

Millions of refugees face harsh conditions across South Asia

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13 July 2018

While immigrants and asylum-seekers are being persecuted in Europe, the US and Australia, millions of refugees face no less brutal treatment by governments across South Asia.

The most prominent group of refugees in the region at present are the hundreds of thousands of Burmese Rohingya people in Bangladesh. Housed in rudimentary and highly vulnerable dwellings, the refugees have no real protection from the monsoon season, which has already begun. The influx of Rohingya was in response to escalating violent attacks and atrocities carried out by the Burmese military and Buddhist supremacist forces over the past 12 months.

According to news reports late last month, at least 200,000 people confront the danger of major landslides and floods in the Cox's Bazar, near the Burma-Bangladesh border. Over 700,000 Rohingya refugees have entered Bangladesh since August 2017, bringing the total number of Rohingya in Bangladesh to one million.

Steve McAndrew, head of Emergency Operations of the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Society at Cox's Bazaar, told a press conference at the United Nations on June 25 that conditions in the Bangladesh refugee camps are among the worst he has seen in twenty years.

"Already, we are starting to see some real damage [from monsoon rains] in the camps," McAndrew said. "Many of the shelters are starting to collapse. Some of the roads are impassable. Latrines are starting to fill up with floodwaters. The floodwaters are breaching through pathways where people walk and kids go to school every day." McAndrew said he expects conditions to worsen as the rains continue through August.

World Health Organization spokesman Christian Lindemeier has also warned about ongoing health dangers. The monsoon rains and flooding, he said, are "increasing the risk of water-borne diseases such as

diarrhoea, hepatitis, and vector-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue and chikungunya."

Rohingya refugees are not only in Bangladesh. According to some reports, about 40,000 fled to India and are living in appalling conditions in the slums of the country's major cities, such as Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad. Over 5,000 refugees are also living in Jammu and Kashmir, India's Muslim-majority state.

Rohingyas in India are subjected to anti-Muslim persecution instigated by the ruling Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) and its associated Hindu extremist groups. BJP ministers and other Hindu chauvinists have falsely accused the Rohingya refugees of sheltering Kashmir separatist terrorists allegedly funded by Pakistan, and have demanded their expulsion.

In February this year, Kulvinder Gupta, a senior BJP figure and then speaker of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, accused the Rohingya of being involved in a separatist suicide attack on the Sunjuwan army camp in which six soldiers, one civilian and three attackers were killed. These unsubstantiated allegations, and similar claims made by Hindu chauvinists, are being used to bolster calls for the expulsion of all Rohingya refugees.

Tens of thousands of Chakma and Hajong refugees are also living in India. They fled Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill districts about five decades ago following attacks by security forces and Islamic fundamentalist thugs. According to the 2011 census, over 47,000 Chakmas reside in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh alone, with many more living in India's north-eastern states and in West Bengal.

While India's former Congress government claimed that there were more than 10 million "illegal" migrants from Bangladesh, the current BJP administration falsely insists that there are 20 million, in a bid to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment.

Thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils forced to flee pogroms and the racist war on the island are also living in impoverished conditions and under constant police surveillance in refugee camps across south India. Over 130,000 Sri Lankan Tamils fled Sri Lanka between 1983 and 1987, during the first stage of Colombo's war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

In the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, there are over 60,000 refugees in more than 100 camps and almost 38,000 in other settlements. An estimated 7,000 reside in Kerala and 35,000 in Karnataka.

Two rival Tamil Nadu bourgeois parties—the ruling AIADMK and the opposition DMK—have shed crocodile tears over the plight of Sri Lankan Tamils in order to garner votes from the state's Tamil population, which has centuries-old family and cultural ties with Sri Lankan Tamils. Alternating AIADMK and DMK state governments, however, have ensured that the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees continue to confront unhealthy conditions and, despite repeated promises, are not granted Indian citizenship.

On top of the 300,000 internal refugees already in Pakistan, the country is home to over 2.7 million Afghans. Only half of them are registered.

The influx of Afghan refugees began in 1979, when the US and Saudi Arabia provided financial and military assistance to Islamic terror groups against the Soviet Union-backed Afghanistan government. These numbers dramatically increased following the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Washington's ongoing intervention is part of its wider geo-strategic plan to bring Central Asia and the Middle East under its control.

The harsh conditions of life for millions of asylum seekers and refugees across South Asia is a damning indictment of the imperialist powers and the regional ruling elites.



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