

Developments related to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

July 13 - July 19, 2020



REFUGEE SOLIDARITY
NETWORK

Highlights:

Camp Conditions:

- The Cox's Bazar refugee camps have been spared the worst of the recent flooding in Bangladesh, but heavy monsoon rains have damaged shelters and increased the possibility of landslides as the camps are built on steep hillsides. Refugees in the camps describe a 'crisis for dry space', with wet mud encroaching into shelters leaving no dry areas to sleep.

High-level statements:

- Malaysia has said that it will not send the 300 Rohingya that arrived by boat in June back out to sea. Instead, there will be an investigation into whether they need international protection, and if so, they will be allowed temporary stay in Malaysia until they can be relocated.
- The UK said in its newly-published 2019 Human Rights & Democracy report that Bangladesh continues to play a vital role in hosting Rohingya refugees, but that there was no improvement in the overall human rights situation in Bangladesh in 2019.

International Support:

- ActionAid Bangladesh has provided Tk30 lakh worth of medical equipment, including PPE, masks and hand sanitizer, to eight isolation centres in Cox's Bazar.
- The UK government matched £5 million of public donations made toward the Disaster Emergency Committee's coronavirus appeal to help the more vulnerable countries and communities affected by the coronavirus pandemic.
- The EU has allocated 35,000 euros in humanitarian assistance for Rohingya refugees who were rescued recently and allowed to land in Aceh, Indonesia.
- The Big Heart Foundation has announced the allocation of US \$500,000 to boost healthcare capacities in sites hosting refugee and internally displaced people in five countries, including Bangladesh.

Developments:

[Bangladesh uses COVID-19 cover to move Rohingya to Bhashan Char](#) Arab News (July 19)

[op-ed] When Dhaka announced that, under its new COVID-19 protocols, those rescued from sea would be temporarily quarantined on the remote island of Bhashan Char, few protested. However, it has now transpired that the move by Bangladesh was not a temporary quarantine measure, but a mechanism to move the first wave of Rohingya to the uninhabited island. Dhaka has plans to relocate more refugees from Cox's Bazar to Bhashan Char. Bhashan Char is not a suitable place for anyone to live, let alone a vulnerable, dependent refugee population. If the international medical nongovernmental organizations in Cox's Bazar now say they have the capacity to quarantine refugees near Cox's Bazar itself, they should be allowed to.

[Webinar: Speakers find pandemic an opportunity to work for marginalized people](#) Dhaka Tribune (July 19)

Speakers said at a webinar on July 19 that although the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected people from marginalized backgrounds, it has brought an opportunity for all to work together and build a better future for the next generation. During the webinar, Sara Hossain, advocate at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and honorary executive director of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (Blast), said access to the internet has become more important than ever but people in Rohingya refugee camps are not getting it.

[Myanmar continues on its unacceptable path](#) The Financial Express (July 19)

[op-ed] Over the last few weeks, nearly every day has revealed fresh international concern about events taking place in Myanmar. In recent weeks, the Myanmar military launched a massive offensive against the rebel group Arakan Army which has been seeking greater autonomy for ethnic Rohingyas in Rakhine. This has forced more than 10,000 people to flee from their homes. The subsequent lack on the part of ASEAN to play a more proactive role over the Rohingya crisis has been described by many observers as "totally shameful." Myanmar's court-martial conviction of three military personnel for crimes against ethnic Rohingya reflected its ongoing government efforts to evade meaningful accountability. Amnesty International has reiterated its deep concern and drawn attention to serious human rights violations. If Myanmar is serious about accountability, it should grant access to the Rakhine State to international investigators, including the UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, the new UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, and the International Criminal Court.

[The Big Heart Foundation allocates US \\$500,000 to mitigate impact of COVID-19 amongst refugee populations](#)

Zawya (July 19)

The Big Heart Foundation (TBHF) has announced the allocation of US \$500,000 to boost healthcare capacities in sites hosting refugee and internally displaced people in Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Bangladesh and Kenya. With almost 30,000 direct beneficiaries including health staff and indirectly impacting 120,000 people from the wider community, TBHF's COVID-19 response efforts in Bangladesh in partnership with UK based non-profit Penny Appeal seeks to improve public health response capacity by providing medical and WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) supplies via health facilities situated in the Rohingya refugee camps and surrounding host communities in Cox's Bazar.

[The Stories being told: Rohingya report on the epidemic](#) Relief Web (July 19)

The prevalence and impact of COVID-19 in the camps today remains unclear and different sources of information paint different and conflicting pictures of the situation. Official numbers of positive COVID-19 cases and deaths confirmed through testing suggest the virus is yet to spread across the camps and that its peak lies ahead. This is reinforced by the fact that medical facilities have not experienced a surge in people seeking treatment, nor a surge in the use of quarantine facilities. There has also been a low number of reported deaths. However, research conducted between 25 May and 25 June 2020 suggest widespread illness moving quickly through communities and an increase in deaths during that time. These reports were corroborated by other sources within the response and discussed in sector meetings.

[Severe flooding hits Bangladesh in midst of coronavirus crisis](#) Oxfam (July 17)

Heavy rains have swollen river basins in north Bangladesh, leading to severe flooding, submerging towns and destroying homes and crops in a region already suffering due to the coronavirus pandemic. The floods - which are predicted to peak on 18 and 19 July - have already claimed eight lives and affected 2.2 million people, only two months after the region was hit by Cyclone Amphan, the strongest storm in a decade. The Cox's Bazar refugee camps, home to almost a million Rohingya refugees, have been spared the worst of the flooding, but heavy monsoon rains have damaged shelters and increased the possibility of landslides as the camps are built on steep hillsides. Refugees in the camps have described a 'crisis for dry space', with wet mud encroaching into shelters leaving no dry areas to sleep. The bamboo bridges and pathways that criss-cross the camps have become more precarious making it more difficult for the elderly and people with disabilities to get around. People living on Chars, or river islands, are extremely vulnerable during cyclone and monsoon season, as crops are washed away and livelihoods damaged.

Similar:

[More Than One Million People Stranded by Flooding in Bangladesh](#) VOA News (July 17)



[**Experts urge Rohingya-Rakhine Buddhists reconciliation**](#) Anadolu Agency (July 17)

Experts at the first Rohingya-Rakhine online seminar on July 16 urged reconciliation of minority Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists to restore sustainable peace in Rakhine state in Myanmar. The Forces for Renewal of Southeast Asia in collaboration with the School of Oriental and African Studies and Free Rohingya Coalition organized the “What Future for Rakhine?: End Games for the Arakanese (Rakhine, Rohingyas and Other Co-habitants)” seminar.

Similar:

[Myanmar Religious Leaders Call for Peace, Tolerance Amid Increasing Unrest](#) VOA News (July 15)

[**Myanmar Military Chief Affirms Support for China’s BRI Projects**](#) The Irrawaddy (July 17)

Myanmar military chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has assured China that the armed forces will continue to guarantee the implementation of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the country, saying he believes it will support the peace process and national development. Despite allegations that the treatment of the Rohingya and the military’s operations amount to genocide and war crimes, Beijing has continued to offer strong support to Myanmar. Since 2017, China has been acting as an official peace broker between the military and the Northern Alliance, which comprises the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). The group is actively fighting government troops in northern Shan State, where many BRI backbone projects are planned. Moreover, China has officially played a mediation role between Myanmar and Bangladesh since 2017. Last year in April, Snr-Gen Min Aung Hlaing praised China as an “eternal friend” during a visit to Beijing and thanked it for countering international pressure on Myanmar over the Rohingya crisis. In 2018, China voted against the UN Human Rights Council’s move to establish a body to investigate claims of genocide in Rakhine. China said at the time that the Rohingya issue should not be “complicated,” “expanded” or “internationalized,” saying instead that it is an issue between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

[**Rohingya call for voting rights ahead of Myanmar election**](#) UCA News (July 17)

As Myanmar gears up for general elections on Nov. 8, 2020, thousands of the persecuted Rohingya community face uncertainty over their right to vote. On June 25, a Yangon-based Rohingya party - the Democracy and Human Rights Party (DHRP) that represents Rohingya in northern Rakhine - sent a letter to officials from the election commission urging it to allow voting for those who hold white cards as well as let them to run for office.

[**Call Myanmar’s crimes against Rohingya by their rightful name: Genocide**](#) Jewish World Watch (July 17)

[op-ed] Nearly three years after unconscionable atrocities were unleashed upon the Rohingya of Myanmar by their country’s military and security forces, the United States still has not called the crimes perpetrated against this ethnoreligious minority group by their rightful name: Genocide. Jewish World Watch, in coalition with 57 other human rights organizations, sent a petition on July 16 to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, calling upon the U.S. government to urgently issue a genocide determination in the case of the Rohingya. The U.S. must step up as a nation to ensure that these survivors and what happened to them are not forgotten.

Similar:

[Genocide Against the Burmese Rohingya](#) International Crisis Group (July 16)

[**Bangladesh maintained its commitment to safe Rohingya repatriation: UK**](#) United News of Bangladesh (July 16)

In its newly-published 2019 Human Rights & Democracy report, the UK has said Bangladesh continued to play a vital role in hosting a significant number of Rohingya people noting that there was “no improvement” in the overall human rights situation in Bangladesh in 2019. There were reports of significant criminality in the refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar, where approximately 855,000 Rohingya refugees are living. These included murder (around 30 cases), gender-based violence, abduction, illegal drug trading, and human trafficking. The government introduced additional police stations, fences around the camps, and limited night-time patrols by mixed security forces, the UK mentioned.



Similar:

[Rights Situation In 2019: Bangladesh saw no improvement](#) The Daily Star (July 18)

[Human rights situation no better: UK](#) New Age Bangladesh (July 17)

[‘No improvement in overall human rights situation in Bangladesh’: UK report](#) The Daily Star (July 17)

[Bangladesh maintained its commitment to safe Rohingya repatriation: UK](#) The Independent (July 16)

[‘BD maintains its commitment to safe Rohingya repatriation’](#) The Financial Express (July 16)

[Bangladesh maintains commitment to safe Rohingya repatriation: UK](#) The New Nation (July 17)

[ActionAid provides medical equipment to upazila health complexes in Cox's Bazar](#) Dhaka Tribune (July 15)

ActionAid Bangladesh has provided medical equipment, including PPE, masks and hand sanitizer, to eight upazila health complexes (isolation centres) in Cox's Bazar to ensure treatment for Covid-19 patients. Tk30 lakh worth of PPEs, KN95 masks, surgical masks, surgical gloves, hand-gloves, hand sanitizers, boots, eyeglasses, face shields, towels, baskets, bleach powder and disinfectant sprayers have been distributed by the international development agency.

[1.1 million Rohingya refugee is now out of thinking amid the pandemic](#) Modern Diplomacy (July 15)

[op-ed] Next August will be the third anniversary of the Rohingya genocide and the forcible exile. Rohingya repatriation has been discussed at various times. Some discussions are in process. But suddenly the coronavirus invades the repatriation debate. So the Rohingya repatriation process is coming to a halt. From the world media to the UN and all the powerful countries are now busy dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. In a general view, the refugee problem could be solved in three ways.

[UN, aid agencies fear worse to come for refugee camps](#) The Financial Times (July 15)

As countries begin to ease lockdowns and focus on restarting economies, the UN and aid agencies are warning there could be a looming crisis in refugee camps. So far a major outbreak in a settlement has been avoided but overcrowding and limited access to basic hygiene facilities could lead to a humanitarian catastrophe. [video]

[UK raises pandemic donations for displaced people including Rohingyas](#) Dhaka Tribune (July 14)

The United Kingdom has taken initiatives to double the impact of British people's donations and ensure that UK charities working on the ground can reach even more people in need especially the global displaced population including Rohingyas. The UK government will be matching the first £5 million (\$6,249,375) of public donations to the Disaster Emergency Committee's coronavirus appeal to help the more vulnerable countries and communities affected by the coronavirus pandemic, according to a message sent by British High Commission in Bangladesh. Funds raised by this appeal will initially focus on displaced populations in Yemen, Syria, Somalia, South Sudan, DRC, Afghanistan, and the Rohingya influx response in Bangladesh.

Similar:

[UK raises pandemic donations for displaced people](#) The Financial Express (July 14)

[UN asks for £8billion Covid-19 recovery fund in largest ever fundraising appeal](#) Evening Standard (July 17)

[Appeal to fight Covid-19 in world's poorest countries raises £5m in a day](#) Guernsey Press (July 16)

[DEC appeal to fight coronavirus in world's poorest countries raises £5m in one day](#) The Irish News (July 15)

[UK working to reach more people in need including Rohingyas](#) The New Nation (July 15)

[UK working to reach more people in need including Rohingyas](#) United News of Bangladesh (July 14)

[UK charities launch coronavirus appeal for world's most fragile states](#) The Telegraph (July 14)

[Coronavirus: UK charities launch appeal to help world's most vulnerable countries](#) BBC News (July 14)

[EU provides humanitarian aid for Rohingya refugees in Aceh](#) Antara News (July 14)

The EU has allocated 35 thousand euros in humanitarian assistance for Rohingya refugees who were rescued recently and allowed to land in Aceh, Indonesia, after spending more than 120 days at sea. The funds have been channeled through the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) and will be used to provide clean water, sanitation facilities, healthcare, psychosocial support, and necessities such as sleeping mats and blankets, and cleanliness and personal protective



equipment. The PMI team will also carry out hygiene socialization, focusing on prevention of coronavirus and dengue infections. The fund will also support efforts to restore contact between separated family members.

[Covid-19 And The Rohingya: Hunger, exploitation, hate crimes and xenophobia](#) The Daily Star (July 14)
[op-ed] Rohingyas living in Burma are being subjected to state sponsored stigmatisation after the outbreak of Covid-19. This has resulted in a sharp increase in hate speech against the Rohingya on Burmese social media. The conditions of the Rohingyas in the internally displaced persons camps in Burma are particularly dire. The camps have very rudimentary facilities and are almost never well resourced. The lockdown has increased the suffering of the residents as problems of water supply, shelter repair and food supply appear, and health care services dwindle. Refugees and asylum-seeking Rohingyas are also being subjected to various forms of exploitation. The condition of women and children is distressing. Often such stigmatisation, hate crime and xenophobia are state condoned and echo the genocidal ideology of Myanmar, the principal perpetrator of genocide. The Rohingya community is disappointed that they are left out of the decision-making processes that involve their life and their future. Some Rohingya felt Burma should be made to pay appropriate reparation to the countries that are adversely affected by its actions, contributing to the refugee flow and incurring huge costs: social, economic and environmental.

[Inside a Covid-19 Isolation Unit in Bangladesh's Rohingya Refugee Camp](#) Direct Relief (July 13)
HOPE for Bangladesh's brand-new Covid-19 isolation center is located inside the Rohingya camp near Cox's Bazar, where more than 800,000 refugees currently live, and where the HOPE Foundation for Women and Children of Bangladesh already has a dedicated field hospital. The center currently has 16 admitted patients, and treats an additional 50 per day on an outpatient basis. In addition to building a sophisticated facility, HOPE for Bangladesh has a vital tool in its belt: trust. "We saw this with Ebola, when people were much more likely to consent to treatment and to participate willingly in containment measures if they trusted public health organizations and NGOs," a doctor specializing in public health said.

[PM: Rohingya refugees will not be sent back out to sea](#) New Straits Times (July 13)
Malaysia will not send any illegal immigrant who arrived here via boat back out to sea – including the 300 Rohingya refugees who entered the country's waters last June. Instead, Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the government will look for an appropriate solution for their situation. "If the findings of the investigation are that the Rohingya refugees need international protection based on the non-refoulement principle and the exemption usually given to foreigners who may need international protection by the UNHCR, on the basis of humanity, this group of people may not be expelled and be allowed to stay temporarily in this country until they can be relocated to either a third country or return to their homeland once the crisis in Rakhine, Myanmar begins to subside," he said.

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/>

