

# Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

July 27 - August 2, 2020



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## Highlights:

### Camp Conditions:

- The coronavirus pandemic is aggravating tensions between Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh, with local NGOs calling for the emergency response to better include host communities, not just Rohingya in the camps.
- Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), has opened another Covid-19 isolation and treatment centre in the Nayapara refugee camp.
- Leaders of local NGOs in Cox's Bazar have expressed concern that the Inter Sectoral Management Group is shutting out local NGOs and local government bodies from the emergency response planning and funding.

### Access to Territory:

- Twenty-six Rohingya refugees, who last week had been feared drowned while trying to swim ashore close to the Malaysian resort island of Langkawi, have been found alive, hiding in the vegetation on a nearby islet and are now being detained, according to a senior coastguard official.

### High-level Statements:

- ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda has expressed appreciation for Bangladesh's strong support for the ICC's independent mandate on justice matters, the international criminal justice system and the Rome Statute.

## Developments:

[How to Elevate Rohingya Women's Voices Amid a Crackdown on the Coronavirus](#) The National Interest (August 2) [op-ed] For decades, the Burmese military has used sexual violence as a weapon of war against the Rohingya. But Rohingya women's vulnerability to sexual violence and abuse does not end at the Burmese border. Coronavirus conditions are further exacerbating barriers to access to medical care and are further impeding women's ability to participate in decision-making within the camps. As a result, women are experiencing more gender-based violence, more behavior-policing, and more restrictions on their mobility. This, in turn, has reduced their access to life-saving health care and information. As the United States continues to play a critical role in responding to the coronavirus outbreak in the camps, it should consider a multi-pronged approach, one that elevates the voices of Rohingya women and girls.

[Mutual respect a better approach](#) New Straits Times (August 2)

[op-ed] Given Myanmar's chequered contemporary history, we must be thankful of Malaysia's relative success in nation-building and seek to build bridges and explore avenues where Myanmar and Malaysia may learn from each other's experiences. It is perhaps time Malaysia sent out peace feelers to the Myanmar government, which can hopefully lead to opening bilateral avenues for honest and mutually respectful dialogues about seeking respective and

distinctive but humane ways forward in nation-building. The Rohingya's plight may ultimately be better served by taking a conciliatory and sympathetic tone in Malaysia's official dealings with the Myanmar government.

#### [Implications of the Myanmar ICJ and ICC Cases for Non-Rohingya Minorities](#) Just Security (July 31)

[op-ed] Over the past several years, ethnic Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan civilians, and others, have been subjected to widespread attacks, indiscriminate killings, destruction and looting of property, food supplies, critical services, and places of worship. Despite clear findings of grave human rights violations by local civil society, international fact-finders, and the de facto head of government, avenues for, or even conversations about, accountability for crimes against non-Rohingya ethnic minorities are virtually non-existent. Justice and accountability are necessary preconditions for a true democratic transition. Justice for all is the only path forward, and until it is achieved, the Tatmadaw will continue its decades-long practice of scapegoating and targeting all of Myanmar's ethnic minorities.

#### [A cause for hope for the Rohingya in Myanmar](#) Arab News (July 31)

[op-ed] An apparent, concerted effort to build bridges between the Rohingya and Rakhine communities is actively supported by younger Rakhines, particularly students. If these students are indeed leading an independent effort to change things for the better in their country, the global community should be very vocal and robust in defending them against any censure from the authorities for speaking out. Even if this is some cynical ploy where the authorities encourage these initiatives for PR and propaganda purposes, the international community should still use the opportunity to push for Rohingya receiving full rights as citizens which they are entitled to under international law.

#### [UAP holds webinar on Rohingyas](#) New Age Bangladesh (July 30)

The Department of Law and Human Rights in collaboration with the Institute of Energy, Environment, Research and Development of the University of Asia Pacific organised a live webinar jointly on the 'Status of Involuntarily Displaced Persons in International Law: A Case Study on Rohingya in Bangladesh' on July 27. Four researchers Chowdhury Ishrak Ahmed Siddiky, associate professor, Md Abdur Rahim, Md Lokman Hussain and Md Saleh Akram, assistant professors of the Department of Law and Human Rights conducted a research on the topic with the funding of the IEERD. Md Abdur Rahim, assistant professor presented the report on behalf of the researchers.

#### [How do we address human trafficking during a pandemic?](#) The Daily Star (July 30)

[op-ed] Driven by poverty, climate change, limited income-generating opportunities, and lack of access to finance, among many other factors, thousands of people every year undertake desperate journeys in search of a better life and livelihood. And these conditions enable the traffickers to dupe helpless people into trafficking through their sinister tactics. "We fear an increase in trafficking and smuggling across borders in several countries, as the global economic downturn is making these migrants more vulnerable and they are exposed to increased risk of exploitation and abuse," said Giorgi Gigauri, IOM Chief of Mission and UN Migration Network Coordinator in Bangladesh. While cross-border cooperation and coordination among law enforcement agencies are essential to identify and catch the trafficking networks, what is even more essential is eliminating the root causes that are making people prone to trafficking in the first place.

#### [Cox's Bazar administration, IOM reaffirm collaboration to tackle human trafficking](#) United News of Bangladesh (July 30)

Cox's Bazar district administration and IOM on July 30 reaffirmed their continued collaboration to counter human trafficking in the coastal district currently hosting over a million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals. According to IOM data, between September 2017 and June this year, 655 victims of trafficking (45 percent Rohingya and 55 percent local Bangladeshis) were identified and assisted by IOM and its partners in Cox's Bazar. Guided by the National Plan of Action (2018–2020), the primary focus [of the collaboration] will be on awareness raising, capacity building of local government and organisations, providing better protection for victims of trafficking and continued leadership by the District Counter Trafficking Committees.

#### [Bangladesh's support for ICC's independent mandate appreciated](#) New Age Bangladesh (July 30)

International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Fatou Bensouda appreciated Bangladesh's strong support for the ICC's independent mandate on justice matters. Bensouda expressed her appreciation in a tweet after a meeting with



Bangladesh ambassador M Riaz Hamidullah in The Hague on July 29. She also expressed her appreciation for Bangladesh's support for international criminal justice system and the Rome Statute.

#### [Rohingya man killed in 'police gunfight'](#) Prothom Alo (July 30)

A Rohingya resident of the Ukhiya refugee camp was killed in what law enforcers called a gunfight with police in Naikhangchhari upazila of Bandarban early July 30. Two policemen were injured slightly in the gunfight.

*Similar:*

[Former UP chairman, Rohingya man killed in 'gunfights'](#) New Age Bangladesh (July 30)

#### [Rohingya Refugees Lead Response as Bangladesh Camps Face COVID-19 and the Monsoon Season](#) UNHCR (July 30)

Refugees are at the centre of preparedness planning and response; however, their role has become even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teams of some 3,000 trained volunteer first responders have been leading their own communities and ensuring life-saving measures, spreading awareness about the risks brought by the weather and helping families better protect themselves. Since the onset of the monsoon season in Bangladesh at the beginning of June until now, almost 84,000 refugees have been affected by incidents including soil erosion and landslides, flooding, wind and storms. More than 7,600 people were forced to temporarily relocate due to shelter damage.

*Similar:*

[Refugees Are Essential To The COVID-19 Response](#) The ASEAN Post (July 31)

#### [Team Digital Innovation wins Silver Medal Award in IBCOL 2020](#) The Daily Star (July 30)

For the first time, Bangladesh participated in the International Blockchain Olympiad (IBCOL) 2020, held online from July 3 to July 5. Team Digital Innovation from Dhaka University won the Silver Medal Award for their project, Decentralized Identity and Aid Distribution: Platform for Rohingya Refugees. Their project addresses the Rohingya refugee crisis. Team Digital Innovation proposes a Blockchain-based solution to make the existing aid distribution procedure more secure, transparent and efficient.

#### [Myanmarese arrested on fraud charge](#) The Hindu (July 29)

A Myanmarese national was apprehended for allegedly obtaining Indian identity documents fraudulently. Based on a tip-off, South Zone Task Force apprehended the accused who was identified as a Rohingya. Another accused, who allegedly helped him obtain an Aadhaar card and EPIC card, was also arrested. Explaining the modus operandi, police said that the accused persons would first obtain a voter ID card by submitting an electricity bill. Once a voter ID card was obtained, they would apply for other proof of identity, finally applying for a passport.

*Similar:*

[Rohingya man held for illegally getting voter, aadhaar cards](#) Outlook India (July 29)

#### [Rohingya treatment a violation of human rights](#) Bangkok Post (July 29)

[op-ed] Thailand and Malaysia routinely violate the rights of trafficking survivors and refugees in three ways. First, Rohingya refugees are routinely arrested, extorted and held in detention facilities. The second way is through so-called "push-back" or "help on" policies, whereby the authorities intercept boats of refugees and force them back out to sea. Finally, Thailand and Malaysia have failed (or been unwilling) to prosecute perpetrators of trafficking, allowing transnational criminal syndicates to operate with impunity. Thailand and Malaysia should commit to stopping their policies of detention, refoulement and protecting perpetrators, and all governments in ASEAN should renew their commitments to protecting survivors of trafficking.

[The West Must Help Myanmar Escape China's Embrace](#) Fair Observer (July 29)

[op-ed] Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw has accused China of arming terrorist groups like the Arakan Army and Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. He also sought international help to suppress them. This statement reveals that China is putting unprecedented pressure on its neighbors in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Suu Kyi is turning to China because the West has abandoned her. The Rohingya crisis has been roundly criticized by Western media and brought allegations of genocide. China's strategy of destabilizing Myanmar even as it makes it an economic vassal has lessons for others. It is up to the West to step up and give Myanmar a choice. With the Chinese menace rising by the day, failure to do so would be a historic blunder.

[The Rohingya Genocide and the ICJ: The Role of the International Community](#) Just Security (July 28)

[op-ed] When it comes to Myanmar, and the plight of its Rohingya people in particular, the international community has consistently failed to adequately respond when faced with serious risks, or even the actual commission of, mass atrocities. The Gambia spearheaded the case at the ICJ to hold Myanmar responsible and ensure protection for the Rohingya going forward. It is now up to the wider international community to make sure that Myanmar's compliance with the provisional measures translates into tangible changes that improve the lives of the Rohingya in Myanmar and allow for a safe return of refugees to their homeland, where human rights of all people would be respected and protected.

[ISCG undermining local NGOs in Rohingya crisis response](#) Dhaka Tribune (July 28)

Leaders of Cox's Bazar CSO NGO Forum, a platform of local NGOs in Cox's Bazar district, has raised questions over the role of the ISCG (Inter Sectoral Management Group), which provides an umbrella to manage the Rohingya response led by UN agencies and their partners. They said the ISCG is effectively shutting out local NGOs and local government bodies from the process. The civil society leaders have also questioned ISCG and UN role in distribution of Central Emergency Response Fund, which they termed as top-down and pre-decided matter. None of the Cox's Bazar origin NGOs received the fund, they said.

*Similar:*

[ISCG undermining local NGOs in Rohingya crisis response](#) United News of Bangladesh (July 28)

[Rohingya boy, 4 others killed in 'gunfights'](#) New Age Bangladesh (July 28)

Five people, including a teenage Rohingya, were killed in two reported incidents of gunfight between groups of suspected drug peddlers in Cox's Bazar early July 28. About 22 people, mostly suspected drug dealers, were killed in reported gunfights with police, border guards and the Rapid Action Battalion and inter-gang feuds in the district in July. At least 10 of the victims were Rohingyas.

[Be part of decision-making process for a resilient future](#) The Daily Star (July 28)

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged the youth to be part of the decision-making steps with their ideas and innovations to build a future which would be resilient and sustainable both at this Covid-19 pandemic period and also the post-pandemic one. The prime minister said this while virtually inaugurating "Dhaka -- OIC Youth Capital 2020" and its first event the "Resilient Youth Leadership Summit" from her official residence, connecting youths from OIC countries and beyond. On the Rohingya crisis, Hasina said Bangladesh has given shelter to more than 1.1 million forcibly displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar, and thanked the OIC and all the member states for extending their assistance towards one of the most persecuted populations in the world.

*Similar:*

[OIC Youth Capital: PM urges global youth to build a resilient future](#) United News Bangladesh (July 27)

[For Myanmar's Elections to Be Free and Fair Rohingya Must Get the Right to Vote](#) TIME (July 27)

[op-ed] The Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights has urged Myanmar to set up voter registration and polling in collaboration with the Bangladesh authorities. Government insiders, diplomats and even representatives of



international non-governmental organizations are saying that if all Rohingya were in Myanmar, they would still not meet the requirements of the election law because they lack citizenship. This is a politically convenient excuse. Not only did Rohingya vote in past elections—during which they were still unjustly denied full citizenship rights—but since the 1990s, Myanmar authorities have kept detailed records of Rohingya through “household lists.” The government has other sources of data on Rohingya as well, including former identity cards and other evidence it could use to determine Rohingya voter eligibility.

*Similar:*

[For Myanmar’s Elections to Be Free and Honest Rohingya Should Get the Proper to Vote Exchange 99](#) (July 29)

[MSF opens Covid-19 treatment centre at Nayapara Rohingya camp](#) Dhaka Tribune (July 27)

International medical organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), also known as Doctors Without Borders, has opened a Covid-19 isolation and treatment centre in the Nayapara refugee camp, in the Teknaf upazilla of Cox’s Bazar district. The Nayapara SARI-ITC has a maximum capacity of 100 beds and begins with 20 operational beds.

[COVID-19 fuels tensions between Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi hosts](#) The New Humanitarian (July 27)

The coronavirus pandemic is aggravating tensions between Rohingya refugees and local communities in Bangladesh, underscoring long-held grievances on the margins of the massive aid response. Increasingly, distrust and stigmatisation have been aimed at Rohingya refugees accused of carrying the virus. Aid groups report a rise in anti-Rohingya hate speech and racism, as well as “rapidly deteriorating security dynamics” between the two communities. The influx of refugees and the enormous aid infrastructure has raised prices and sent wages plummeting, while locals say they haven’t benefited enough from hundreds of millions of dollars earmarked for the Rohingya response each year. Local NGOs have long called for the response to better include host communities, and development experts have pushed for longer-term investments in the surrounding areas. Failing to address host community grievances, analysts warn, could heighten tensions, create more opposition to aid projects, and worsen public sentiment against the Rohingya themselves.

[Hate Speech Threats Proliferate in Myanmar, Southeast Asia](#) The Irrawaddy (July 27)

[op-ed] Southeast Asia and Myanmar are experiencing new forms of hate speech that are increasingly being played out over social media. To date, most hate speech laws in Myanmar and throughout the region disproportionately focus on race and religion. They do not adequately recognize the new forms of hate speech, which are targeted at an expanded range of identity groups. Additionally, the broad and vague wording of some hate speech regulations allow them to be used to selectively oppress vulnerable communities and political opponents. Hate speech regulations—especially those imposing criminal consequences—must be clear, precise and targeted at specific behavior.

[Govt sheds light on refugees, overcrowded depots](#) The Malaysian Reserve (July 27)

The Malaysian government’s recent report on the country’s prison facilities and detention depots offer a glimpse into the living conditions of thousands of undocumented migrants and refugees whose mass arrest in Kuala Lumpur on Labour Day drew international attention. The government revealed that as of July 1, 2020, the total number in custody at detention depots stood at 20% over the country’s capacity at 15,163. Of the total, authorities had identified 1,340 Rohingyas. Human Rights Commission of Malaysia commissioner Jerald Joseph said that “The detention camps are supposed to be temporary to facilitate the process for deportation. Yet, many of them have been there for a long period of time. Usually, the time taken is a few months, but there have been occasions where it has gone up to 10 months and even more.” According to Joseph, the process should be even faster for Rohingya refugees as the UNHCR can quickly identify them and issue a UNHCR card, upon which they would be allowed to live and manage themselves. “That should be the usual understanding when it comes to dealing with refugees, nothing else you can do to them. There is no point of charging them in court or putting them into prisons nor deport them. You just must respect that they are refugees and allow them into the community... You cannot send them back to Myanmar, and even if they came from Cox Bazaar, we have no authority to deport them to Bangladesh because they are not citizens there. Therefore, they are stuck, and Malaysia, as a respectful country takes it as an international obligation,” he said.



[Malaysia finds Rohingya feared drowned hiding on island](#) Al Jazeera (July 27)

Twenty-six Rohingya refugees, who had been feared drowned while trying to swim ashore close to the Malaysian resort island of Langkawi, have been found alive, hiding in the vegetation on a nearby islet, a senior coastguard official said on July 27. Authorities have detained the refugees. Two Rohingya have also been arrested for suspected trafficking in connection with the people found.

*Similar:*

[26 Rohingya feared drowned found alive off Langkawi](#) New Straits Times (July 27)

[26 Rohingya Feared Drowned Found Hiding on Malaysian Islet](#) The New York Times (July 27)

[26 Rohingya Refugees Found Hiding on Malaysian Islet](#) VOA News (July 27)

*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/>*

