

# Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

June 22 - June 28, 2020



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK

## Highlights:

### Access to Territory:

- On June 26, nearly 100 Rohingya people trapped at sea were rescued by Indonesian fishermen in Aceh.

### Camp Conditions:

- The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and IOM have opened new isolation facilities to treat COVID-19 patients in the Rohingya refugee settlements and nearby host communities.
- Surveys conducted among the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar revealed that many lack information about COVID-19, and that 40% of children are scared of dying of the disease.

### Conditions in Myanmar:

- Thousands of villagers have fled their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine state after a local administrator warned dozens of village leaders that the army planned "clearance operations" against insurgents.

### High-level statements:

- The UN Human Rights Council has adopted a resolution urging the repatriation of the Rohingya people to Myanmar.
- The UK and Slovenia have assured Bangladesh this week that they are committed supporting Bangladesh and the Rohingya regarding COVID-19, and sustainable Rohingya repatriation to Myanmar.
- At an ASEAN meeting on June 26, the Malaysian Prime Minister said that Malaysia cannot take in any more Rohingya.

## Developments:

### [Thousands in western Myanmar flee as army plans operations, monitors say](#) BDNews24 (June 28)

Thousands of villagers have fled their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine state after a local administrator warned dozens of village leaders that the army planned "clearance operations" against insurgents. "Clearance operations" is the term the Myanmar authorities used in 2017 to describe operations against insurgents from Rakhine's Muslim-minority Rohingya people. During those operations, hundreds of thousands of people fled from their homes. In a joint statement on June 27, the British, US and Canadian embassies in Myanmar said they were "deeply concerned by the reports of the Myanmar Military's clearance operations along the Kyauktan village tract" and "the worsening humanitarian and security situation across the region."

#### *Similar:*

[Thousands in Western Myanmar Flee as Army Plans Operations, Monitors Say](#) VOA News (June 28)

[Thousands of Rohingya Muslims on The Move Again From Army 'Clearance Operations'](#) Albawaba (June 28)

[Thousands in western Myanmar flee as army plans operations, monitors say](#) Reuters (June 27)

[IOM opens new Covid-19 isolation, treatment centers in Cox's Bazar](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 28)

IOM has opened two new Severe Acute Respiratory Infection Isolation and Treatment Centers (SARI ITC) in Teknaf and Ukhiya upazilas for treating Covid-19 patients amidst the pandemic. The SARI ITCs were opened in collaboration with the office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) during the last week. In the two new specialized Covid-19 healthcare facilities, 47 SARI ITC beds are currently available. The capacity will increase to a total of 110 beds as facilities ramp up operations in July.

*Similar:*

[IOM Opens New COVID-19 Isolation and Treatment Centers, with Expansion Ongoing Relief Web](#) (June 28)

[Rohingyas tell Malaysia how dozens perished during 4-month voyage](#) Prothom Alo (June 28)

Survivors from a boat crammed with over 300 Rohingya Muslim refugees told Malaysian authorities that dozens of their people perished and their bodies were thrown in the sea during a tortuous four-month voyage. The head of the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency described the ordeal suffered by Rohingya whose damaged boat had made land on the Malaysian island of Langkawi on 8 June, with 269 people aboard. He also recounted how the Rohingya had been transferred from a larger "motherboat" to a smaller vessel half-way through a voyage that began close to the Myanmar-Bangladesh border back in February. The survivors of the boat that came ashore in Langkawi have been detained and their future remains unclear. The fate of close to 500 Rohingya who had remained on "Motherboat 1" after the transfer at sea is unknown.

*Similar:*

[Rohingya describe high-seas terror](#) The Star (June 29)

[Rohingya refugees tell Malaysia how dozens perished during four-month voyage](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 24)

[Rescued Rohingya describe high-seas terror](#) Straits Times (June 28)

[Death and despair: Rescued Rohingya describe high-seas terror](#) The Jakarta Post (June 28)

[Rescued Rohingya describe high-seas agony, terror](#) New Straits Times (June 28)

[Death and despair: Rohingya describe high-seas terror](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 28)

[Rohingya say they were forced to drink urine to stay alive on four-month sea journey](#) The Telegraph (June 28)

[Rohingya refugees tell Malaysia how dozens perished during four-month voyage](#) BDNews24 (June 24)

[Rohingya say dozens perished in months-long voyage to Malaysia](#) Al Jazeera (June 24)

[Rohingya Refugees Tell Malaysia How Dozens Perished During Four-Month Voyage](#) NY Times (June 24)

[Rohingya refugees tell MMEA how dozens perished during four-month voyage](#) Malaysiakini (June 24)

[Dozens of Rohingya die in boat voyage to Malaysia](#) New Straits Times (June 24)

[Dozens of Rohingyas believed to have died in voyage to Malaysia](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 24)

[Caritas Bangladesh raises alarm over Covid-19 pandemic among Rohingya](#) Herald Malaysia (June 27)

Caritas, the social and development arm of the Catholic Church of Bangladesh, has expressed concern over the serious unhygienic and cramped conditions in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps, making the Rohingya extremely vulnerable to Covid-19. They cannot maintain the proper distancing or hygiene measures to provide effective prevention against the spread of the novel coronavirus. Furthermore, Immanuel Chayan Biswas, the Communications Officer for Rohingya Response Programme of Caritas Bangladesh, pointed out that the tragic pandemic taking place is only one of the emergency situations dominating their lives. "They are victims of the violent and traumatic uprooting from their homeland in Myanmar; victims of the health emergencies such as dysentery and pox; victims of the repeated climate emergency they face when cyclones [and monsoons] batter Bangladesh. And now they are also victims of the global pandemic which is bearing down on Bangladesh."

*Similar:*

[In crowded Rohingya refugee camps, social distancing presents challenges](#) Catholic News Agency (June 28)

[Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in Rohingya camps](#) Caritas (June 26)

### [Indonesians pull stranded Rohingyas to shore](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 26)

Nearly 100 Rohingya asylum seekers stranded off the coast of Indonesia have been pulled to shore by locals angered at the refusal of authorities to give them shelter over coronavirus fears. Some 94 people from the persecuted Myanmar minority — including 30 children — were reportedly plucked from a rickety wooden boat by fishermen this week before being intercepted by maritime officials from Sumatra island who pulled them closer to shore. But officials in Lhokseumawe city on Sumatra's northern coast refused to allow the group to land, citing coronavirus concerns. Angry locals took matters into their own hands by jumping into boats which they used to pull the asylum seekers to shore. Local police chief Eko Hartanto originally said they wanted to send the Rohingya back to sea rather than give them temporary shelter. But authorities appeared to soften that stance in the face of local protests, and the weary group are now temporarily being put up in private residences. The Rohingya will be checked by medical staff to ensure they were virus-free, according to Aceh's rescue agency.

#### *Similar:*

[Indonesia draws praise for assisting Rohingya as ASEAN fails to mitigate crisis](#) The Jakarta Post (June 29)

[Indonesian fishermen praised for rescuing Rohingya travellers as pressure grows on ASEAN states to assist](#) Australian Broadcasting Corporation (June 27)

[Rohingya stranded off Indonesia undergo COVID testing, given shelter](#) The Jakarta Post (June 27)

[Indonesian villagers defy Covid-19 warnings to rescue Rohingya refugees](#) The Guardian (June 26)

[Indonesian fishermen rescue nearly 100 Rohingya refugees in Aceh](#) Reuters (June 26)

['Best of humanity': Indonesian fishermen rescue stranded Rohingya](#) Al Jazeera (June 26)

[Stranded Rohingya Pulled To Shore By Sympathetic Indonesians](#) Kashmir Age (June 26)

[Suspected Rohingya refugee boat floating off Indonesia](#) BDNews24 (June 25)

[Boat carrying 'Rohingya refugees' floating off Indonesia](#) Prothom Alo (June 24)

["They are human too": Indonesia locals rescue Rohingya refugees barred by Covid fears](#) France24 (June 26)

### ['Malaysia can't take any more Rohingya refugees'](#) Prothom Alo (June 27)

Malaysia, which does not recognise refugee status, has recently turned away boats and detained hundreds of Rohingya, amid rising anger towards foreigners who have been accused of spreading the coronavirus and taking up scarce state funds. "We can no longer take more as our resources and capacity are already stretched, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic," prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin said in teleconference with other leaders of the 10-member ASEAN, which includes Myanmar. Muhyiddin urged the UN refugee agency to speed up the resettlement of Rohingya in Malaysia to third countries.

#### *Similar:*

[Ismail Sabri: Putrajaya firm in its stand to stop entry of Rohingya refugees](#) Malay Mail (June 27)

[Gov't firm in blocking entry of Rohingya refugees](#) Malaysiakini (June 27)

[Malaysia can't take any more Rohingya refugees, PM says](#) BDNews24 (June 26)

[Can't take any more Rohingya refugees: Malaysian PM at ASEAN meet](#) Al Jazeera (June 26)

### [Rights groups ask Myanmar to Grant Rohingyas citizenship](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 27)

ASEAN has failed to hold its member states accountable for violations of human rights and erosion of fundamental freedoms across the region, 45 regional rights groups said in a statement on June 26. The 45 rights groups said that the failure of ASEAN as an institution to protect Southeast Asia's most vulnerable communities raised skepticism among the civil society towards the regional body's commitment to people's interest. Describing the persecuted Rohingya people as citizens of Myanmar, Charles Santiago, a member of the Malaysian parliament, said at an online press conference that they all should be given citizenship. The international community and ASEAN should place civil peacekeeping forces in Rakhine for building confidence among the Rohingya people, who have been living in shelters in Cox's Bazar so that they can go back to Rakhine, he said. Myanmar citizenship and livelihood provisions, Phil Robertson of Human Rights Watch said, would be crucial for the Rohingya people as they want to go back to their community, not to camps meant for internally displaced persons.

#### [ASEAN: Overhaul Regional Response to Rohingya Crisis](#) Human Rights Watch (June 26)

Southeast Asian leaders should urgently adopt concrete plans for addressing the crisis facing ethnic Rohingya in Myanmar and abroad, Human Rights Watch has said. Leaders of the 10 countries of ASEAN will convene virtually on June 26 for the 36th ASEAN Summit. The 36th ASEAN Summit presents an opportunity to communicate to Myanmar the consequences of continued inaction, such as its removal from regional military and economic initiatives. "ASEAN governments' focus on repatriation over safety and accountability reveals a callous disregard for Rohingya lives," Brad Adams, HRW Asia director, said. "ASEAN member states should drop their harmful 'non-interference' mantra and express their readiness to respond to Myanmar's abuses and lack of cooperation with international agencies."

#### [4 Rohingya robbers killed in Teknaf 'gunfight'](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 26)

At least four suspected Rohingya robbers were killed in a reported 'gunfight' with police at Cox's Bazar on June 26. Police recovered 40,000 yaba pills and 4 weapons from the scene.

##### *Similar:*

[4 Rohingya men killed in gunfight with Bangladesh police](#) Australian Broadcasting Corporation (June 27)

[Bangladeshi police kill four suspected Myanmar-Rohingya criminals](#) The Star (June 27)

[Bangladesh Police kill four suspected Rohingya robbers](#) BDNews24 (June 26)

[Four Rohingyas killed in 'gunfights'](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 26)

[Four Rohingya men killed in 'gunfights'](#) Prothom Alo (June 26)

#### [US report upgrades Bangladesh's ranking on trafficking list](#) BDNews24 (June 26)

The US State Department upgraded Bangladesh in its 2020 Trafficking in Persons report, published on June 25, which sorts countries into four tiers based on their efforts to fight trafficking. Bangladesh moved from Tier 2 Watch List to Tier 2, meaning it does meet the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking but that it no longer faces special scrutiny and is at less risk of falling to Tier 3, which can trigger United States sanctions. "This significant step reflects Bangladesh's progress in combating human trafficking over the past year, including standing up seven anti-trafficking tribunals," the US Embassy in Dhaka said. In addition, the government continued to allow humanitarian access to the Rohingya camps. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Law enforcement decreased investigations into trafficking cases, the government continued to deny credible reports of official complicity in trafficking, and, despite hundreds of credible reports of forced labour and sex trafficking of Rohingya, the government did not open investigations to verify these reports.

##### *Similar:*

[U.S. finds Bangladesh improving anti-trafficking efforts in annual report](#) Reuters (June 25)

[US report: Bangladesh increased efforts to prevent trafficking](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 26)

#### [Bangladesh: Rohingya plea for refugee camp cemeteries](#) Anadolu Agency (June 25)

A Rohingya rights group has asked the Bangladeshi refugee commissioner's office to allocate a plot of land for members of the minority group to bury the bodies of deceased Rohingya. The official application, submitted on June 14 by the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights (ARSPH), lamented that after two years encamped near the country's southeastern town of Cox's Bazar, the refugees had nearly run out of cemetery space. According to an approximate calculation by the ARSPH, since the mass exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh in August 2017, as many as 17,480 Rohingya have died in the camps. Bangladesh's Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Mahbub Alam Talukder said that officials had received the application, but that a decision was pending.

#### [Lost in translation: Language barriers and the Rohingya response](#) The New Humanitarian (June 25)

Research by Translators without Borders (TwB) shows many Rohingya struggle to make themselves heard. When communicating with aid providers, the Rohingya rely most often on translations by speakers of Chittagonian, the dialect common in this part of southern Bangladesh. Many Chittagonian speakers believe their language is nearly identical with Rohingya. But TwB research shows there are important differences. One survey suggests more than a

third of Rohingya – 36 percent – did not understand a simple message spoken in Chittagonian. There's a particular language gap when it comes to healthcare. About a third of Rohingya who visit health facilities reported not understanding everything that's said, and that they don't feel all their questions are answered. Groups like TwB are trying to compensate by organising regular training sessions for interpreters, issuing glossaries of key terms, and advising local and international aid groups on the best ways to listen to refugees.

**[Most Rohingyas unaware of Covid-19: Survey](#)** United News of Bangladesh (June 25)

Most of the Rohingyas living in Cox's Bazar camps are not aware of Covid-19 and its intensity, according to a survey jointly conducted by KNH Germany and Samaj Kallyan O Unnayan Sangstha. The survey report released on June 25 said Rohingyas have misconception about Covid-19, and that Rohingyas have no clear information about the deadly disease. The survey report also showed that from among 931 respondents, 30.1 percent of Rohingyas said they are yet to know about Covid-19 while 44 percent believe that it is an air-borne disease. The report recommends taking a massive awareness programme in camps to reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus pandemic among the Rohingya population as soon as possible.

*Similar:*

[Most Rohingyas unaware of COVID-19: survey](#) New Age Bangladesh (June 26)

[Most Rohingyas unaware of COVID-19: Survey](#) Prothom Alo (June 25)

**[COVID-19: Forty percent of Rohingya refugee children in Bangladesh are scared of dying or losing a loved one to the virus](#)** Relief Web (June 24)

Four out of every ten children in the congested Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh are scared of dying or losing a family member to COVID-19, with girls more scared than boys of losing their lives or a loved one, according to a new report completed in May but only now made public. Several aid agencies including Save the Children spoke to 223 children and adolescents across several camps in Cox's Bazar to better understand how children in the world's largest refugee settlement are impacted by COVID-19. The vast majority (93 percent) had heard of COVID-19 and many knew what symptoms to look out for. Two-thirds of the children (64 percent) were scared of being infected, while nearly half (49 percent) were distressed about the closure of play areas and learning centres.

*Similar:*

[Rohingya Refugee Children Fear Death from COVID-19, Survey Finds](#) Benar News (June 25)

[Fear, Covid-19 stalk Rohingya refugee children](#) Asia Times (June 27) [op-ed]

**[Covid-19: UK pledges to help Bangladesh, Rohingya](#)** The Daily Star (June 24)

UK International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan has said the UK is strongly committed to helping Bangladesh and the Rohingya people through this devastating crisis. On the "virtual visit", a first for a UK Minister, Trevelyan met with Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen and also saw how UK-backed isolation and treatment centres will help protect Bangladeshi and Rohingya communities in Cox's Bazar from the pandemic. Trevelyan visited, via a video call, the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, where social distancing is nearly impossible due to cramped conditions. She said the UK will continue to work with the government of Bangladesh, international partners and the UN Security Council to enable the Rohingyas to return home to Rakhine in a safe, dignified and voluntary manner, and to support them in Bangladesh until that is possible.

*Similar:*

[UK minister urged to mount pressure on Myanmar over Rohingya on virtual Bangladesh visit](#) BDNews24 (June 25)

[UK International Development Secretary gives strong commitment to help Bangladesh and Rohingya through the coronavirus crisis](#) UK Government (June 24)

[UK pledges to help Bangladesh, Rohingya](#) The New Nation (June 25)



[Help Myanmar deal with Rohingya refugee crisis, Muhyiddin urges Vietnam](#) Free Malaysia Today (June 23)

Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin has called on Vietnam to play a bigger role in addressing the Rohingya refugee crisis. Muhyiddin received a phone call from his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc, during which the leaders discussed areas in which the two countries could work together to address the challenges brought about by the Covid-19 outbreak. "I ended the conversation by suggesting that Vietnam, as this year's Asean chair, can play a bigger role in helping Myanmar to address the Rohingya refugee issue that is also affecting Malaysia," said Muhyiddin.

[Rohingya Repatriation: Bangladesh seeks support from Slovenia](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 23)

Non-resident Ambassador of Bangladesh to Slovenia Md Abu Zafar met Slovenian President Borut Pahor at his office in Ljubljana recently and briefed the president about the current situation of the Rohingya crisis. He also met the Speaker of the National Assembly of Slovenia Igor Zorčič at the latter's office in Ljubljana. He requested for Slovenian support in the European Union and other international forums for an immediate and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar. Borut Pahor assured Bangladesh of extending its support for an immediate and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingyas to their ancestral lands in Myanmar.

*Similar:*

[Bangladesh seeks Slovenia's support on Rohingya issue](#) Prothom Alo (June 23)

[Rohingya: Malaysia urged to end raids, detention amid COVID-19](#) United News of Bangladesh (June 23)

The Rohingya Women Development Network (RWDN) and Fortify Rights interviewed 13 Rohingya refugees in Malaysia who described the ongoing risk of arrest and the effects of restrictions on movement and access to livelihoods. "Malaysia should stop arresting and detaining all refugees," said Sharifah Shakirah, founder and Director of RWDN in Malaysia. "Instead, the government should provide basic protections to refugees and migrants during this global crisis to prevent the spread of the virus."

[UN adopts resolution asking Myanmar to take back Rohingya from Bangladesh](#) BDNews24 (June 23)

The UN Human Rights Council has adopted a resolution urging the repatriation of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. The Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to Geneva said that the resolution titled "Human Rights Situation in Myanmar" was adopted at the current session of the assembly. "Myanmar has been called to establish an appropriate setting to encourage the Rohingya to return to their country with complete security and dignity in a bilateral agreement with Bangladesh," they said. The resolution further called upon countries to continue providing support in this regard until the repatriation is complete and praised Bangladesh for providing the Rohingya people with refuge.

*Similar:*

[UNHRC adopts resolution asking Myanmar to ensure Rohingya return](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 23)

[UN asks Myanmar to take back Rohingya from Bangladesh](#) The Financial Express (June 23)

[Positive policies helping Bangladesh move towards inclusion in education: UNESCO](#) The Daily Star (June 23)

Bangladesh has taken many positive initiatives towards inclusion in education but needs to do more in removing remaining barriers, says UNESCO's 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report. Refugees such as the Rohingya in Bangladesh are taught in a parallel education system. In January 2020, the government announced that, as of April 2020, 10,000 Rohingya children in grades 6 to 9 in camps would enroll in a pilot programme using the Myanmar curriculum. While the decision goes some way to offer the Rohingya an education prospect, it violates the principle of inclusion of refugees in national education systems.

*Similar:*

[Positive policies helping Bangladesh move towards inclusion in education: UNESCO](#) The Independent (June 23)

[Positive policies help BD move towards education: UNESCO](#) The New Nation (June 24)



[USCIRF Urges Thailand and Malaysia to Protect Rohingya Muslim Refugees Stranded at Sea](#) US Commission on International Religious Freedom (June 23)

In recent months, a number of vessels carrying Rohingya Muslims fleeing ethnic and religious-based violence in Burma have been turned away by Thai and Malaysian authorities. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom calls on the governments of Thailand and Malaysia to admit boats carrying Rohingya Muslim refugees stranded at sea. "Thai and Malaysian authorities must recognize their obligations under international law to refugees fleeing ethnic and religious violence," USCIRF Chair Gayle Manchin stated.

[Internet Blackout In Rakhine Enters Second Year](#) The Asean Post (June 22)

The internet shutdown in Myanmar's conflict-ridden northwest, described by rights groups as the world's longest, has entered a second year, with locals and campaigners appealing for an end to the blackout as coronavirus fears grip the region. The government shut down mobile data in several townships across Rakhine state and neighbouring Chin state on 21 June last year, causing panic among residents desperate for information about the unrest. Human Rights Watch has called on for an immediate end to "the world's longest government-enforced internet shutdown". A government official said earlier this month the internet shutdown would continue until at least 1 August in eight townships.

*Similar:*

[Internet blackout in Rakhine enters 2nd year](#) The Malaysia Reserve (June 22)

[BDRCS opens 2 field hospitals in Cox's Bazar camps](#) BDNews24 (June 22)

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), with support from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Red Cross and Red Crescent partners, is opening two new isolation field hospitals to treat a growing number of COVID-19 patients in the Rohingya refugee settlements and the adjacent host communities in Cox's Bazar. The isolation and treatment centres will help address a growing gap in critical medical care needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and mass deaths in the world's biggest camps for the displaced Rohingya people from Myanmar's Rakhine state.

*Similar:*

[Covid-19: BDRCS launches 30-bed medical centre for Rohingyas, host communities](#) Dhaka Tribune (June 22)

*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/>*

