugees have adequate access to information, and to enable communication between partners," Louise Donovan, communications officer for UNHCR said.

[HRW: Cyclone endangers Rohingyas on silt island](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 21)

The Bangladesh government has kept over 300 Rohingya refugees confined on Bhasan Char, a remote silt island in the path of a "super cyclone" without adequate protections or safety measures, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW). The authorities should take immediate steps to ensure the safety of the refugees, including nearly 40 children, and transfer them to the camps in Cox's Bazar as soon as possible. The UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations are there, prepared to provide them with critical services and reunite them with their families, HRW said. "The Bangladesh government properly brought Rohingya refugees stranded at sea ashore, but holding them on a tiny island during a cyclone is dangerous and inhumane," Brad Adams, Asia director at HRW said. "Our fear that Bhasan Char would become a 'floating detention center' has now turned into a fear of a submerged one," he added.

Similar:

[Bangladesh: Cyclone Endangers Rohingya on Silt Island](#) Human Rights Watch (May 20)

[Isolation, treatment centres open in Rohingya camps](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 21)

The government in collaboration with the UNHCR has formally inaugurated first two Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Isolation and Treatment Centres (SARI ITCs) of Covid-19 in Cox's Bazar for Rohingyas and host Bangladeshi communities there. These two SARI ITCs, one located within Camp 5 of Kutupalong Rohingya camp and the second in Ukhiya Upazila, will serve the needs of almost 200 Covid-19 suspected patients suffering from moderate to severe symptoms, according to a press release issued by UNHCR.

Similar:

[Medical Teams International to open COVID-19 Isolation Treatment Center in world's largest refugee camp](#)
ReliefWeb (May 19)

[No 'bitter end' for Rohingya](#) Asia Times (May 20)

[op-ed] Every new twist marks an expansion of our understanding of the threshold for human misery, and of our capacity for failing our fellow man. This is particularly true for the Rohingya. Things were grim before Covid-19. As though the curveball of a global pandemic wasn't enough, there's now a cyclonic system brewing over the Bay of Bengal. Even if the intensity of the storm wanes somewhat before it makes landfall, it has the potential to deal a devastating blow to some of the most vulnerable people on the planet: the Rohingya refugees in the camps near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Even during a relatively mild monsoon season, landslides pose a real, mortal threat to those forced to inhabit the ramshackle tents that dot the barren hills. For those in the camps and the often-overlooked Bangladeshi host communities, the impending twin threats of pandemic disease and a cyclonic system are – to invoke a cliché – a perfect storm. When it comes to the suffering of the Rohingya, it seems no bitter end is in sight. This stateless people has been left time and again to plumb the depths of human misery alone. The least we can do is throw them a lifeline.

['Crisis on top of crisis' as Cyclone Amphan hits India and Bangladesh](#) Oxfam (May 20)

Millions of people are being evacuated in India and 12,000 shelters have been prepared in Bangladesh to house nearly five million people in the path of Cyclone Amphan. Oxfam, working with partners, is delivering life-saving assistance including safety equipment, clean water, sanitation, food, and shelter for people in the cyclone's path. Oxfam is helping Rohingya refugees in camps in the Cox's Bazar area in southern Bangladesh. "It is already a huge challenge to contain the spread of coronavirus amongst the Rohingya refugees living in over-crowded camps, sharing water and toilet facilities," says Dipankar Datta, Oxfam's country director in Bangladesh. Without assistance, people will be at risk not only to water-borne and other infections rampant during inclement weather, but also coronavirus if their immunity is compromised.

Similar:

[Crowded & Desperate: Rohingya in World's Largest Refugee Camp Face Dual Crises of Cyclone & COVID-19](#)
Democracy Now (May 21)
[India and Bangladesh are already suffering with coronavirus. Now a super cyclone is heading their way](#)
CNN (May 18)

[Bangladesh Army to deploy landslide response experts in Rohingya camps during cyclone](#) BDNews24 (May 20)

The Bangladesh Army is working to save the Rohingya refugees from possible landslides due to rainfalls under the influence of a super cyclone. The rain warning has triggered fears of landslides in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, where more than 1 million refugees live in muddy, wooden shacks on hills. A team of experts with experience in tackling landslides was ready to be deployed at the camps to save the forcefully displaced nationals of Myanmar, the Inter Services Public Relations Directorate has said.

[300 Rohingyas in one cyclone shelter at Bhashan Char](#) Dhaka Tribune (May 20)

Hundreds of Rohingyas who were recently rescued from the Bay of Bengal are safe and in a cyclone shelter at Bhashan Char at the time, the state minister for disaster management and relief has said. Dr Enamur Rahman said: "There are 120 cyclone shelters in Bhashan Char. However, all the Rohingya people currently living in the char have been taken to

one of them.” Bangladesh Navy personnel are taking care of them, he said, adding that all necessary facilities were being provided to the refugees. Some 308 Rohingyas were sent to live in Bhashan Char, an island off the coast of Noakhali, earlier this month after they were rescued from boats in the sea during their failed illegal attempt to travel to Malaysia on different occasions.

Similar:

[Bangladesh moves hundreds of Rohingyas to shelters as cyclone Amphan nears Prothom Alo](#) (May 20)

[Bangladesh moves Rohingya to island shelters as huge cyclone nears BDNNews24](#) (May 20)

[Bangladesh moves Rohingya to island shelter as super cyclone nears Free Malaysia Today](#) (May 20)

[Persecution and pandemic](#) The Express Tribune (May 19)

[op-ed] While the world is busy battling Covid-19, millions of Rohingya Muslims remain exposed to the disease in Bangladesh’s Cox Bazaar refugee camp. Home to roughly a million Rohingya refugees, the overcrowded camp is now exposed to the respiratory virus which has claimed over 300,000 lives worldwide. International aid groups have been dreading this moment for months. And now that the virus has entered the world’s largest refugee settlement in Bangladesh, the world is staring at the very real prospect that thousands of these unwanted refugees may die from the respiratory disease. While the situation is alarming and calls for immediate international action, it also serves as a stark reminder of how vulnerable the Rohingya refugees are even while they are far away from Myanmar’s consistent persecution.

Similar:

[COVID-19: 1.1 million refugees are extremely vulnerable in Bangladesh Modern Diplomacy](#) (May 20)

[Displacement, Disease and Disaster: How Rohingya Refugees are Surviving in Bangladesh WBUR](#) (May 21)

[Yanghee Lee: Champion of justice for Rohingyas](#) The Daily Star (May 19)

[op-ed] At a time when the world, including neighbouring Malaysia and Thailand, have shunned the Rohingya (acknowledged as the most persecuted minority in the world); at a time when the Burmese state audaciously tramples the whole corpus of international human rights instruments being aided and abetted by major powers; at a time when those who stand for reason, rule of law and justice feel betrayed by the high and mighty of the world, Yanghee Lee stood firm as a beacon of hope. In our meeting during her last visit to Bangladesh, she underscored the need for sustained engagement of civil society against all odds. Brushing aside my shyness, I told her that we celebrate her good fight against a system that stands for the status quo and the powerful, and has repeatedly failed to deliver justice. I added, she was the role model for those who stand for justice for the wretched of the earth. Maintaining her graceful composure, she smiled. Gracias, Professor Yanghee Lee.

[18, including one Rohingya person, test Covid-19 positive in Cox’s Bazar](#) The Daily Star (May 18)

Eighteen people, including a Rohingya refugee from Ukhiya, have tested positive for Covid-19 in tests conducted at Cox’s Bazar Govt Medical College. The field lab of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) at the medical college had tested samples from 188 persons on May 18, said Dr Anupam Barua, principal of the medical college. So far, seven Rohingyas have tested positive for Covid-19.

[COVID-19: ‘Community transmission among Rohingyas’](#) Prothom Alo (May 18)

Specific causes are not found as to how Rohingya people at Ukhiya’s Lombashia camp are infected with coronavirus. Local upazila administration and law enforcers said the Rohingyas may be infected through a section of workers of trucks from coronavirus-hit districts Dhaka, Chattogram and Narayanganj. Civil surgeon Mahbubur Rahman said that the authorities could not trace how the Rohingyas got infected. The infected persons are unable to clearly say how they contracted the virus. "They may be contracted the virus through community transmission," he added. Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner's (RRRC) chief health coordinator Abu Toha MRH Bhuiya said that 5,500 more Rohingya people of 1,260 families in Lombashia W-2 camp were home quarantined on Sunday. Earlier, over five thousand people were quarantined at F-block of the camp.

[Cautionary flag raised at Rohingya camps](#) New Age Bangladesh (May 18)

With the intensification of an area of low pressure into a severe cyclone in the Bay of Bengal, partners and volunteers in the Rohingya camps have raised the 'First Flag' of warning. Thousands of trained first responder volunteers from both the Rohingyas and the host community are working to share key information with the communities and to prepare in case the cyclone makes landfall in Bangladesh, said the UNHCR.

Similar:

[Cyclone Amphan: Warning flag raised at Rohingya camps](#) Prothom Alo (May 18)

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/>

