



12 May 2020

Analyst Journal 2/20 - Observations of Rohingya Migrants' Movement within the IFC Area of Interest (AOI)

Disclaimer: The assessments in this report are made by the Information Fusion Centre and do not reflect the views of any government.

OVERVIEW

1. In April 2020, the IFC recorded 5 incidents of attempted irregular human migration (IHM) undertaken by Rohingya migrants via the sea. This Analyst Journal aims to provide an overview of the increased Rohingya migrants' movement within the IFC AOI.

SUMMARY OF FACTS

2. The details of the incidents observed are as follows:

a. The first incident involved the interception and detention of 202 personnel onboard a fishing trawler off Langkawi by the Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) on 5 Apr 20. The 199 Rohingya migrants and 3 Myanmar nationals (suspected boat crew) were arrested.

b. The second incident involves the capsizing of a boat with 132 Rohingya migrants onboard within the Bay of Bengal on 7 Apr 20. The Bangladesh Coast Guard rescued 77 personnel and 15 bodies were retrieved, with 40 personnel still missing.

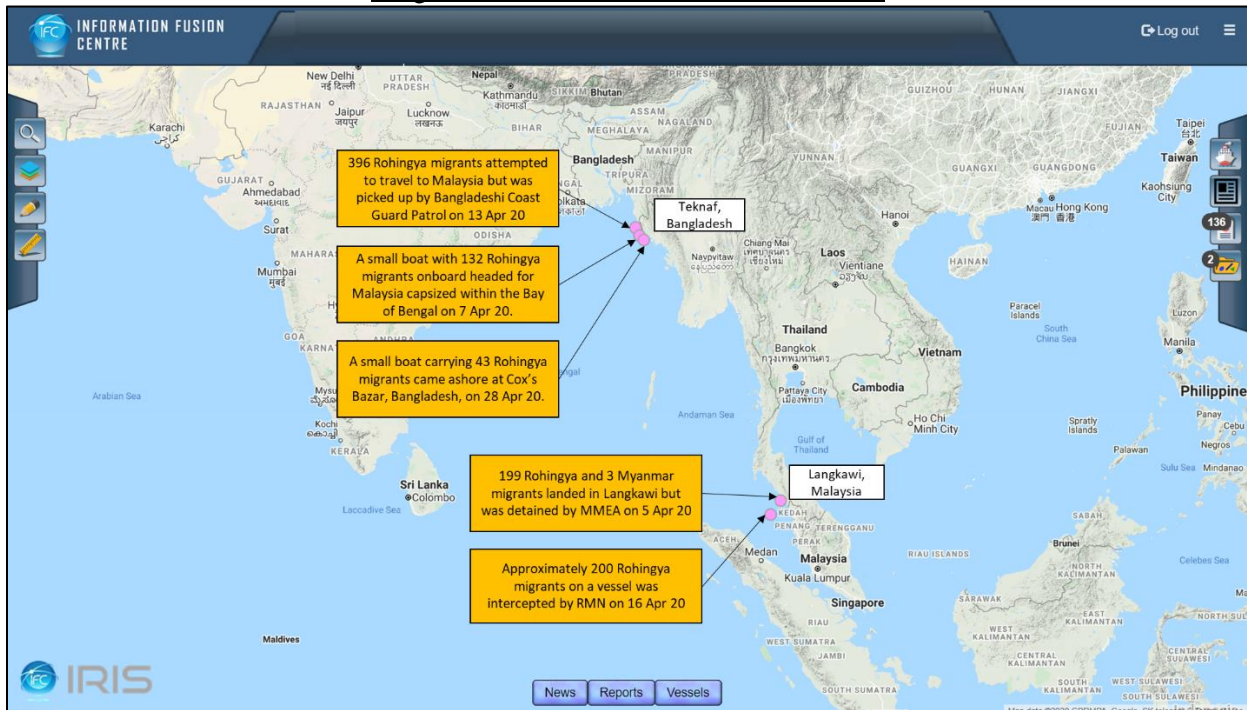
c. The third incident involved the rescue of 396 Rohingya migrants by the Bangladesh Coast Guard on 13 Apr 20, after being adrift in a fishing

trawler within Bangladeshi waters; Further investigation by authorities revealed that the fishing trawler was headed for Malaysia, and its estimated approximately 32 personnel had died at sea while the vessel was adrift.

d. The fourth incident involved the interception of more than 200 Rohingya immigrants onboard a fishing trawler by the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN), after it was detected by a Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) maritime patrol flight in international waters west of Langkawi (adjacent to Malaysian EEZ) on 16 Apr 20. The RMN provided the vessel with essential supplies before it was turned back at sea due to the prevailing COVID-19 countermeasures undertaken by Malaysian authorities.

e. The fifth incident involved a small boat carrying 43 Rohingya migrants coming ashore at Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh, on 28 Apr 20. They were believed to have disembarked from one of the larger vessels carrying migrants at sea.

Diagram 1: Chartlet of Incidents’ Locations



PATTERN OF LIFE

3. Movement Pattern. This pattern of migration by the Rohingya migrants observed in the recent incidents is consistent with past trending recorded by IFC and

the UNHCR’s data. The IFC has observed that Malaysia is the “preferred” destination by the Rohingya migrants; of the 29 incidents involving Rohingya migrants recorded between 2018 to 2019, 21 incidents stated Malaysia as the destination, with Indonesia and Thailand as the stated destinations for the remaining 8 incidents. This could be attributed to Malaysia being regarded as an attractive location by migrants as it is a Muslim-majority state located near Myanmar, as well as the large Rohingya refugee community (over 100,000 personnel) in Malaysia, previously admitted into the country on humanitarian grounds.¹

Diagram 2: Interceptions at Sea from Jan 2018 till Apr 2020

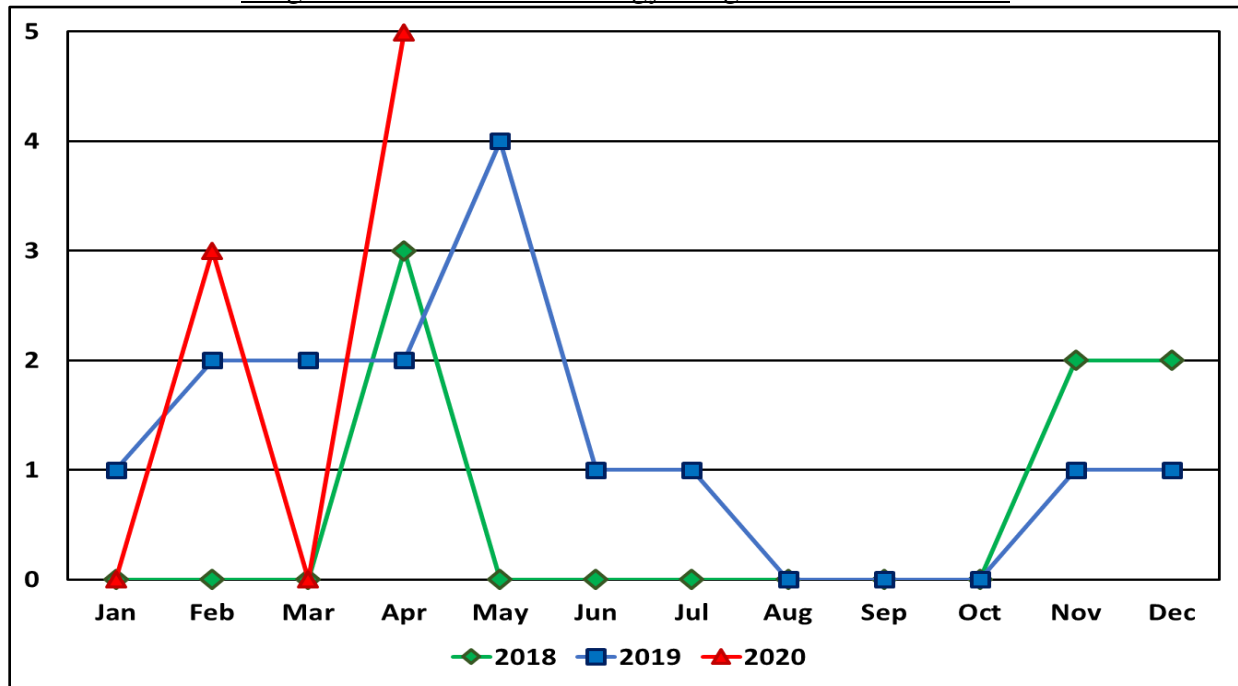


4. Movement Period. IFC has also observed that migration via maritime routes tend to occur between November to May and will reduce between July to October during the monsoon season, due to dangerous conditions at sea. The monsoon’s heavy rainfall typical brings about landslides and flooding which severely damages infrastructure in the refugees’ camps, limiting their access to basic amenities, as well as increasing health risks such as water contamination and disease outbreaks. The effects of the monsoon on refugee camps possibly increases the impetus for the

¹ Despite Malaysia not being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol, the Malaysian government has been admitting Rohingya migrants into the country on an ‘ad-hoc’ basis.

Rohingyas to seek better livelihoods elsewhere when conditions are favourable at sea. Of the 29 incidents involving Rohingya migrants recorded by the IFC from 2018, most incidents occurred between the months of November to July. Monsoon season in the Bay of Bengal in 2020 has been forecasted to start at the end of April and is not expected to ease until June/July.

Diagram 3: Incidents of Rohingya Migrants Detected at Sea



ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS BY MARITIME ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

5. Regional maritime enforcement agencies have generally stepped up enforcement efforts, which includes enhanced surveillance and deployment of assets at sea.

ASSESSMENT

6. The increased of Rohingya migration attempts in the month of April 2020 is possibly due to the increased risk of COVID-19 in the refugee camps and the probable deteriorating conditions expected due to the forecasted monsoon season in the Bay of Bengal.

7. It is also likely that people smuggling organisations may have used the increased risk of COVID-19 and the deteriorating weather conditions to encourage

people to pay the necessary money and take the risk in travelling to other countries in the region including Malaysia by sea before the monsoon season commences.

CONCLUSION

8. The observations presented above on the movement of Rohingya migrants within the IFC AOI indicates a significant increase in the volume of migrants compared to previous years. As such, the IFC will continue to monitor the movements of Rohingya migrants via the maritime domain and invites ship masters and operators to participate in the Voluntary Community Reporting (VCR) program to promptly report any fishing vessel(s) carrying large numbers of people onboard.