



Scenes from the camps, pix courtesy Sahat Zia Hero, r4rStories and Hafiz Abdullah Qureshi

A word from us...

Hi and welcome to Rohingya Stories Volume 4! We're excited to take you to **Cox's Bazar**, Bangladesh, in this volume, the world's largest refugee settlement, where an estimated 1.24 million people are packed into sprawling makeshift settlements and overcrowded camps..

Battered by the recent Cyclone Mocha, the massive fire in March 2023, scattered incidents of violence and of course, the uncertainty and fear omnipresent in refugee life, there are still green shoots of hope in **Md Ibrahim Holi Ullah's** home garden. The father of six tends to his vegetable garden against all odds – a very viable solution to reduce food insecurity in refugee camps. His work has been documented by **Sahat Zia Hero**, a Rohingya photographer who has used his lens to become a voice for his community. He has founded **Rohingyatographer**, a magazine run by young shutterbugs whose images tell the truth about camp life.

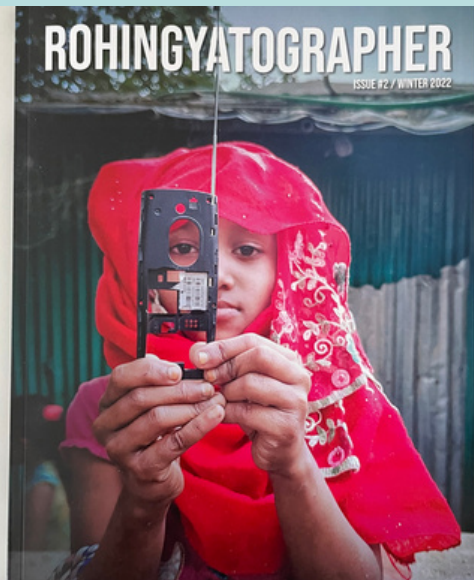
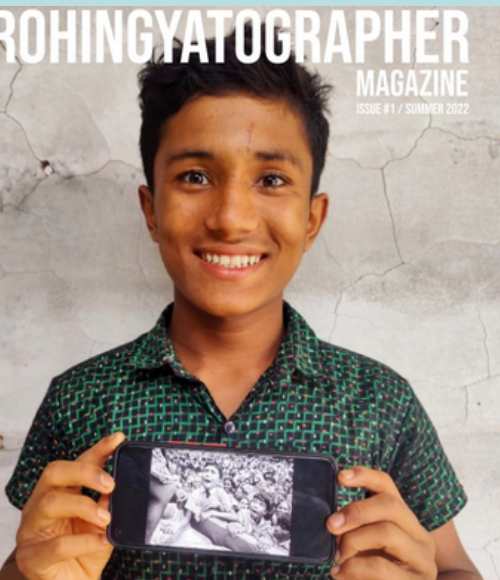
Meanwhile, in Haryana, India, **Faizul Rahman** says he fled his homeland with just the skill in his hands – and is now a successful bamboo worker. His story shows that marketing traditional skill sets could enrich refugees as well as their hosts. And, last, we have a heartwarming story of **Minara Begum**, a young widow, herself married at 14 and a mother a year later, who has campaigned to ensure that at least her camp is child marriage free. All these stories illustrate once more, the human face and innate resilience of the Rohingya – and that they are much more than the sum of their miseries, genocide and displacement.

Rohingya Stories is a monthly newsletter from the Rohingya Human Rights Initiative. It aims to showcase our people's resilience, and great potential to become economically, socially and culturally productive members of our host country, India. Rohingya Stories will humanize the Rohingya to a world that has seen them as nameless victims for too long.

YOU CAN HELP!!

Friends in the media, please help us amplify these inspirational faces, voices and stories. We can help you **access** the camps, **interview** respondents and share our **photos** too!

Contact us
r4rstories@gmail.com



Sahat Zia Hero (centre) and the Rohingyatographer magazine, pix courtesy Sahat Zia Hero, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

“I don't want the world to forget our faces...”

“The camera doesn't lie – that's why photographs are the best medium to show the world the reality of our lives,” says Sahat Zia Hero. When this 29-year-old photographer from Arakan State (Myanmar) fled to Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar in 2017, he lost his precious camera phone. As soon as he was able to buy another one, he began taking pictures of refugee life in Bangladesh. Soon, he founded **Rohingyatographer**, a photo magazine with a collective of 20 Rohingya photographers (including four women) in Cox's Bazar, which raises awareness about the Rohingya community and their situation, while also providing a historical record of their lives and experiences in the refugee camps.

They face many challenges in their quest for **self expression and documentation** of their displaced life, other than chasing after funding, which is why only two volumes of Rohingyatographer have been published since 2022. “Often people are too fearful to consent to being photographed,” he says, “too traumatised to trust.” Other times, their photographs have been lifted from their social media handles, and reused without permission. “It's hard for us to negotiate such problems,” he says.

Yet, this collective has found personal solace behind the lens, and their camerawork has an intimacy that only comes from shared lived experience. When outsiders

Check out their work on
<https://www.rohingyatographer.org>

The magazines cost 45 USD (print) and 15 USD (e-book) and the proceeds from the sales go directly to all the participating photographers!

take photographs in refugee camps, Zia feels that they are never there long enough to allow their subjects to become comfortable with them. “Often, they come with preconceived ideas and take photographs that fit with those ideas,” he says.

They are working on their third volume on food culture. “This has become more urgent now that the UN is reducing their expenditure on food supplies to our camps,” Zia says. “With our smartphone cameras, we need to document these issues and become the voices of our community...”

Contact us r4rstories@gmail.com



Md Ibrahim Holi Ullah, pix courtesy Sahat Zia Hero

Kitchen Gardens in Refugee Camps

Md Ibrahim Holi Ullah, a Rohingya refugee and father of six, found solace in planting a small **vegetable garden** around his shelter in the overcrowded Refugee Camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Forced to flee Myanmar due to the horrific genocide in 2017, Ibrahim was determined to provide his large family with fresh food, despite the limited space for cultivation. With his farming expertise acquired back in Myanmar, his garden is a lifeline amid the **dwindling food rations** provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) to Rohingya refugees.

Ibrahim procured seeds and plants from local farmers. His garden yielded a modest amount of vegetables, which helped sustain his family's daily meals. However, his hopes were soon shattered as his hard-earned crops fell victim to ravenous mice and destructive insects. Lacking the means to purchase pesticides, Ibrahim was unable to protect his garden from these relentless pests. Furthermore, he could ill-afford fertilizers to enhance the soil's productivity. The recent Cyclone Mocha, which ravaged the Refugee Camp and left tens of thousands of Rohingya Refugees without adequate shelter or enough food, also destroyed some of Ibrahim's plants. Ibrahim shoulders the responsibility of providing for his family alone, without any additional sources of income. The Rohingya refugees face dire circumstances, exacerbated by the fact that 62 percent of them are children already grappling with malnutrition due to poor access to food and

Rising Food Insecurity in Cox's Bazar

The World Food Program has reduced its monthly food vouchers from \$12 to \$10 per refugee, and will bring this further down to \$8 on June 1. Olivier De Schutter, U.N. special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, visited Rohingya camps in Bangladesh in May 2023 and said the international response to support the refugees is "grossly insufficient."

human-caused climate change. "If only I had a larger space, I could cultivate a substantial garden and provide well for my family by selling the surplus vegetables in the market," Ibrahim laments. "Even protecting my small garden has become a daunting task. The food crisis looming over the Rohingya Refugee Camp threatens to exacerbate the already dire conditions faced by its inhabitants, placing them in an extremely vulnerable position. Small vegetable gardens like Ibrahim's could provide a partial but viable solution.

Pix and words:

Sahat Zia Hero, Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh

Contact us r4rstories@gmail.com



Minara Begum and some of the girls in her camp, pix courtesy R4R Stories

How a Rohingya Camp Said NO to Underage Marriage

At the Rohingya camp in Kalindi Kunj a group of teenage girls studies together. “It’s very different from how things were when I came to this camp in 2012,” says Minara Begum (30). “All these girls would have been married then.” She knows how hard **child marriage** can be – she was married at 14 and had her first child at 15.

“To be married when one doesn’t even understand adulthood is terrible,” she says. “It’s even worse when the children come...” After coming to India, for a long time the community was unaware of the Indian law against child marriage.

In 2021, when Minara was elected as one of the three leaders of her camp, she actively began working to change this. “We’ve banned underage marriage in our camp,” she says. As a leader, Minara has to greenlight every new marriage and she checks the refugee cards of the bride and groom to confirm their ages. “Four-five families didn’t listen to us,” she says. “We simply called the Delhi police’s women’s cell to intervene.”

Today, there are about 15 teenaged girls in her camp, and there hasn’t been a child marriage in her camp for the last three years. Now widowed, Minara counsels families to let their daughters study. “What happened to me is done,” she says. “I don’t want anyone else to go through the same experience now!”

A SILENT PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

Child marriage, defined as marriage of a child under 18 years of age, has been seen to accelerate during conflicts and insecurity. Although it may be a survival strategy for girls and their families, it is a silent public health issue which violates their human rights and disempowers them psychologically, socially and financially. The health consequences of child marriage include:

*Increased risks to women’s health as deliveries from child marriages are often too soon, too close, too many, or too late.

*Increased risk of sexually transmitted infections and cervical cancer

*Increased risks to progeny: underage mothers have a 35% to 55% higher risk of delivering a preterm or low-birthweight infant. The infant mortality rate is 60% higher for under-18 mothers.

Contact us r4rstories@gmail.com



Faizul Rahman, pix courtesy: Faizul Rahman

Traditional Skills, Modern Livelihoods

“When I came to India in 2011, all I brought was the **skill in my hands**,” says Faizul Rahman. He comes from a long line of carpenters, who have now unfortunately scattered because of the genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar. “Back home, we’d work with bamboo as it grows abundantly in Burma and is commonly used for building houses there,” he says. “It was only after I came to India that I realised that my work is unique.” Look at some of Rahman’s creations, and it is easy to see why he is in great demand. “Bamboo houses require much more skilled labour than basic cement constructions,” he says. “And **Rohingya-made structures** are stronger, and much more artistic than local ones.”

From intricately woven mats for the walls, to sturdy double storeyed structures, Rahman has built them all. He is working on two projects and says that he could have had much more work if he had a national ID. “Without a bank account and Aadhar card, people tend not to trust us,” he says.

To showcase his talent and (probably vent his frustration too), Rahman has built a mosque in his camp, an elegant bamboo structure with sturdy scaffolding and tightly woven, highly decorative cane walls. He also trains other young boys in this craft. “After learning under me, 15 young men have started their own businesses,” he says proudly.

What is MADE51?

MADE51 is an innovative, market-based model developed by UNHCR that addresses one of the less-discussed impacts of the global refugee crisis: the **loss of craft talent and tradition**. It identifies refugees with artisanal skills, develops artisan groups and connects them to local social enterprise partners. MADE51 convenes strategic partners from the private sector to curate collections, create marketing opportunities and make products available for sale to consumers worldwide.

The idea? To create the world’s first ecosystem for **refugee-made products**, in which consumers buy refugee-made products that directly enable refugees to earn and contribute to their host country’s economy. The MADE51 marketplace showcases the best of refugee skills and shows how, if given the opportunity, they can become positive contributors to societies and economies.



LIKE THESE STORIES? HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO...

Pitch them to your editors! We know refugee stories are often hard to research as their camps are not easily accessed, but we've got you covered with contact details of respondents, a lovely photo bank (free to use with attributions) and even a list of subject matter experts. Contact us on r4rstories@gmail.com for details...

Write and tell us what you'd like to know more about the Rohingya. We'd love for this to be a conversation!

Check out the back issues of ROHINGYA STORIES here:
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/rohingya-stories/>

Join our media broadcast group on Whatsapp if you're not already on it, and recommend it to your journo friends. Email us with your number and we'll add you.

Connect with us on social media

<https://www.facebook.com/rohingya>

<https://twitter.com/ROHRIngya> and <https://twitter.com/R4RStories>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/rohingya-r4r-a95095153/>

And definitely follow **Solutions Journalism Network**, the amazing independent non-profit that advocates a more nuanced, evidence-based mode of reporting on the responses to social problems. This newsletter has been made possible because of their generous LEDE FELLOWSHIP 2023!