

Health

# Malnutrition soaring among Rohingya children in Bangladesh

## Rohingya children caught up in a catastrophe

GENEVA: Life-threatening levels of malnutrition have risen dramatically among Rohingya refugee children who have fled Myanmar for Bangladesh, the United Nations warned Friday. The UN children's agency said preliminary data indicated a full 7.5 percent of the children crammed into one of the camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district were at risk of dying from severe acute malnutrition. More than 600,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar's Rakhine state since late August during military operations that the United Nations has described as ethnic cleansing and the world's most acute refugee crisis.

Around half of them are children. "It's very worrying to see the condition of children who keep arriving," UNICEF spokesman Christophe Bouliere told reporters in Geneva after a recent trip to the camps. The agency and its partners are already treating more than 2,000 acutely malnourished children at 15 treatment centers, and are in the process of setting up six additional centers. AFP correspondents on the ground also witnessed scores of obviously malnourished children near treatment centers in several refugee camps in Cox's Bazar.

"He cannot eat enough food as he suffers from pneumonia, fever and diarrhea," Rohingya woman Fahima Bibi said as she emerged from one centre with her two-year-old grandson Mohammad Javed, who is suffering from severe acute malnutrition. UNICEF said its preliminary findings were based on a nutrition assessment conducted last week of children under the age of five in 405 households in the Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar.

**Catastrophe**  
"The Rohingya children in the camp, who have survived horrors in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State and a dangerous journey here, are already caught up in a catastrophe," UNICEF Bangladesh Representative Edouard Beigbeder said in a statement. "Those with severe malnutrition are now at risk of dying from an entirely preventable and treatable cause," he warned. Malnutrition rates among children in northern Rakhine were already above emergency thresholds before the latest crisis erupted.

"The condition of these children has further deteriorated due to the long journey across the border and the conditions in the camps," the UNICEF statement said. The journey by boat is particularly treacherous, with the International Organization for Migration on Friday putting the number of drowning since August at around 250. Some 26,000 people now live in the Kutupalong camp, where they are faced with an acute shortage of food and water, unsanitary conditions and high rates of diarrhea and respiratory infections, the agency said.

UNICEF said it was planning two additional assessments in other sites in Cox's Bazar this month to help determine if the numbers found in Kutupalong might apply to the entire area. Bouliere however said the agency was concerned by the preliminary findings, since the Kutupalong camp has existed for a long time and the services there are believed to be better than in the many new, makeshift camps. The overall rate of



UKHIA: Rohingya Muslim refugee children look on as they stand inside Kutupalong refugee camp in the Bangladeshi district of Ukhiya. —AFP

life-threatening malnutrition could therefore turn out to be even higher than what was found in Kutupalong, he said.

The influx of refugees is continuing, with the UN refugee agency estimating that some 3,000 people

crossed through a single border crossing at Anjuman Para between Wednesday and Thursday alone. "We need far more attention to the crisis, and far more resources for the response," Beigbeder said, stressing that "these children need help right now." —AFP

“ Those with severe malnutrition are at risk of dying ”

## Experts demand better prevention, treatment for children with hepatitis

SAO PAULO: Experts at the second World Hepatitis Summit Friday called for improved preventative measures and treatment for 52 million children suffering from the disease, on the final day of the three-day event in Sao Paulo. Of 325

million confirmed patients worldwide, 52 million are minors—a number far higher than the 2.1 million children suffering from AIDS, according to figures provided at the summit. "Most infected infants and children are not diagnosed, prioritized or treated effectively," Raquel Peck, CEO of World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA), said in a statement. Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver caused by a virus. There are five types, but B and C are responsible for more than half of all new cases of liver cancer, according to the World Health Organization. Often transmitted from mothers, 48 million children have type B. But experts drew attention to increased diagnoses of hepatitis C, for which no vaccine exists—and expressed concerns about the lack of pre-

ventative measures. Data released at the summit indicated 84 percent of countries offer hepatitis B vaccines—but only 39 percent provide the necessary dose at birth.

"Enough is enough. Governments and global health organizations must ensure all children are vaccinated for hepatitis B and provided with DAAs (direct-acting antivirals) for hepatitis C, and that all pregnant women are screened," said Charles Gore, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance. Last year, 194 countries pledged to take steps to eradicate hepatitis—a liver inflammation which kills 1.3 million people each year-by 2030. However, only nine are now honoring that commitment, according to figures released Wednesday. —AFP

## Niger closes 14 health establishments for 'alarming' flaws

NIAMEY: The West African state of Niger has ordered the closure of 14 privately-run health establishments after inspectors uncovered "alarming" failings, Health Minister Idi Illiassou said Friday. A months-long check

of privately-run clinics, physicians, pharmacies and maternity hospitals, mainly in the capital Niamey, resulted in "36 summons, of which 14 entailed immediate closure while 22 resulted in warnings," he said on television. He said inspectors had uncovered an "alarming situation... (in which) regulations, legislature and procedures for opening (medical) establishments are not respected". "(Ordinary) treatment rooms are being used for bed patients or to carry out surgery and doctors' consulting rooms are being used as laboratories," he said. Illiassou also complained of "anarchy" in pricing among pharmacies, with as much as a three-fold variation in prices for the same drug. "It

doesn't make sense," he said.

Clinics and laboratories sometimes "defrauded sick people" by recommending tests that were costly, unnecessary and of doubtful accuracy, he added on Saturday, in comments to lawmakers. "We are going to be relentless in upholding the laws and current regulations," he said, adding that the campaign would spread from Niamey to "all health services across the country". One of the poorest countries in the world, Niger is burdened with many flaws in its health infrastructure. In January, the health ministry closed down a major clinic and two ancillary buildings that, it said, had been working for years without any authorization. —AFP

## Colombia mothers stage 'nurse-in' to defend breastfeeding

BOGOTA: Hundreds of mothers gathered to breastfeed their babies in a park in Bogota Friday, in a "nurse-in" demonstration aimed at raising acceptance of the practice and promoting its health benefits. Nearly 1,000 families met in the city's Parque de Los Novios for the fourth event of its type in the city, organized by the mayor's office. Similar protests have taken place elsewhere in Latin America and around the world in recent years, often in response to cases of women being told to stop feeding their babies in public places.

"The message is not only the importance of mothers breastfeeding their children due to its nutritional quality, but also that society should accept it without discrimination, understanding that it is a right for children and mothers," said Maria Consuelo Araujo, Bogota's social integration secretary. Mother-of-three Yuri Corredor, 32, said another woman recently told her to cover up while she was feeding her seven-month-old baby. —AFP

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Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem  
د. فهد علي المخيزيم

استشاري أطفال  
M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St. 1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B - Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368