

Title	Bangladesh: Rohingya beaten, deported
Publisher	Radio Free Asia
Country	Bulgaria Myanmar
Publication Date	19 February 2010
Cite as	Radio Free Asia, <i>Bangladesh: Rohingya beaten, deported</i> , 19 February 2010, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b87905440.html [accessed 12 March 2010]

Bangladesh: Rohingya beaten, deported

2010-02-19

Minority refugees from Burma face harassment and worse in Bangladesh.



A Rohingya refugee walks through Kutupalong Makeshift Camp, Sept. 9, 2009. AFP

BANGKOK – Burmese minority refugees in Bangladesh are being beaten, jailed, and deported, according to residents of a camp overseen by a United Nations agency.

The refugees say a growing number of Rohingya refugees in a second, unofficial camp, known as the Kutupalong Makeshift Camp, lack food and are being harassed by local authorities and residents when they leave the camp to seek supplies.

A refugee in the official refugee camp, run by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said refugees from both camps were barred from leaving.

"The refugees who are in the registered camp are supported by the UNHCR, but the refugees who are living in the unregistered camp – they are not supported by anything. And right now it is very difficult for them to survive their life because they cannot go out for work, and they don't even get any [food]," he said.

"If they go out, they are arrested by Bangladeshi officials and also by the local people. Sometimes they are returned to Burma and sometimes they are sent to jail," said the refugee, who asked to be identified only by his Burmese name, Kyaw Min, for fear of retribution.

Kyaw Min said a UNHCR official had gone to the local police station to demand the release of detained refugees.

"But the police denied the request of the U.N. protection official," he said, adding that police had refused to acknowledge that the refugees were being held there.

In addition to deportation and imprisonment, several refugees who left the camps have been beaten or attacked with weapons, and Rohingya women have been raped, Kyaw Min said.

Starvation

"It's absolutely true. It's [happening] from both sides – the local people and also government people," he said.

Another refugee at the UNHCR camp, who gave his name as Sala, said resources at Kutupalong, which had seen a huge increase in refugees in recent months, were extremely scarce.

"Since January, 15 to 20 ... refugees died of starvation," Sala said.

"Those people, they cannot go outside the camp to work and to feed their family members. Therefore, when the refugees do go outside the camp, they are arrested by the local people and local leaders and police," he said.

Sala said refugees who end up in detention are the sole suppliers of food for their families, which often comprise six or seven members.

"The people who are in the jail are not able to be released by their family members because they have no money.... How will they release their husbands and their [family] members from jail?" he asked.

Sala said that even Rohingya who had previously lived among the local population had been beaten up by police or members of the Bengali community.

"Therefore, the Rohingya people who are in the local area join the Kutupalong Makeshift Camp."

Kyaw Min said the number of Rohingya at Kutupalong had ballooned to 50,000 in recent months, spreading supplies thin.

"Every day people are coming from outside – refugees from different parts of Bangladesh. [They are] joining the makeshift [camp] because of persecution by the local people and the government," he said.

Future uncertain

Kyaw Min said that in addition to a lack of food, living conditions in Kutupalong are extremely harsh.

"I went there myself to see the conditions. They're living in very small huts with plastic over the roof. It's very difficult for them to live there. And they also face restrictions on their movement by the local people and the government," he said.

Kyaw Min said the Bangladesh government had increased harassment of the Rohingya to maintain good ties with its neighbor to the south.

"The purpose of the crackdown against the Rohingya is to uphold the bilateral relationship with the Burmese government," he said.

He said that while life as a Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh is hard, it is preferable to the kind of treatment the ethnic minority has endured under the Burmese military regime.

"Though they are very afraid in Bangladesh, they would never wish to go back to Burma," he said.

Faced with a lack of legal status and the threat of persecution, thousands of Rohingya have left Burma in recent years for other Asian countries.

But the ethnic group has been met resistance from most governments in the countries

where they have sought asylum.

Kyaw Min said Bangladesh has been no different.

"Even outside the makeshift [camp], in the localities, their life is very, very hard. They are oppressed and harassed by the local people every day. Their future is uncertain," he said.

Thousands of refugees

The Rohingya are denied citizenship under the laws of mainly Buddhist Burma, and rights groups say they face official repression and poverty.

The Rohingya themselves say they are Muslim descendants of Persian, Turkish, Bengali, and Pathan traders, who migrated to Burma as early as the 7th century A.D. But their ethnic identity isn't widely recognized.

In 1992, 250,000 Rohingya, around one-third of their total population, fled over Burma's border into Bangladesh, citing persecution in Burma.

Rights advocates estimate that the number of Rohingya fleeing the Burma-Bangladesh border area to seek a better life elsewhere has increased from hundreds to thousands over the last five years.

The Rohingya take to the sea for a dangerous voyage in boats, putting their lives in the hands of human traffickers and facing brutal treatment by the Thai and Malaysian navies when they arrive, advocates say.

The Rohingya have been leaving Burma and heading mainly into impoverished Bangladesh since the late 1970s. The biggest influx occurred in 1992.

Original reporting by Joshua Lipes and by RFA's Burmese service. Burmese service director: Nyein Shwe. Edited by Sarah Jackson-Han.

[Link to original story on RFA website](#)

Copyright notice: Copyright © 2006, RFA. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Asia, 2025 M St. NW, Suite 300, Washington DC 20036.
