

‘What choice do we have?’

After escaping prosecution in Myanmar, Rohingya women face odyssey of misery

AFP, Kutupalong

Stay in a squalid refugee camp -- hopeless, starving, and made to feel a burden -- or leave, risking death, rape, human trafficking and months at sea to reach a husband you've never met.

This is the bleak choice many Rohingya women, already scarred from fleeing violent persecution in Myanmar, are now facing.

As conditions deteriorate in increasingly overcrowded Bangladeshi refugee camps, desperate parents are marrying off their daughters to Rohingya men thousands of kilometres (miles) away in Malaysia.

Wed by phone or video apps, the girls have little say in such unions and rely on occasional calls to build a relationship with their new partners as they begin treacherous journeys to reach them.

"My parents kept asking me to find a way to reach Malaysia -- living with them, I was just an extra mouth to feed," explained Jannat Ara, talking about her marriage to Nur Alam, a Rohingya man who lives in Kuala Lumpur.

She has seven other siblings, and the family had to share and survive on twice-monthly 25-kilogram (55-pound) rations of rice.

Ara has never met the man she married via phonecall from the refugee camp but, after mounting pressure from relatives to seek him out, decided to leave.

She is one of the thousands of Rohingya, who are stateless and cannot travel abroad legally, forced to put their faith in husbands they don't know and the people smugglers paid to transport them.

Her clandestine route took her via rickshaw to port, and from a small boat to a packed, dilapidated trawler.

But Malaysia denied it entry and "after floating at sea for two months and seeing many people die, we returned to the place where we started," the 20-year-old told AFP from the Bangladeshi camps.

Arranged marriages are part of Rohingya custom, but in the Bangladeshi refugee camps, families have little income and struggle to afford the traditional dowries required.

Virtual weddings and international betrothals can seem an ideal solution.

At just 18, Somuda Begum was regarded as getting "too old" for marriage by relatives, and while proposals came from some families within the camp, they all



In this file photo taken on September 7, 2020, Rohingya migrants look on following their arrival by boat in Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia.

PHOTO: AFP

demanding "a lot of money".

"My parents couldn't fix my marriage as my old father barely had any money to pay for a wedding. So he thought it would be better to send me to Malaysia instead," she said.

Begum, one of 11 children, was shown a photo of her prospective husband before the pair wed via video call -- her in-laws and an imam were present in her family's shack for the "ceremony", her fiancé on screen with his friends.

Begum's ageing father, Mohammad Ledu, entrusted her to a middleman who pledged that for 30,000 taka (\$350) he would take her to Malaysia. Instead, he took the money as soon she reached the boat and left her.

She never reached her husband -- turned away from its destination, the vessel drifted at sea for two months before the Bangladeshi coast guard rescued them.

Charities warn that families in camps can be easily tricked, mistaking human traffickers and pimps for matchmakers offering brighter futures.

The increase in attempts at sailings is driven by desperation at life in the camps, where refugee numbers have swelled to almost one million since a 2017 military

crackdown in mostly Buddhist Myanmar, said Chris Lewa, director of NGO the Arakan Project.

Just over 100,000 Rohingya are currently registered with the United Nations in Muslim-majority Malaysia, but as they are denied citizenship, they remain in limbo.

The Rohingya men who have settled have few chances to assimilate -- as refugees they cannot legally work and so must take low-paid construction labour. And while they may share a religion with about 60 percent of the population, they frequently face discrimination and harassment.

Most are unable to find local wives due to the stigma attached to marrying a refugee with few prospects or social standing.

This shortfall of brides is driving the demand for women and girls from the Bangladesh camps.

Lonely men turn to relatives and matchmakers in the camps to organise unions, paying middlemen between \$2,000 and \$3,000 to smuggle in women by land and boat.

"We do worry about this, but there is no other way. There is no other option since we don't have passports," Rashid said.

Janu, whose husband is in Malaysia,

insisted she knew of the dangers before embarking on the journey to join him.

"I know it is dangerous but I took the decision," the 18-year-old said, adding that while her marriage was arranged by her parents, she went voluntarily to start a new life.

But her journey turned out to be the stuff of nightmares.

Told the trip would take a week, she endured a 200-day ordeal as her crowded fishing trawler was blocked from landing in Malaysia and smugglers refused to release those on board until their relatives agreed to make extra payments.

"The captain told my husband that if he did not give money, he will torture and kill me and throw me into the sea," she said.

As a growing number of passengers perished and, with no hope of reaching their intended destination, the smugglers eventually cut their losses and dumped their human cargo in northern Indonesia.

Janu and about 300 others who survived the voyage now find themselves in another refugee camp in Lhokseumawe city but are hopeful that, once travel curbs are eased, they will be able to quietly cross to neighbouring Malaysia.

She says her fiancé sends money when he can, but conceded that "he has no plan to come here for me".

Glorene Das, executive director of Tenaganita, an NGO that works with migrants and refugees in Malaysia, said that girls and women remain vulnerable even if they reach their destination.

The community is "very closed" and, while little formal data exists, she added that domestic abuse is "most definitely" a concern because the women have few rights and little access to outside help.

Amerah, 18, has not seen her fiancé -- who is a construction worker in Malaysia -- since she was six. Their courtship was via WhatsApp and social media before she attempted to travel to join him.

The teenager expected seven days of sailing -- instead she and her fellow passengers were adrift for seven months. Many did not survive.

Eventually, the traffickers abandoned them in northern Indonesia.

Listless and alone, having swapped one refugee camp for another, Amerah has little hope for the future.

"I don't know when I will get married. I do almost nothing here," she said. "I will follow whatever I am told to do."

RECORD CLIMATE DISASTERS IN ASIA-PACIFIC

Millions pushed to 'breaking point'

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION

Asia-Pacific has faced a record number of climate-related disasters in 2020, affecting tens of millions of vulnerable people already hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Red Cross said yesterday.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said it had responded to 24 climate-linked crises this year in the world's most disaster-prone region - up from 18 in 2019 - including floods, typhoons, extreme cold and drought.

"Covid-19 has of course aggravated these impacts, with a taste of the compound shocks we're expecting in a changing climate," Maarten van Aalst, director of the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"The pandemic has not only complicated evacuations and disaster response, but also aggravates the economic impact of disasters, especially for the poorest people," he added.

Southeast Asia was the IFRC's busiest region in 2020, with 15 emergency responses to disasters including severe floods, storms and landslides in the Philippines and Vietnam that affected more than 31 million people.



Women have suffered a triple blow, she added, with the pandemic fuelling violence at home just as many lost their jobs and had to look after out-of-school children and elderly relatives while the country was pummelled by destructive storms.

Last year, more than 94 million people in the Asia-Pacific region were hit by climate-related disasters, with the area experiencing twice as many emergencies as the Americas or Africa, according to the IFRC's latest World Disasters Report.

The total number of people affected in 2020 has not yet been released.

Van Aalst said countries had become better prepared and equipped to save lives but were still failing to protect the livelihoods of vulnerable communities struck by disasters.

He cited the example of Cyclone Amphan that battered India and Bangladesh in May. Mass evacuations before the storm made landfall prevented a large number of deaths.

But the impact on economic well-being was harsh, especially for the poorest, he noted, with total damages estimated at more than \$13 billion.

Pakistan okays chemical castration of sex offenders

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan has approved the chemical castration of rapists as part of sweeping new legislation sparked by outcry over the gang rape of a mother on a motorway.

New laws approved by President Arif Alvi on Tuesday will see rape cases expedited through the courts and create the country's first national sex offenders register.

"The provision of the chemical castration of repeat as well as first-time sex offenders... was added in the Anti-Rape Ordinance 2020", the president's office confirmed Wednesday.

Pakistan is a deeply conservative and patriarchal nation where victims of sexual abuse often are too afraid to speak out, or where criminal complaints are frequently not investigated seriously.

In September, protests erupted after a mother was raped on the side of the road in front of her children when her car broke down near Lahore.

Prime Minister Imran Khan responded

by calling for the chemical castration of rapists, which involves using drugs to reduce a person's libido.

Khan had said the worst sex crimes should be punishable by public hangings but added this could impact trade with partners that oppose the death penalty, such as the European Union.

Rights activists have warned the provision of chemical castration could affect Pakistan's international human rights obligations.

Under the new laws, special courts will be established to try cases of rape and sexual abuse against women and children, which must be completed within four months.

They also establish anti-rape cells across the country for conducting initial investigations, and medical examinations within six hours of filing a police complaint -- while abolishing an invasive medical examination known as the two-finger virginity test for rape victims.

The laws come into effect immediately but must be ratified by parliament within three months.

HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE IN 2021

Yemen most at risk

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Yemen is the country most at risk of a humanitarian catastrophe in 2021, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has warned, marking the third year running the war-ravaged nation has earned the grim recognition.

Continued conflict, widespread hunger and a collapsing international aid response threaten to dramatically worsen the current crisis in Yemen next year, the IRC said yesterday.

Tamuna Sabadze, the aid agency's director for Yemen, said support was critical, now more "than ever".

The IRC's watchlist for 2021, ranked from one to 10, comprised: Yemen; Afghanistan; Syria; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Ethiopia; Burkina Faso; South Sudan; Nigeria; Venezuela and Mozambique. A further 10 countries were also on the list but were unranked in terms of gravity: Cameroon; the Central African Republic; Chad; Colombia; Lebanon; Mali; Niger; Palestine; Somalia and Sudan.

Financial support for the country is drying up, with UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock warning in November Yemen had received less than half of the emergency funds it needed this year.

According to the UN, 80 percent of Yemen's 30 million people need some form of aid or protection. About 13.5 million Yemenis currently face acute food insecurity, including 16,500 people living in famine-like conditions, UN data shows.



Farmers shout slogans as they block the road during a protest against farm bills passed by India's parliament, at Delhi-Noida border on the outskirts of Delhi, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

5m more Afghans will need help in 2021: UN

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations expects to have to help five million more Afghans in 2021 than this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic and an increase in conflicts, a UN official said Tuesday.

The need is increasing and "funding is urgently needed," the acting assistant secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, Ramesh Rajasingham, said during a press conference.

The rise in need is the result of "the Covid-19 crisis, increased conflict and displacements" of the population, he said. "We are going from a situation where we have (asked) for support to target around 11 million people in 2020 to what we estimate will be almost 16 million people next year," Rajasingham said.

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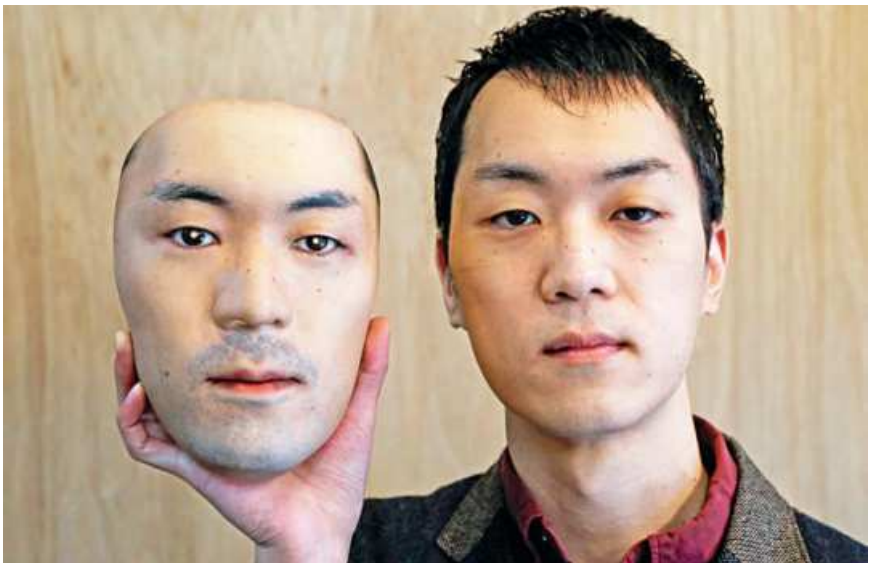
প্যানেল আইনজীবী তালিকাভুক্তি পুনঃবিজ্ঞপ্তি

ইসলামি আরবি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের জন্য প্যানেল আইনজীবী তালিকাভুক্তির নিমিত্ত নির্ধারিত পদে অভিজ্ঞতাসম্পন্ন আইনজীবীর নিকট হতে পূর্ণাঙ্গ জীবনবৃত্তান্ত সহ দরখাস্ত আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে (পূর্বে যারা আবেদন করেছেন তাদের পুনরায় আবেদন করার প্রয়োজন নেই) :

ক্রম	পদের নাম	অভিজ্ঞতা
১.	প্যানেল আইনজীবী (সুপ্রীম কোর্টের আদালত বিভাগে পদাধীশ/পরিচালনার জন্য)	মহামালা সুপ্রীম কোর্টের অ্যাডভোকেট জিস্টিসনে মামলা পরিচালনার কাজে ন্যূনতম ৫ (পাঁচ) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা। সরকারি/আইনজীবী/সেসকোরি প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্যানেলে কাজ করার অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পন্নদের অগ্রাধিকার দেওয়া যেতে পারে।
২.	প্যানেল আইনজীবী (সুপ্রীম কোর্টের হাইকোর্ট বিভাগে পদাধীশ/পরিচালনার জন্য)	মহামালা সুপ্রীম কোর্টের হাইকোর্ট জিস্টিসনে মামলা পরিচালনার কাজে ন্যূনতম ৭ (সাত) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা। সরকারি/আইনজীবী/সেসকোরি প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্যানেলে কাজ করার অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পন্নদের অগ্রাধিকার দেওয়া যেতে পারে।
৩.	প্যানেল আইনজীবী (জেলা ও দায়রা জজ আদালত ডাকার অফিসে পদাধীশ/পরিচালনার জন্য)	জেলা ও দায়রা জজ আদালতে মামলা পরিচালনার কাজে ন্যূনতম ৭ (সাত) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা। সরকারি/আইনজীবী/সেসকোরি প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্যানেলে কাজ করার অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পন্নদের অগ্রাধিকার দেওয়া যেতে পারে।

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Shuhei Okawara, 30, owner of mask shop Kamenya Omote, holds a super-realistic face mask based on his real face, made by using 3D printing technology, in Tokyo, Japan yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Wearing someone else's face

Hyper-realistic masks to go on sale in Japan

REUTERS, Tokyo

A year into the coronavirus epidemic, a Japanese retailer has come up with a new take on the theme of facial camouflage - a hyper-realistic mask that models a stranger's features in three dimensions.

Shuhei Okawara's masks won't protect you or others against the virus. But they will lend you the exact appearance of an unidentified Japanese adult whose features have been printed onto them.

"Mask shops in Venice probably do not buy or sell faces. But that is something that's likely to happen in fantasy stories," Okawara told Reuters.

"I thought it would be fun to actually do that."

The masks will go on sale early next year

for 98,000 yen (\$950) apiece at his Tokyo shop, Kamenya Omote, whose products are popular as accessories for parties and theatrical performance.

Okawara chose his model, whom he paid 40,000 yen, from more than 100 applicants who sent him their photos when he launched the project in October. An artisan then reworked the winning image, created on a 3D printer.

Initial inquiries suggest demand for the masks will be strong, Okawara said.

"As is often the case with the customers of my shop, there are not so many people who buy (face masks) for specific purposes. Most see them as art pieces," Okawara said.

He plans to gradually add new faces, including some from overseas, to the lineup.

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শেখ হাসিনার মূলনীতি
এাম শহরের উন্নতি

Memo No. 46.02.4100.000.07.001.18.95

Dated: 15-12-2020

e-Tender Notice No. 15/2020-2021 (2nd Call)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following works are given below:

Sl. No.	Package No.	Name of scheme	e-TID No.	Tender method	Last date & time of selling document	Last date & time of submission documents
1.	CW-43c/RCIP/JSR	Improvement of Road from Jashore Khulna RHD Bhangagate Badamtala-Amtala GC via Moricha Nawly Bazar Road from Ch. 3650m to 24584m Total Length 20934m Effective length 20909m under Abhoynagar Upazila District-Jashore. Road ID-241042007. Salvage cost of this package is Tk 974767.00 which is fixed amount and it will be paid by the contractor. (2nd Call)	487061	OTM	17/01/2021 up to 14.00pm	18/01/2021 1 up to 13.00pm

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and also from E-mail: xen.jessore@lged.gov.bd or call to **0421-68951**. For any queries interested tenderer are requested to communicate with the undersigned during office hours.

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E-mail: xen.jessore@lged.gov.bd

GD-2005