

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	56
Land:	Burma
Kilde:	Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)
Titel:	Bangladesh: Closing the door on Rohingya
Udgivet:	13. juni 2012
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	3. september 2012

Title	Bangladesh: Closing the door on Rohingya
Publisher	Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)
Country	Bangladesh Myanmar
Publication Date	13 June 2012
Cite as	Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), <i>Bangladesh: Closing the door on Rohingya</i> , 13 June 2012, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4fdb0c9b2.html [accessed 2 September 2012]
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Bangladesh: Closing the door on Rohingya

Bangladesh says it will not accept any Rohingya refugees fleeing a new spate of ethnic violence in neighbouring Myanmar's western Rakhine State.

"We are not interested in more people coming to Bangladesh," Foreign Minister Dipu Moni told an impromptu press briefing at her office, noting that Bangladesh is already a densely populated country and cannot afford a fresh influx.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have fled persecution in Myanmar over the past three decades, the vast majority to Bangladesh in the 1990s.

The minister's comments follow a call on 12 June by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) for Bangladesh to keep its doors open after a recent escalation of violence between Rakhine's mainly Buddhist community and its minority of Rohingya Muslims, and local media reports that Bangladeshi border authorities had turned away a number of boats carrying people from Myanmar.

"We are concerned about the reports we are seeing and are in contact with the Bangladesh government at various levels," Andrej Mahecic, a UNHCR spokesman told IRIN from Geneva on 13 June, citing reports of border patrol forces turning boatloads of refugees away. "Many of these people may need safety or medical assistance."

The latest [unrest](#) flared as a result of the alleged rape and murder of a Buddhist woman by a group of Rohingya Muslim men at the end of May, followed by an attack on a bus in early June, in which 10 Muslims died.

Media reports say dozens of people have been killed in recent days and hundreds of homes burned as security forces struggle to contain what has been described as some of the worst sectarian violence to strike Myanmar in years.

Burmese President Thein Sein declared a state of emergency in Rakhine State on 10 June, imposing a dusk-to-dawn curfew.

In terms of Burmese law the [Rohingya](#) - officially referred to as Muslims - are stateless, while Bangladesh views them as illegal migrants.

UNHCR figures put the number of Rohingya in Bangladesh today at more than [200,000](#), including more than 30,000 documented refugees living in two government-run camps [Kutupalong and Nayapara] located within 2km of Myanmar in the southeast.

Aid workers say there is no way of knowing how many Rohingya have managed to cross

the border as those who are successful tend to hide, however, UNHCR has deployed five teams to the area to better assess the situation.

The refugee agency is also trying to monitor developments inside northern Rakhine State through people who have contacts with friends and families there, but the high level of insecurity makes this extremely difficult.
