

Bangladesh frets about population boom in Rohingya camps

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Bangladesh has launched a birth control drive in its overcrowded Rohingya refugee camps, an official said Tuesday, fearing a population boom would worsen the humanitarian crisis unfolding along its border.

Family planning teams have been deployed to offer advice and distribute condoms and other contraceptives throughout its ill-equipped camps, which have been overwhelmed by the arrival of 420,000 Rohingya refugees since August 25.

Authorities have already identified 70,000 new or expectant mothers among the latest influx from Myanmar, and fear without intervention the population pressures could worsen in coming months as the crisis drags on.

"They have six, seven, eight, nine, 10 children," said Pintu Kanti Bhattacharjee, head of the government's [family](#) planning department in Cox's Bazar district where the camps are located.

"We are very worried. If they are here for another six months to a year, another 20,000 children will be born."

Mothers with newborns, pregnant women and enormous families with more than 10 children are not uncommon among the camps.

Bangladesh is building a large new camp to accommodate hundreds of thousands of these new arrivals fleeing violence across the border, but

space is stretched very thin.

Whole families are sleeping outdoors and squatting in farmland, roadsides and vacant buildings, with competition for food, shelter and other essentials intensifying as the number of new arrivals climbs.

Bhattacharjee said officials on the ground were "counselling" new Rohingya arrivals about [family planning](#), a new concept for many, and trying to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Officials on the ground were distributing contraceptives to men and women with mixed results, he added.

Mujibur Rahman, a Rohingya man in the Kutupalong [refugee](#) camp in Ukha, was open to the condoms and [birth control pills](#) he received in a handout.

"These will definitely help us," the 25-year-old told AFP.

But others were not so sure.

"I thought it was a food pack," said Mohammad Mostafiz, a 40-year-old Rohingya man, who has two wives and 14 children.

"It is our religious duty to have [children](#). Using medicines to prevent childbirth is a sin. I don't think my family will use this stuff."

Bangladesh has been praised for its efforts to handle the growing crisis, but aid groups warn the situation remains dire.

Police on Tuesday cleared squatters and dismantled shanties around Kutupalong, one of the largest camps, where the roads are choked with refugees and long queues of traffic snake from aid centres.

Police warned those squatting on roadsides they could be arrested if they refused to move. The government has been trying to herd refugees into designated areas, fearful that nearby cities could be overwhelmed if they are left unchecked.

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