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AUSTRALIA’S ROLE IN PREVENTING THE NEXT ANDAMAN SEA REFUGEE CATASTROPHE

Ten years ago, people smugglers abandoned more than 8,000 refugees and migrants to be stranded for weeks in the Andaman Sea. An estimated 370 people died.



Food supplies dropped by a Thai army helicopter to boats of Rohingya refugees drifting in Thai waters off the southern island of Koh Lipe in the Andaman sea in May 2015 (Christophe Archambault/AFP via Getty Images)

The Andaman Sea has long been a major route for those fleeing persecution and violence in Myanmar and Bangladesh, but because it lies between Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, responses have often been ad hoc. Inconsistency and inadequacy defined both national and regional actions to the 2015 crisis. Without clear protocols or agreements, neighbouring countries pushed boats back or looked the other way. It became one of the deadliest episodes of forced migration that Southeast Asia has seen in recent memory.

The incident was a confronting wake-up call. Governments quickly realised they were ill-equipped to respond effectively to future refugee crises. Indonesia and Thailand, in particular – two of the region’s key refugee-hosting countries – began reforming their policies, recognising the need for better systems to manage refugee flows while balancing national security and humanitarian obligations. In Indonesia, the crisis prompted the issuance of Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 125 of 2016, the only regulation in the region that defines “refugee” in accordance with international conventions. It established formal procedures for treating asylum seekers and refugees, including a duty to rescue those stranded at sea and the introduction of alternatives to immigration detention.

A decade on, the Andaman Sea crisis still casts a long shadow. What happens next will show whether the region has truly learned its lesson – or is doomed to repeat it.

■ Source: lowyinstitute.org

ARAKAN ARMY BANS YOUNG PEOPLE FROM LEAVING RAKHINE

The move comes two months after the group’s imposition of conscription in the state



The Arakan Army (AA) announced last week that it is prohibiting young people from leaving Rakhine State under its newly imposed military service regulations.

The announcement comes two months after the introduction of the group’s National Defence Emergency Provision, which requires men in the state aged 18 to 45 and women aged 18 to 25 to serve in the AA for two years.

In a statement released on May 22, the AA said that those eligible for conscription will be prohibited from travelling outside the state until a stable military situation is achieved.

Only patients whose lives are at risk if they are unable to travel will be exempted from the ban, the statement said.

■ Source: myanmar-now.org



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ROHINGYA REFUGEES
AT THE MERCY OF
CLIMATE CHANGE



The Kutupalong refugee camp is seen after a storm in Cox's Bazar on June 10, 2018 in this image obtained from social media. PHOTO: K MARTON/SAVE THE CHILDREN/VIA REUTERS

The Rohingya, a persecuted Muslim minority from Myanmar, face an escalating crisis in Bangladesh's overcrowded refugee camps. More than a million Rohingya have fled genocide and violence in Rakhine State since 2017, seeking refuge in Cox's Bazar, where they live in sprawling, makeshift settlements. These camps, among the most densely populated spaces on earth, are increasingly vulnerable to climate change.

Cyclones, floods and earthquakes threaten the region, while rising sea levels shrink Bangladesh's landmass. Without urgent international investment in disaster preparedness, infrastructure and early warning systems — and without successful repatriation — the Rohingya will be among the first and most devastated victims of climate vulnerability.

■ Source: arabnews.com

THE HISTORICAL NEXUS BETWEEN
COX'S BAZAR AND THE ROHINGYA
REFUGEES

Historically, all countries in the world have borders with the same ethnic groups living on both sides of the border and Rohingya is no exception

While classical literature extensively documents the historical trajectory of Cox's Bazar, contemporary discourse often overlooks its intrinsic association with the Rohingya refugees. It is pertinent to acknowledge that the annals of Cox's Bazar are inherently intertwined with the Rohingya refugee narrative.

The incursion of Burmese forces into Arakan in 1784 precipitated a mass exodus of Rohingyas and Rakhine ethnic communities towards the Ramu region (present day Cox's Bazar), marking the inaugural instance of refugee influx into Cox's Bazar. Subsequently, in response to this humanitarian crisis, the British colonial administration dispatched Captain Hiram Cox to facilitate the settlement of displaced Rohingya and Rakhine ethnic people, in 1798. The eponymous nomenclature Cox's Bazar thus derives from Captain Hiram Cox, symbolizing the historical intervention undertaken to address the exigencies of displaced refugees. Prior to the year 1784, the geographical region presently identified as Cox's Bazar Sadar, inclusive of its municipal boundaries,

alongside the Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts wherein contemporary refugee settlements are positioned, exhibited a notable absence of substantive human habitation.

This area was characterized by sparse population density, with only a limited number of individuals inhabiting the territory corresponding to the current Ramu and Chakaria sub-district. It is to be noted that the territorial expanse comprising the entirety of the Chittagong Division, encompassing Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, Bandarban, Khagrachhari, Feni, Lakshmipur, Comilla, Noakhali, Brahmanbaria, and Chandpur districts, along with the present-day Rakhine state, was historically under the jurisdiction of Arakan -- an autonomous domain distinct from Myanmar and Bengal.

The settlement and agricultural development of the entire Cox's Bazar district and the present-day Rakhine state of Myanmar were undertaken by the antecedents of the Rohingya populace. The vast tracts of land in these regions were previously uncultivated and sparsely inhabited.

■ Source: dhakatribune.com