

Beyond Border

A Chronicle of Rohingya Crisis & Bangladesh





RRRC

BEYOND BORDER

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Foreword

"Beyond Borders: A Chronicle of Rohingya Crisis & Bangladesh" epitomizes a stirring saga of empathy, resilience, and solidarity. As the Rohingya crisis unfolded, Bangladesh's response stood as a testament to its unwavering commitment to humanitarian principles. The compassion by Bangladesh in sheltering the Rohingyas, or Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs), showcased Bangladesh's willingness to uphold its moral obligations, despite the immense challenges posed by hosting one of the world's largest refugee populations.

So far, Bangladesh's exemplary handling of the Rohingya influx has been lauded for its efficiency and compassion, setting a benchmark for other nations facing similar challenges. The Rohingya crisis since the beginning witnessed both structured and non-structured transformation. The images taken over the years remained as silent spectator and evidence of their struggle, solicitude from Bangladeshi host community and the testament to the coordination between national and international communities.

In this book, through powerful images, we will witness the transformative impact of education, the healing power of healthcare, and the resilience of individuals rebuilding their lives against all odds. We are reminded that the plight of the Rohingya is not just a humanitarian crisis but a moral imperative for the global community. From diplomacy to dispute resolution- this crisis represents the untold stories of Rohingyas, living beyond the border from their native places. The Bangladeshi civil servants working in the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), along with the humanitarian community, walked along the Rohingyas from the beginning, and witnessed their sorrow, struggle, happiness and ways of life. Through compelling narratives and calls to action, we echo the voices of advocates, activists, and changemakers who continue to tirelessly champion the rights and dignity of the Rohingya people. This book offers the opportunity to look into the camp lives of the most persecuted ethnic minority population on the globe.

HISTORY OF ROHINGYA INFLUX IN BANGLADESH: PRE 2017

In 2017, over 700,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh to escape violent persecution in their homeland. With this influx, the Rohingya population in Bangladesh exceeded one million, including those who had been living there since 1992. According to UNHCR, Bangladesh is hosting the largest refugee settlement in the world, and after seven years, this crisis has become one of the world's largest protracted refugee crises. Although the history of Rohingya migration to this region dates back to 1784, Bangladesh as a nation first faced this major challenge in 1978, followed by subsequent influxes in 1992, 2012–2016, and most notably in 2017, with smaller influxes occurring in between.

This section presents the Rohingya crisis and management till the largest influx in 2017.

Makeshift Camp

The registered Rohingya camp and extended makeshift camp before 2017





There are significant differences in camp structure and assistance between pre and post influx in 2017.

Camp life, celebration and activities (pre 2017)



INFLUX 2017

The Rohingya Exodus in 2017 refers to a significant wave of Rohingyas from Myanmar's Rakhine State to neighboring Bangladesh. Bangladesh decided to open the border to shelter them. Almost 700,000 Rohingyas entered Bangladesh seeking refuge. They fled with whatever they could manage, and took shelter initially in open places, under the open sky. Later, they were taken and provided shelter by setting up new camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf- two sub-districts under Cox's Bazar.



Despair

A Rohingya man in utter despair watching his home being burnt down in Myanmar.



Uncertainty

Rohingyas wait to cross the border into neighboring Bangladesh.



A Long Walk

Rohingyas walked miles towards the safe destination- Bangladesh.



Moving Ahead

"I could only manage to save my mother's life. I carried her on my shoulders and walked for the past three days until we crossed into Bangladesh. I had to leave everyone else in my family behind in Rakhine." -A Rohingya man



Towards Hope

A Rohingya man entered Bangladesh with his child and belongings he could salvage.



Children were one of the worst sufferers of the influx. These vulnerable group had to bear sufferings, malnutrition and subsequent trauma from those days.





Many Rohingyas entered Bangladesh with marks of severe injuries.



Distressed and exhausted Rohingyas took shelter by the roads and in free space under the open sky.

Destination

Rohingyas on arrival started settling freely wherever they could.





Misery

Upon arrival, the traumatized Rohingyas contemplated on misery of the past and the uncertainty of the future.

INITIAL RESPONSE

The Host Community of Bangladesh is often considered the first to support the distressed Rohingyas. The warm welcome from them showcased the compassionate attitude of Bangladesh as a country towards the Rohingyas. Before the organized response could start, the Host Community responded with whatever they had - food, water, clothing and other essential items. Moreover, aids started to pour in from all over the country. RRRC office, DC office, Bangladesh Army and other government stakeholders started to function from day one to organize the relief management and planning to set up camps and involve international humanitarian organizations. Some voluntary groups also extended their support for treatment and management. These initial responses laid the foundation for the camp management we find today.



First Response

A group of Bangladeshi local youth is providing fresh water to newly arrived Rohingyas.



Bangladeshis provided support in various forms- from providing vehicles to transport Rohingyas from border areas to the camps, to food assistance.





First Assistance

Bangladeshis came forward with food support to assist the hungry and distressed Rohingyas.



Free emergency medical assistance were provided to the new arrivals by various volunteer organizations.





Following the influx, the Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP) started registering the newly-arrived Rohingyas and provided them registration cards. Bangladesh Army listed Rohingyas for food distribution.



CAMP SETTLEMENT

From the initial point of shelters, they were moved to Ukhiya and Teknaf Registered camps and nearby makeshift camps. RRRC office, with the support of UNHCR, IOM and other humanitarian organizations set up new camps for the Rohingyas, along with the previous camps. currently, there are 33 camps in Cox's Bazar, of which 31 are for FDMNs or the newly arrived Rohingyas. Of these 31 camps, 25 are in Ukhiya and the rest are in Teknaf. Bangladesh government successfully relocated camp 23 in 2021 from Shamlapur to Mega Camp in Ukhiya, becoming as the first camp in this response to be relocated.



New Beginning

The newly arrived Rohingya families are moving through the makeshift settlements, established before 2017, in search of places to set up their shelters.



From Shelters to WASH facilities- everything was provisional at the beginning, far from what we may find today.



Local people and voluntary organizations also provided bamboo poles and polythene sheets to Rohingyas for temporary shelters.





Thousands of acres of reserved forestland were cleared, and millions of trees were cut to construct more than two hundred thousand spontaneous temporary shelters.





As the Rohingyas settled freely, they made temporary toilets with tarpaulins, and collected water from natural sources to meet their WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) needs.





In early days, camp dwellers cut down trees indiscriminately from the nearby hills and even uprooted those to collect firewood for cooking. Shockingly, everyday 10 football field-sized area was cleared. Later RRRC office convinced UN agencies to provide Rohingyas with LPG as alternative cooking fuel.



Initial bridges, drains, slopes and shelters in the camps



Connectivity

Engineers Construction Battalion (16 ECB) of Bangladesh Army constructed main roads to and within the camps to establish improved communication and easier transportation.



Drain and canal digging, with the support of humanitarian organizations, to create rain water passage during monsoon to prevent flash flood.



Evolution

The number of shelters kept on growing, built using temporary materials.



COORDINATED HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Bangladesh presents a unique model of humanitarian operation in the world. Government officials, known as CiCs directly supervise the day-to-day activities in the camps from the field office. RRRC office is the centre of camp administration, management and coordination. Under their supervision and with the support of District and Upazila administration, Bangladesh Army, APBn, District Police, Civil Surgeon's Office, DPHE, LGED and other relevant government organizations, the humanitarian agencies like UNHCR, IOM, WHO, WFP, UNICEF, UN Women, FAO and other UN organizations, alongside ISCG, provide support to the Rohingyas and implement life-saving activities, through and along with 150+ NGOs and INGOs. Under the leadership of the Government of Bangladesh, the humanitarian response has supported hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas since August 2017.



In addition to leading and coordinating the humanitarian response, RRRC office, with the support of UNHCR and IOM, initially devoted much of its time in setting up the camps, mapping its potential area and demarcating the boundary in a planned way.





Temporary distribution points were set up in different locations of Rohingya settlement areas for distribution of food and non-food items.



RRRC briefing Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General and Jim Yong Kim, World Bank Group President on camp settlement, during their visit to Rohingya camps in 2018

“

“At the World Bank Group, we are committed to doing more to make sure that the Rohingya, and all of us, can see justice. We are all Rohingya.”-*Jim Yong Kim, World Bank Group President*

”

“

“The Rohingya refugee crisis is a humanitarian and human rights nightmare. I thank Bangladesh for its generosity in hosting the refugees.”- *Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General*

”



Md. Jashim Uddin, Foreign Secretary



Md. Kamrul Hasan ndc, Secretary, MoDMR

Senior government officials visit camps regularly to promote innovativeness and understand camp context for proper policy innovation.



Faruk E Azam Bir Protik, Honorable Adviser, MoDMR



Dr. Khalilur Rahman, Honorable High Representative to the Chief Adviser on Rohingya Crisis and Priority Issues Affairs

Community Engagement to understand their grievances is the key to Rohingya Camp Management. Rohingya community, from children to elderly, get opportunity to share their views and get acquainted with Government's high officials during their visits.



Frequent coordinated field visits by RRRC and UN officials as part of site planning (2017).





The Government of Bangladesh and UNHCR at currently conduct the joint verification process of Rohingya registration, using biometrics. A unique ID (ProGres Card) is the ultimate product of this joint exercise.





Biometric registration forms the foundation for providing food and other assistance to the Rohingyas. Until the registration process is completed, tokens are issued as a temporary measure. Below is a sample of an individual ID card for Rohingyas.





Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH) awareness and activities in camps.





WaSH activities are a significant part of humanitarian assistance. The construction of toilets, handwashing facilities, desludging, and safe water collection are all integral to life-saving measures.





Camp cleaning activities and campaign in camps, involving Rohingya volunteers.





Necessity

Rohingya woman collecting food rations through General Food Assistance (GFA) from WFP outlets.



WFP e-voucher shops provide food items, including fresh foods like vegetables, fish, chicken etc. in the camps.





Life Saver

Ready-to-use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) are provided to malnourished children as a life-saving essential supply at the nutrition centres.



Regular vaccination programme and maternal health service activities in health facilities





Healthcare services are provided by humanitarian organizations, under the Health Sector, led by WHO, Civil Surgeon of Cox's Bazar and RHU of RRRC Office.





Isolation centre and extensive health services during outbreak of COVID-19 helped to keep the mortality rate low.



Nutrition sector supports malnourished children in camps. Nutrition support and supplements are provided to avoid the extreme danger of severe or moderate acute malnutrition (SAM and MAM).



Awareness sessions in camps. From door-to-door to centre-based sessions on Protection, GBV and Nutrition





Community mobilization and awareness are important tools to involve Rohingyas in disseminating messages and decision making.





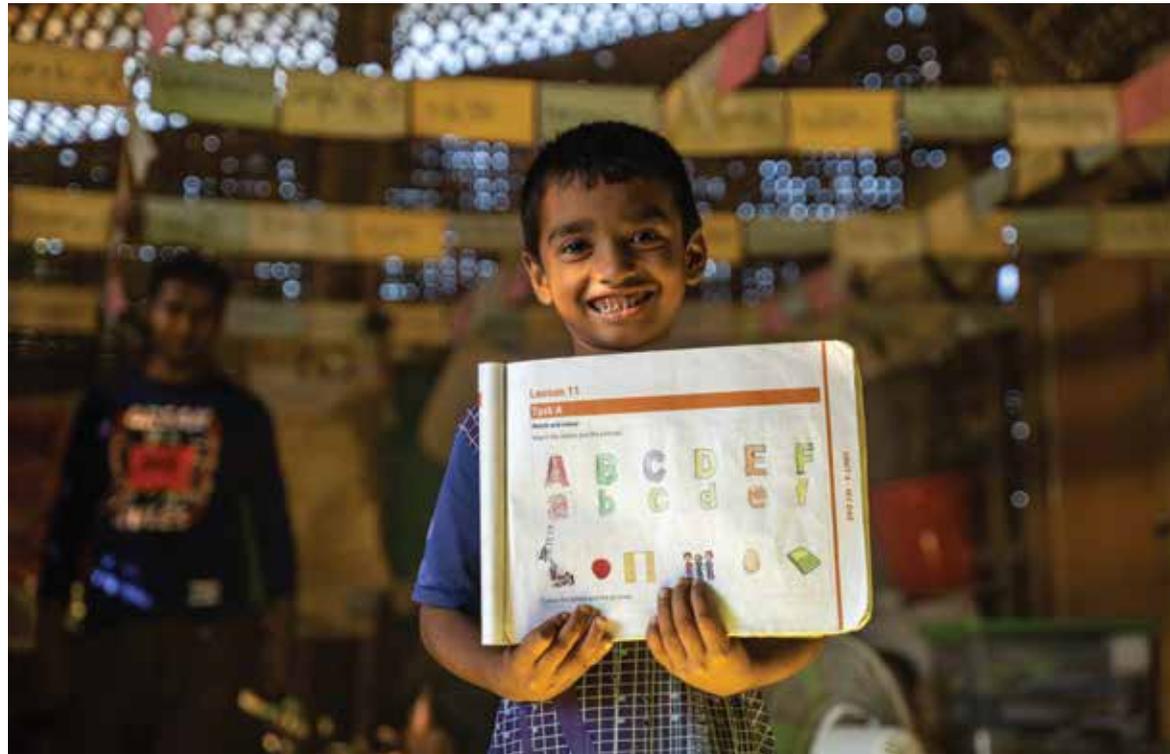
Restoration

Reforestation initiatives, taken by RRRC office and supported by FAO, WFP, UNHCR, IOM, BRAC, Caritas, BAT and other agencies in camps is a major activity to restore the biodiversity lost during settlement.



Myanmar Curriculum (MC) is currently being implemented in the camps, with children getting education up to Grade 11.





Around 400,000 Rohingya children are attending Learning Centres for education under Myanmar Curriculum. There are around 6,000 learning facilities in camps.



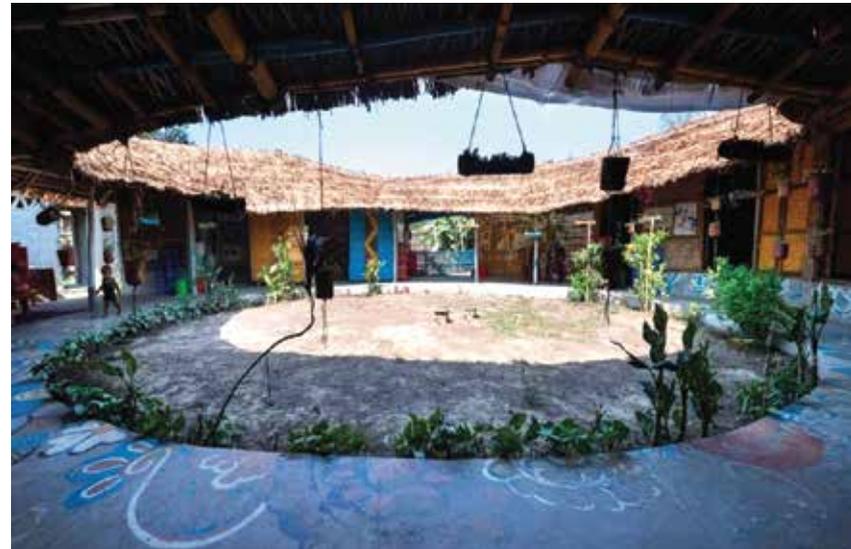


Visit

HM Queen Mathilde of Belgium spent some time with the children in an LC during her visit in camps



Safe spaces for women and girls serve as women friendly and regularized place for recreational activities, painting, drawing, hand-stitching and sewing, as well as Gender-Based Violence awareness-raising sessions and distribution of life-saving dignity kits.





Own Space

Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) are established to facilitate learning, development and well-being of the Rohingya children. One of the earliest CFSs can be seen here.



Creativity is fostered at CFS as children express their potential and artistic outlook through different activities.





Capacity building, skills development sessions, discussions with community and awareness programmes and campaigns are conducted for the Rohingya community to ensure their participation in community mobilization.





Cooking Fuel

With the introduction of LPG by UNHCR, IOM, FAO and WFP, the rate of deforestation to gather fuel for cooking plummeted.



Rohingya women participate in the production of jute bags and other jute items in the camps, as part of livelihood and skills development initiatives.





In the camps, the Rohingya community engages in livelihood activities to enhance their skills, whether it is in gardening or volunteering in a soap factory.





Various volunteering and livelihood activities by the community.



RRRC & CIC

In this unique model of Camp Administration, Coordination and Management, RRRC represents the government and leads the activities in camps. Camp-in-Charge (CIC) is the government focal in camps on behalf of RRRC. The office of the RRRC was established in 1992. CiCs are in charge of the camps, and coordinate with humanitarian organizations, NGOs, and the Rohingyas to ensure proper service provision.



RRRC participates in different meetings, seminars and workshops to present government views and policies regarding Rohingya crisis.





Interaction with the community



Briefings and Meetings.

On the top left: H.E. Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights of the USA

On the top right: H.E. Mr. Ramis Şen, Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye, and Dr. Umit Naci Yorunmaz, Vice President of TİKA

On the bottom: H.R.H. Victoria Ingrid Alice Désirée, Crown Princess of Sweden





CiCs interact with stakeholders, especially the community, for day-to-day operations.





RRRC, Additional RRRC and CiCs are known for their multitasking skills, from disaster mitigation, law and order management to coordination in repatriation process.



DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Fires, landslides and monsoon floods- all these phenomena have become quite common in the camps. The distressed people face calamities almost throughout the year and struggle for their survival. However, they are not alone in this defence, as the government and humanitarian organizations work alongside to mitigate the impacts of disasters. From the community, trained Cyclone Preparedness Program, (CPP) Disaster Management Unit, (DMU) volunteers under MoDMR and led by CiCs, are the first responders to any such disaster, ensuring safety during disasters and supporting with rebuilding activities.



Daily life in the Rohingya camps is often disrupted by disasters such as landslides, fires, and flash floods.





Destruction

One of the most frequent disasters in the camps is fire. During the dry season, fires originating from accidents or natural sources spread very fast. Although most fires are small in scale and are easily contained, some fires break out in a large scale. The people who lost everything once, lose everything again to the fire.



In addition to firefighting units, emergency response volunteers are also trained on quickly responding to fire and other disasters. However, they do not always succeed, and the fires engulf hundreds of shelters.



Landslide is another common occurrence in camps. It not only causes damage to camp settlements, but also claim lives of innocents on its way.





From disseminating warnings to going on household visits to create awareness, volunteers are the first responders during any disaster.





Vigilance of the community, particularly the volunteers, plays a key role in disaster mitigation.





Coordination among the government, the UN, other humanitarian organizations, and community members plays a key role during disasters, and in post-disaster management phases.





Firefighter

Firefighting units remain ready in camps to respond to any fire breakouts.

BHASANCHAR

In 2020, a separate camp in Bhasanchar was established for Rohingyas. The relocation in Bhasanchar started in December that year. With the prospect of diversified livelihood projects, Bhasanchar can accommodate up to 100,000 Rohingyas altogether.



Activities and lives of Rohingyas in Bhasanchar





Rohingya children and youth participate in traditional and non-traditional games.





Livelihood opportunities for Rohingyas



REPATRIATION

The Rohingyas currently seeking refuge in Bangladesh dream of a safer future. They hope for a better future for their children, and a life of dignity. But above all, they dream of going back home to their own land. The call for repatriation from Bangladesh to Myanmar underscores the pressing need for a safe, voluntary, and dignified return for Rohingyas to their homeland.



Myanmar delegations, including Dr. Win Myat Aye, Myanmar's Minister of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement, have visited Bangladesh and the Rohingya settlements several times, to meet with Rohingya leaders. A delegation also visited for verification purposes and interviewed selected Rohingya families for so-called "Pilot Project".





Myanmar delegates addressed Rohingya community about their decisions and process for repatriation. Bangladesh government also extended support, working as a bridge during these sessions.



Identity

Recognition and Identity- the most crucial demands of Rohingyas



* We want our
recognition
(as Rohingyas) to be
restored.

However, no repatriation could be carried out in the last 7 years. Rohingyas staged protests and peaceful rallies to express their strong wish to go back home. They urged the international community to ensure safe and dignified return to their homeland.



LIFE, CULTURE & CAMPS: FACE OF THE COMMUNITY

Uncertainty, struggle, hope- these are the essential components of a common day in camps. Lives rarely change color here. However, even in this, Rohingyas celebrate their culture, befriend their struggle, pray for their future, and find happiness among small things. From dawn till dusk, their faces and lifestyle narrate stories unheard of.

Survivor



Summer





Elderly people, who may never get a chance to return home in their lifetime, look for hope in the future generation.



Hopelessness

Many Rohingya women and girls live with trauma of violence and persecution committed back their home. Their physical injuries may have been attended to, however the mental trauma haunts them every moment, leading to sorrow and hopelessness.



Women in Rohingya camps represent more than half of the community. They work both inside and outside their shelters. The photos depict their sorrows, helplessness and revived hope in camps.





Culture

Rohingya artists singing their traditional song at Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre (RCMC)



The artifacts and tools, related to Rohingya culture and tradition, are displayed in RCMC.





The traditional game of Rohingyas is Chinlon (Sepak Takra, Photo at the top). Other games like Football are also played. The first ever Rohingya Football League (RFL) in 2024, organized by RRRC office, symbolizes their passion for sports.





The government and humanitarian staff share the joy of festivals with the community in the camps.





Children are the most vulnerable in the camps, as the camp life is never suitable for the future of a community.





The distressed life of Rohingyas find hope in their future generation.





Faces of the Future





Joy & Hope

More than half of the population are children and many of them are too young to remember their life back at Rakhaine. However, they are the future of the community. Our commitment is to keep their hopes alive.



Children go to Learning Centres and also study religion, focusing on the study of the Quran and the teachings of Islam in Moktob.



Precaution

Even though camps are densely populated, spreading of COVID-19 was successfully restricted due to rigorous protocols and safety measures.

PANORAMA: PERMANENT TEMPORARINESS

Although these camps are temporary shelters of Rohingyas, the modification of camps and their structures over the years are noteworthy. Facilities and camp designing has become a significant factor over the years to accommodate and provide services to the growing population of the community. The views of Rohingya camps are a matter of wonder, sorrow and hope. Everything here is for the future- a fertile land of inspiration, for returning to their homeland, with skills and dignity.

Camp View

Initial Phase (January 2018)





Camp View Present Days

With the combined initiatives by government and other organizations, greenery restoration is in progress.

Camp View Teknaf

Water reservoir- lifeline of Teknaf camp dwellers
where ground water becomes scarce.





Camp View
Mega Camp
Mega Camp area in Ukhiya



A Faecal Sludge Management (FSM) plant in the camp (01), Shantikhana WFS (02), Eco Shed (03)





WFP hub at Modhuchora (01), Ukhiya Specialized hospital (02), and a CIC office (03)





Omni Processor (01), WFP food shop (02), and bamboo bridge (03)



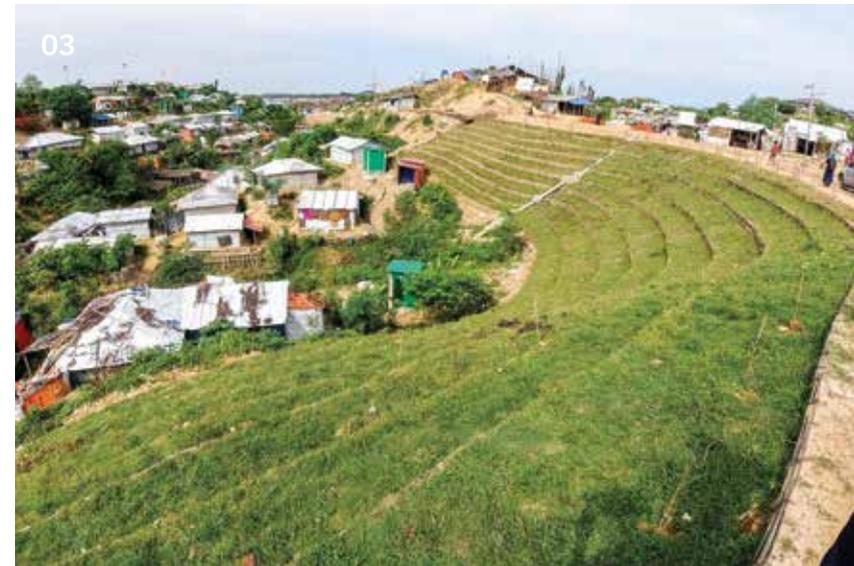


Excitement

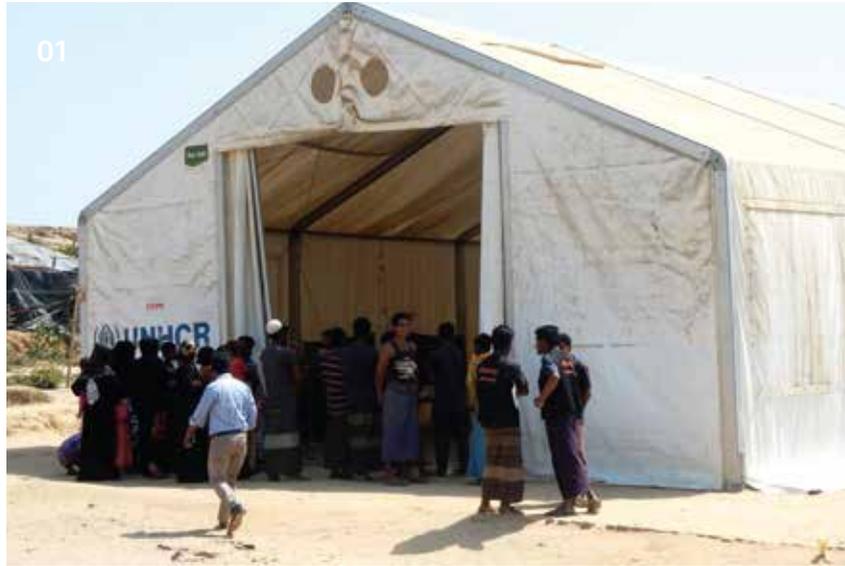
Breathtaking final match in the maiden Rohingya Football League (RFL), organized by RRRC office with the support of TIKA.



Army Road (01), RCMC (02), and treatment plant (03)



Stairs (01), Solar Panels (02), and Slope Stabilization in camps (03)



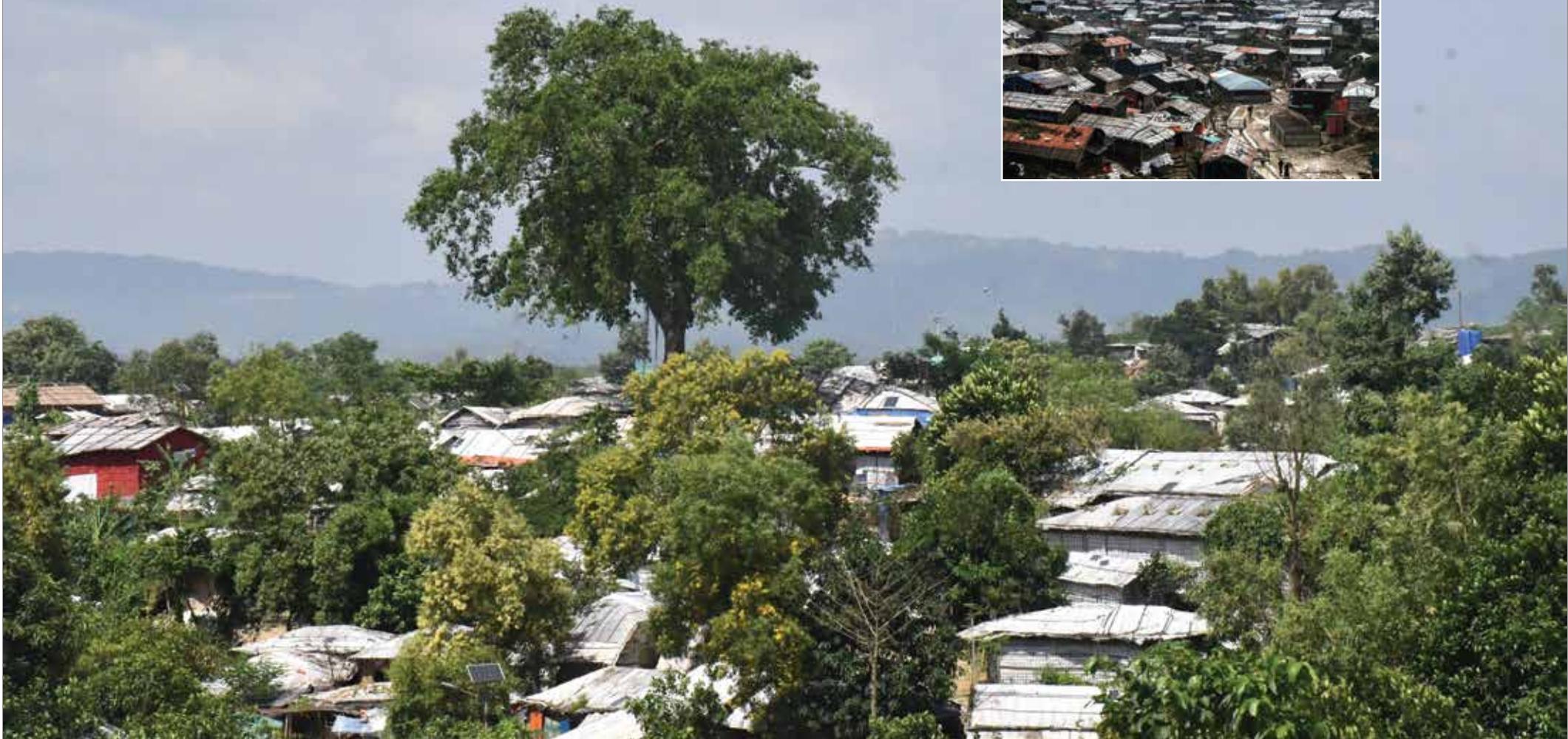
UNHCR Distribution Points (Initial Phase)
(01&02), Bazar in camps (03)



Bhasanchar Cluster House (01), WFS in Camp 25 (02), and Kutupalong Transit Centre for repatriation (03)

Transformation

Reforestation and preserving greenery are the motto behind all activities in the camps, aimed at restoring biodiversity.





Statelessness

Life goes on even in the camps.

Voice of Hope

Rohingyas do not give up hope, and they keep on voicing their wish to go back home through various platforms, believing that someday it shall happen.



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PHOTO CREDIT

UNHCR/Ikteruddin Md. Bayzid for “History of Rohingya influx in Bangladesh: Pre 2017” Section and others, Abdullah AL Mamun Akash (Documentation Officer), Md. Fahim Chowdhury (Community Mobilization Assistant) and Sayeed Abdullah AL Mamun (Administration Assistant) from RRRC Office.

Page- 12, 13, 14-(1st Photo), 15-(2nd Photo), 20, 23, 24, 60, 104- Suman Paul.

Page-9, 10, 11, 14 (2nd and 3rd), 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 38, 41, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 62, 63, 64, 78, 81, 83, 84, 85, 87, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 99, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 120, 122- Saikat Mojumder, CEO & Photographer, Into Positive.



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