



PHOTO: AFP/INDRANILMUKHERJEE

The uphill task to receive an education in the camps

The expulsion of Rohingya students from local schools in Teknaf and Ukhia reveals the extent to which children and their parents in the camps struggle to access quality formal education

MALIHA KHAN

On a recent visit to the camps, a young Rohingya boy, who proudly wore a bright blue UNICEF backpack, took us to his school. It was only a little larger than the bamboo huts in which the refugees live. Called 'learning centres' (note that these cannot even be called 'schools'), these are the best hope of an education for children growing up in the camps.

Rohingya children learn English and Burmese (learning Bangla is also strictly forbidden by the government) and math. As of March, 1,991 such centres are operating in the camps, where 180,293 children are en-

rolled. However, over 39 percent of children aged three to 14 don't attend the learning centres and 97 percent of those between 15 and 24 have no access to any education facility, according to the 2019 joint response plan compiled by humanitarian agencies.

Rohingya refugees have no access to formal education in the camps. Learning centres, run by the UN and NGOs, are dismissed by many parents as places for their children to learn rhymes and songs and play, and not where they can receive a quality education.

Bored, many children drop out. The

local government and UN agencies were reportedly at loggerheads last December, with the former accusing that the latter were essentially inflating enrollment numbers for donor funding, by failing to track dropouts.

Refugees who have money pay for private tuition in the camps—largely religious education or learning a Burmese curriculum from educated refugees. Madrasas, in particular, flourish in the camps. After exhausting all options in the camps, some parents have gone the extra mile to obtain papers, most notably birth certificates, to get their children enrolled in local schools. Studying in local schools means that Rohingya students can then sit for national examinations and potentially go on to college.

Following a government notice instructing secondary schools in Teknaf and Ukhia to expel Rohingya children, many of these students have been expelled since January. Human Rights Watch viewed the government notice—which detailed the students' names, their camp addresses, and schools—and interviewed 13 expelled refugee students. Most of them were in grades nine and 10, nearly at the end of their high school education, when they were expelled.

Rohingya students were publicly called out in classrooms, their hard-won ID cards and books taken from them, and told to leave. 64 students were expelled from Leda High School alone, the area in Teknaf being host to Rohingya refugees since the early 1990s—in the formally registered camps nearby and informal camps which grew up around them.

The expelled students come from the families of registered refugees in the Nayapara and Kutupalong camps, run by UNHCR and local authorities. They were declared refugees by the Bangladesh government back then and are protected under international law (as opposed to the more than 900,000 refugees who have arrived in Bangladesh since, the largest numbers having arrived in August 2017). These children were able to study up to class eight in the registered camps.

Under international law, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child (which Bangladesh is signatory to), children have the right to education—free primary education as well as access to secondary education and higher education.

At first, non-formal schools in the registered camps allowed children to receive some education following the Burmese curriculum. Since 2007, an adapted version of the Bangladeshi school curriculum was allowed in these camps by the government upto grades five (subsequently, extended to grade seven). After class eight, these students have no other option.

Continued to page 4

"MY HOME IS AS GREAT AS THE PADMA BRIDGE TO ME"

COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT

BSRM
building a safer nation

Whether for your home or the Pillars of Padma Bridge
We forge steels with the same expertise