

# Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

June 8 - June 14, 2020



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK

## Highlights:

### Access to Territory:

- 269 Rohingya refugees were detained in Malaysia on June 8 after Malaysian officials attempted to push their boat back out to sea, but determined that their boat was too damaged and then took them to shore.
- A second boat attempted to enter Malaysian waters several times on June 8 before turning back due to the presence of patrol vessels.

### Camp Conditions:

- Two more Rohingya men died from coronavirus in the camps on June 8, bringing the total deaths to 3.
- Six additional Rohingya people tested positive for coronavirus in the camps on June 8.

### High-level statements:

- Malaysia announced it would request that Bangladesh take the 269 Rohingyas Malaysia took ashore and detained on June 8. Bangladesh has refused to take them.
- Human Rights Watch has urged Malaysia and Thailand to rescue the Rohingya refugees stranded at sea and provide them with assistance and access to asylum.

## Developments:

### [Govt should release the 269 Rohingya refugees arrested and detained, including 49 children — Joint Action Group for Gender Equality and Coalition for Child Rights Malaysia](#) Malay Mail (June 13)

[op-ed] The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality and the Coalition for Child Rights Malaysia are appalled at the arrest and detention of 269 Rohingya asylum seekers, including 49 children, who arrived in Malaysia on June 8 by boat. The government should immediately release these individuals and cease the practice of detaining refugees. Unwillingness to legally recognise refugees results in a violation of customary international law. The arrest and detention of 49 children is a direct violation of treaty obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as well as obligations under the Malaysian Child Act of 2001.

#### *Similar:*

[Malaysia not fulfilling legal obligations in treatment of refugees](#) The Star (June 14)

### [US Senator writes to State Dept: End internet restrictions in Kashmir, allow Rohingya in Bangladesh to have sim cards](#) The Kashmir Monitor (June 13)

United States Senator Edward Markey has written to the US Department of State, talking about the restriction on the telecom services on Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox Bazar. While appreciating the Bangladesh government's "generous willingness" to host Rohingya refugees who fled the military oppression from their homes in

Myanmar, the senator said, “Lack of access to mobile phones and internet is exacerbating the outbreak and hindering an adequate response.”

[\*\*Rohingya cyclists share key Covid-19 information across refugee camps\*\*](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 12)

Since the internet was cut off in Rohingya refugee camps, bicycles and rickshaws play a vital role in sending messages far and wide. To amplify key messaging and ensure that no one is left without access to lifesaving information, IOM’s Mental Health and Psychosocial Support unit in Cox’s Bazar began delivering information throughout the Rohingya settlements by bicycle. The cyclists use megaphones to deliver pre-recorded messages to each area. The initiative is conducted by Rohingya refugees, for Rohingya refugees, and has already reached approximately 67,000 beneficiaries across the camp. Message content ranges from key Covid-19 information to general mental health and psychosocial support information and is recorded in English, Rohingya, and Bangla with support from Bengal Creative Media and Translators Without Borders.

*Similar:*

[Covid-19: Rohingya cyclists sharing information in Cox’s Bazar camps](#) United News Bangladesh (June 12)

[Rohingya Cyclists Share Key COVID19 Information Door to Door in Cox’s Bazar Refugee Camps](#) Relief Web (June 12)

[COVID-19: Rohingya cyclists creating awareness among refugees](#) The Financial Express (June 13)

[\*\*Malaysia/Thailand: Allow Rohingya Refugees Ashore\*\*](#) Human Rights Watch (June 12)

Malaysia and Thailand should urgently rescue Rohingya refugees stranded at sea and provide them with assistance and access to asylum, Human Rights Watch has said. All countries, including Malaysia and Thailand, have the responsibility to respond to boats in distress, enact or coordinate rescue operations, and ensure timely disembarkation in a safe port. “Southeast Asian governments are callously passing the buck on protecting Rohingya refugees desperate for sanctuary and a future after Myanmar’s military drove them from their homes with mass atrocities,” said Brad Adams, Asia director.

[\*\*Thai Admiral: Navy Patrols Fail to Find Rohingya Boat\*\*](#) BenarNews (June 12)

Thailand’s navy insisted on June 12 that its ships had not located a boat carrying hundreds of Rohingya refugees after Malaysia’s coast guard chief claimed it was in Thai waters and had been blocked from entering Malaysian territory many times. “The Navy only heard about Rohingya boats in territorial waters from news reports. Malaysia did not contact us over the boat’s presence there,” Royal Thai Navy Spokesman Rear Adm. Prachachart Sirisawat said. “We asked our patrol units, but we didn’t find any Rohingya boats.” If any Rohingya boats were spotted, he said the navy “would give them humanitarian assistance,” such as providing them with food, fuel and water.

[\*\*Malaysia cannot shift responsibility for refugees to Bangladesh\*\*](#) The Daily Star (June 11)

[op-ed] Malaysia must be held to account for not recognising the status of refugees and continuing to call them illegal migrants, thus dismissing the struggles of refugees and their right to not face deportation after surviving genocide. Malaysia’s excuse for its poor treatment of refugees and migrants is that they must tighten border controls to rein in the coronavirus. But with only 8,338 reported infections and 118 deaths from Covid-19, it is inconsiderate to even suggest that Bangladesh, with its Covid-19 death toll soaring past 1,000, should be the only country to continue to take in Rohingya refugees. The concerned nations and agencies must come together and work with Bangladesh, Malaysia and other host countries to come to a diplomatic solution regarding the refugees. But most crucial of all, the global community must hold Myanmar to account for its persecution of the Rohingya.

[\*\*Refugee children get better health, nutrition via e-vouchers\*\*](#) Medical Xpress (June 11)

Electronic food vouchers provided young Rohingya children in Bangladeshi refugee camps with better health and nutrition than direct food assistance, according to new research led by Cornell University, in conjunction with the International Food Policy Research Institute. The study reports that electronic food vouchers allow families to buy a greater range of nutritionally diverse foods. The Rohingya get about \$9 a month in their electronic food vouchers, which look like debit cards.

*Similar:*

[Refugee Children Get Better Health, Nutrition via e-Vouchers](#) Newswise (June 11)

[Refugee children get better health, nutrition via e-vouchers](#) EurekAlert (June 11)

[Amid pandemic, migrant smuggling continues; to be much riskier, says Interpol](#) Outlook India (June 11)

Migrant smuggling incidents involving Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Malaysia by sea have increased threefold from March to April 2020, Interpol has said, urging member countries to be on alert as migrant smuggling continues around the world amid the pandemic. Interpol said the sudden increase of smuggling of Rohingya started likely due to the fear of Covid-19 contagion in refugee camps fostered by migrant smugglers to boost demand for their services.

*Similar:*

[Amid pandemic, migrant smuggling continues; to be much riskier, says Interpol](#) New Kerala (June 11)

[Bangladesh urged to lift Rohingya internet ban as Covid-19 rumours swirl](#) The Guardian (June 11)

Rohingya leaders have urged Bangladesh to lift an internet ban imposed on a million refugees in Cox's Bazar, warning that rumours and panic over Covid-19 are deterring people from getting tested. Mohammad Shaiful, 25, said misinformation spread quickly in the camp. "There's a rumour that people will be killed in quarantine," he explained. "Like doctors are injecting them with something that's causing the deaths. Also, doctors are 'giving' coronavirus to people who don't even have it and killing them." The Bangladeshi government has repeatedly stated that it is doing far more than other countries to support the Rohingya, and that the internet ban has been imposed for security reasons.

[Pandemic has led to rise in Rohingya domestic abuse cases, charity warns](#) The Telegraph (June 11)

Aid workers in Bangladesh's sprawling Rohingya refugee camps have called for the reopening of women's protection services over fears that domestic violence is on the rise during the strict pandemic lockdown. A new IRC report revealed that a quarter of women and girls surveyed in the camps before the onset of the pandemic had experienced gender-based violence. Since Covid-19 lockdown measures were put into place, the IRC has seen a 50% decrease in reports, despite anecdotal evidence that violence is increasing. "We fear that it has become a lot more difficult for people to report incidents given that they are trapped in their homes with their abusers and most won't have access to a mobile phone or to data to be able to let us know what has happened," said the IRC's UK executive director.

*Similar:*

[Pandemic has led to rise in Rohingya domestic abuse cases, charity warns](#) DNYUZ (June 11)

[Malaysia says Rohingya boat tried to enter its waters](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 11)

A boat carrying hundreds of Rohingya tried to land in Malaysia this week but turned back after spotting patrol vessels seeking to stop the entry of migrants over coronavirus fears, an official has said. The boat is believed to have been at sea for three to four months and tried several times to enter the country's waters on June 8 before giving up. Up to 300 Rohingya were on board the latest vessel. They were originally part of another group of 269 Rohingya that was allowed to land in northwest Malaysia on June 8.

*Similar:*

[Malaysia says Rohingya boat tried to enter its waters](#) The Jakarta Post (June 12)

[Another Rohingya boat turned back from Malaysia waters](#) New Straits Times (June 11)

[Rohingya refugee boat turned back on Monday, says MMEA chief](#) Malaysiakini (June 11)

[Rohingya Boat is off Thailand, Has Been at Sea 4 Months: Malaysian Official](#) Benar News (June 10)

[Rohingya Boat Off Thailand Has Been at Sea Four Months: Malaysian Official](#) Radio Free Asia (June 10)

[Malaysia says Rohingya boat tried to enter its waters](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 11)

[Malaysia says Rohingya boat tried to enter its waters](#) Channel News Asia (June 11)

[Rohingya boat turns back after spotting patrol vessels](#) Free Malaysia Today (June 11)

[Share the burden of humanitarian situations: Dhaka to int'l community](#) The Daily Star (June 10)

At the high-level panel discussion on June 9 during the 2020 ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment in New York, Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to UN Ambassador Rabab Fatima said that, "Emergency humanitarian responses such as pandemics and health emergencies must be underpinned by additional humanitarian assistance, without curtailing the funds for regular humanitarian needs." She briefed the meeting about some of the efforts of Bangladesh to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19 in the Rohingya camps, which include steps taken to put in place hygiene and social distance measures and setting up of temporary isolation centres while ensuring that humanitarian operations continued unhindered. She also mentioned that these measures have kept Covid-19 spread among the Rohingya population to a minimum; not anywhere close to the infection rate in the host community.

*Similar:*

[Share burden of humanitarian situations: Dhaka to int'l community](#) United News of Bangladesh (June 10)

[Bangladesh for extra funds alongside regular assistance for humanitarian emergencies](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 10)

[Lack of funding compromising Rohingya well-being](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 10)

Lack of funding is compromising the essential services and the health and well-being of both the Rohingya and host community population, the Inter Sector Coordination Group, which coordinates the humanitarian activities of the United Nations agencies and local and international NGOs, said on June 10. Funding to sustain vital activities being carried by the humanitarian organizations is crucial, it said, adding that to date, 27% of the \$877 million joint response plan for 2020 has been funded.

[Time to begin dismantling movement restrictions in Rakhine](#) Frontier Myanmar (June 10)

[op-ed] The report, *Freedom of Movement in Rakhine State*, by the Independent Rakhine Initiative shows the effects of newly imposed movement restrictions on all communities since the intensification of fighting between the military and the Arakan Army in late 2018, and finds that freedom of movement restrictions are central to the continued persecution of the Rohingya. These problems can only be resolved through dialogue with and among all Rakhine State's communities in a spirit that recognises diversity, non-discrimination, equality and inclusion as the way forward.

[US court asked to force Facebook to release Myanmar officials' data for genocide case](#) BDNews24 (June 10)

A request, filed on behalf of The Gambia on June 8 with the US District Court for the District of Columbia, calls on Facebook to release "all documents and communications produced, drafted, posted or published on the Facebook page" of military officials and police forces. In 2018 UN human rights investigators said that Facebook played a key role in spreading hate speech that fueled violence in Myanmar. Among officials whose Facebook data is being sought were Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of Myanmar's armed forces. Details from 20 accounts of officials and organisations banned by Facebook in August 2018 were also sought.

*Similar:*

[Lawyers seek Facebook posts of Myanmar leaders in Rohingya case](#) Al Jazeera (June 10)

[Rohingya virus cases fuel Bangladesh, Myanmar dispute](#) Anadolu Agency (June 10)

Bangladesh and Myanmar are at odds over the origin of two coronavirus cases confirmed among the latter's Rohingya community. The dispute started when Myanmar's Health Ministry confirmed that two Rohingya men -- a Muslim and a Hindu -- had tested positive for COVID-19 in the country. Some media outlets in Myanmar, citing local lawmakers, reported that both men had recently returned from the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. However, Dhaka rejected the reports as "totally false and baseless."



### [As COVID-19 deaths rise in Cox's Bazar, is increased testing enough?](#) Devex (June 10)

[op-ed] The two deaths in the Rohingya camps and the rising number of cases highlight the need for continued vigilance in the world's largest refugee camp, where testing capacity remains low. Only over 300 tests have been conducted in the camps as of last week where over 800,000 refugees live. Aid groups are hopeful testing capacity for the district will soon increase to 500 per day. But increasing testing capacity won't be enough. Aid agencies also need to intensify sensitization efforts in refugee camps to ensure refugees are presenting to health centers early for testing.

### ['Desperate journeys': Rohingya children recall ordeal at sea](#) AlJazeera (June 9)

Left to starve for months at sea, Rohingya children who escaped Bangladesh's refugee camps took "desperate" journeys to reach Malaysia on flimsy smuggling boats, according to a new report released by Save the Children. Testimonies by refugee children, who were rescued from a boat found adrift in the Bay of Bengal in April, revealed how they were beaten and forced to watch their parents' bodies thrown overboard. Kasit Piromya, a board member of Asean Parliamentarians for Human Rights and former Thai foreign minister, has urged Malaysia to do more to help those it had detained. Kasit said countries in the region should work together to try and ease the plight of the Rohingya. "Ultimately what needs to happen is for ASEAN to finally come together and collectively search and rescue boats in danger at sea, and pressure Myanmar to end its persecution of the Rohingya," he said.

### [Bangladesh rejects 'Malaysian proposition' to take in 269 Rohingyas](#) Prothom Alo (June 9)

Bangladesh has outright rejected a reported Malaysian plan to ask Dhaka to take 269 Rohingyas who managed to land on its soil, with the foreign minister saying Dhaka was neither obligated nor willing to do so. Momen said Dhaka would not shoulder the responsibility of the Rohingyas in Malaysia and "we will (rather) welcome the global leaderships and organizations to relocate the persecuted 1.1 million Rohingyas who are now in temporary shelters in Bangladesh".

#### *Similar:*

[Bangladesh criticizes Malaysia, says fleeing Rohingya are Myanmar's responsibility](#) BDNews24 (June 9)

[Bangladesh minister rejects Msia's plan to deport rescued Rohingya refugees](#) Malaysiakini (June 10)

[Unwanted: Bangladesh, Malaysia reject rescued Rohingya refugees](#) Al Jazeera (June 10)

[FM rules out possibility of taking Rohingyas from Malaysia](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 10)

### [Malaysia to ask Bangladesh to take back Rohingya refugees found at sea](#) The Japan Times (June 9)

Malaysia will ask Bangladesh to take back about 300 Rohingya refugees detained after a boat carrying them entered its waters this week, the southeast Asian nation's defense minister said on June 9. The nation has said it will no longer accept Rohingya refugees as it has tightened border controls to rein in the coronavirus. Malaysia's foreign ministry will ask Dhaka to take back the detained migrants if they are found to have fled camps in Bangladesh's district of Cox's Bazar. Malaysia also plans to ask the UNHCR to re-settle Rohingya migrants in a third country.

#### *Similar:*

[Unwanted: Bangladesh, Malaysia reject rescued Rohingya refugees](#) Al Jazeera (June 10)

[Malaysia to ask Bangladesh to take back Rohingya refugees found at sea](#) Reuters (June 9)

[Rohingya refugees in Malaysia will be deported back to Bangladesh](#) The Nation Thailand (June 10)

[M'sia to ask Bangladesh to take back Rohingya refugees found at sea](#) China Daily (June 10)

[Malaysia To Send Back Latest Rohingya Boat Arrivals](#) The Asean Post (June 10)

[Ismail Sabri: Foreign Ministry will contact UNHCR about Rohingya refugees](#) Malay Mail (June 9)

### [More than 260 Rohingyas come ashore in Malaysia amid pandemic](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 9)

More than 260 Rohingya arrived by boat in Malaysia on June 8, officials said, despite authorities' efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic by stopping entry of the Muslim minority. A coastguard vessel spotted a suspected migrant boat off the northwest island of Langkawi, and was set to push it out to international waters. But as the coastguards approached, 53 Rohingya jumped into the sea and were detained. On inspecting the boat, authorities found another 216 Rohingya and the body of a dead woman. Investigations also revealed the boat was intentionally damaged and

could not be repaired and this resulted in the push-back effort being halted. Food and water were provided to the migrants and the boat was taken to Langkawi, where all 269 were detained.

*Similar:*

[269 Rohingya refugees detained in Malaysia](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 9)

[Malaysia: Boat Carrying Rohingya Allowed to Land on Langkawi Island](#) BenarNews (June 8)

[Malaysia detains 270 Rohingya refugees who had drifted at sea for weeks](#) BBC News (June 9)

[Malaysia detains nearly 270 Rohingya seeking entry by boat](#) Channel News Asia (June 9)

[Malaysia detains nearly 270 Rohingya seeking entry by boat](#) Reuters (June 8)

[Authorities intercept boat carrying Rohingya refugees, 269 arrested](#) Malaysiakini (June 8)

[Hundreds of Rohingya come ashore in Malaysia](#) Arab News (June 8)

**[2 more Rohingyas die from coronavirus in Cox's Bazar](#)** Prothom Alo (June 9)

Two more Rohingya men died from coronavirus on June 8, taking the total deaths in the Rohingya camp to three. One of them was 58 years old and a resident of camp-10 while another was 70 years and a resident of camp-7, said Abu Toha MRH Bhuiyan, health coordinator of the Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. Five more Rohingyas were diagnosed with coronavirus on June 8, and the total number coronavirus cases rose to 35. Meanwhile, two Rohingya men made a recovery from coronavirus.

*Similar:*

[Two more Rohingyas die of COVID-19 in Cox's Bazar](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 9)

[Coronavirus: 2 more Rohingyas die; 5 more infected in Cox's Bazar](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 9)

[2 more Rohingyas die from coronavirus in Cox's Bazar](#) United News Bangladesh (June 9)

**[Coronavirus: Six more Rohingyas among 99 infected in Cox's Bazar](#)** United News of Bangladesh (June 9)

Another six Rohingya people are among the 99 newly infected in Cox's Bazar on June 8, raising the confirmed cases in Cox's Bazar to 1,089.

*Similar:*

[Six more Rohingyas test positive for coronavirus infections](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 9)

[COVID-19: Six more Rohingyas among 99 infected in Cox's Bazar](#) Prothom Alo (June 8)

**[Five Rohingyas arrested in Telangana for illegal immigration, getting Aadhar, Indian passport](#)** New Indian Express (June 9)

Five Rohingya Muslims have been arrested in Telangana on charges of illegally entering the country and getting Aadhar cards and Indian passports by providing false information, police have said. Two Indian passports, five Aadhaar cards and voter IDs were seized from them.

**[Ismail Sabri: Malaysian field hospital operations at Cox's Bazar discontinued since March following Covid-19 outbreak](#)** Malay Mail (June 9)

The operations of a Malaysian field hospital in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh have been discontinued since March, following the Covid-19 outbreak. Senior Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the decision was taken as a precautionary measure against the outbreak. The field hospital began operations in late 2017 after an influx of more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh due to Myanmar military atrocities north of Rakhine.

**[When will Myanmar stop denying the truth?](#)** Dhaka Tribune (June 9)

[op-ed] In 2019 Gambia raised allegations against Myanmar for committing genocide against the Rohingya community. Myanmar's defense against all the allegations was based on the final report of the Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICOE). ICOE in its report claimed that they found no evidence of genocide or atrocities on Rohingya Muslims,



which proves that the report was frivolous in support of Myanmar's official version of events and government narratives. The report submitted by Myanmar to the ICJ is not acceptable as it does not disclose the truth of the ongoing atrocities happening in Rakhine state. Myanmar has used the ICOE as a method to delay and postpone efforts by the international community to ensure fairness and transparency.

*Similar:*

[Myanmar Avoids Helping Rohingya Minority Despite International Court Order, Observers say](#) New Delhi Times (June 8)

[Myanmar Avoids Helping Rohingya Minority Despite International Court Order, Observers say](#) VOA News (June 6)

[Aid Groups at Rohingya Refugee Camps Say COVID-19 Might Force Care Rationing](#) VOA News (June 8)

Humanitarian aid groups operating in southern Bangladesh say if there's a major outbreak of COVID-19 in the weeks or months ahead, they may face a shortage of staffing, supplies and equipment, which could force them to ration health care. In recent months, aid groups have opened five isolation and treatment centers for COVID-19 patients in the camps and nearby communities, with hopes of adding another seven centers by July for a total of 1,130 beds. But given how easily COVID-19 spreads and how overcrowded the camps are, medical teams are still bracing for a possible worst-case scenario. Additionally, growing global demand and a limited supply of medical-grade personal protective equipment (PPE) is making it difficult to bring enough into Bangladesh.

[Concern as Myanmar Finds COVID-19 Case in Rohingya Who Illegally Crossed Border to Go Home](#) Radio Free Asia (June 8)

Authorities near Myanmar's border with Bangladesh have told police to redouble efforts to stop illegal crossings, after a Rohingya refugee tested positive for COVID-19 after sneaking into Rakhine state, lawmakers and local officials have said.

*Similar:*

[Rakhine reports uptick in COVID case due to Bangladesh returnees](#) Myanmar Times (June 12)

[Infected Rohingya refugees fleeing quarantine](#) Asia Times (June 8)

Rohingya refugees infected with coronavirus are fleeing quarantine in their Bangladesh camps because they fear being transferred to an isolated island in the Bay of Bengal, community leaders have said. At least two infected refugees have gone missing since testing positive for the virus after the first Covid-19 death was reported.

*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/>*

