

Bangladesh turns away 1,500 refugees from Myanmar
By The Associated Press
12 June 2012

Bangladesh on Tuesday turned away three boats carrying 1,000 Rohingya Muslims fleeing violence in neighboring Myanmar, bringing to 1,500 the number of refugees blocked in recent days, officials said.

"They have been chased away," police official Jahangir Alam said by phone from Saint Martins Island in the Bay of Bengal after the three boats attempted to approach the shore of the island. "We are keeping our eyes open so that nobody can enter Bangladesh illegally."

Violence between Buddhists and minority Muslims in western Myanmar have left at least 12 people dead and hundreds of homes burned since Friday. Bangladesh earlier said it sent back 11 boats with about 500 Rohingya Muslims aboard in the past three days.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said at a news conference in the capital, Dhaka, that it was not in Bangladesh's interest to accept any refugees because the impoverished country's resources already are strained.

Some still slipped into Bangladesh, and one refugee allegedly wounded by gunfire from Myanmar security forces died Tuesday at a hospital in Chittagong, a doctor said.

Kala Hussain, 50, died from a stomach wound and two other Rohingyas are being treated for bullet wounds, said Anisur Rahman, a doctor at Chittagong Medical College Hospital. He said police took Hossain's body.

Rahman said the condition of one of the injured was critical with bullet injuries in his head while another 20-year-old man is out of danger. They came from Maungdaw, where the mass violence broke out Friday, Rahman said, citing hospital records.

Meanwhile, A.N.M. Nazim Uddin, the chief government official in bordering Teknaf sub-district in Cox's Bazar, said several camps of police and border guards have been set up to prevent any violence in Bangladeshi frontier villages. Both Rohingya refugees and Buddhist Rakhines live in the area.

Myanmar considers the Rohingya to be illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and denies them citizenship. Bangladesh says Rohingya have been living in Myanmar for centuries and should be recognized there as citizens.

In the 1990s, about 250,000 Rohingya Muslims fled to Bangladesh in the face of alleged persecution by the military junta.

Later, Myanmar took back most of them, leaving some 28,000 in two camps run by the government and the United Nations.

Bangladesh has been unsuccessfully negotiating with Myanmar for years to send them back and, in the meantime, tens of thousands of others have entered Bangladesh illegally in recent years.