

Cross-Party Group on Bangladesh

CPG Meeting – 3rd June 2025

18:00-20:00, The Scottish Parliament, CR6

Minutes

In Attendance

MSPs

Foyso Choudhury MSP (Convenor)

Miles Briggs MSP (Co-Convenor)

Non- MSP CPG Members

Confirmed attendance

Dr M Mozammel Huq	Chairman, Charity Education International
Dr Rose Mary Harley	Vice Chairman, Charity Education International
Kabir Uddin Ahmed	University of Stirling
Muhammad Bodrul Husain	Bangladeshi students' association of Scotland
Cllr Nurul Hoque Ali	Aberdeen City Council
Farhana Kabir	Hope for Rural People
Ahmed Ali	GSC
Ziauddin Siddique	Salisbury Bangladesh Welfare Association (SBWA)
Khan Elahi	SBWA
Shahnoor Chowdhury	Elderly People's Forum Scotland
Jelina Berlow-Rahman	Bangladesh Diaspora Climate Action (BDCA)
Dr Wali Tasar Uddin MBE	Europe Bangladesh Federation C& I
Kabir Uddin Ahmed	University of Stirling
Dr. Sadia Haque Jui	The University of Edinburgh
Iffat Khan	Dundee University
Nina Munday	Edinburgh College
Chandrima Lala	SBWA
Adeola Famoroti	Scot-Study
Solomon Adeniji	Scot-Study
Sydney Waitt	Scot-Study
Md Abaidur rahman	Bangladeshi Student Association of Scotland
Luthfur Rahman	Bangladesh Samity
Moshfique Chowdhury	NEBA
Amad Ali	NEBA
M A Wahid khan	NEBA
Mohammed Afsaruzzaman	NEBA
Mahmood Rajah Khan	GBR Scotland
Dr debojyoti das	University of Edinburgh
Katie Maddison	UN World Food Programme

Dr Mohammed Mozammel Huq
Professor Andy Large
Farhana Kabir
Sunrita Dhar Bhattacharjee

Chairman, Charity Education International (CEI)
Living Deltas Hub, Newcastle University
Hope for Rural People
Anglia Ruskin University

Individual Members of Scotland's Bangladeshi Community

Abdul Mohit Khan (Badsha)
Mohammed Monowar Parvez
Mohammad Ali
Habib Rahman
Md Sadiqur Rahman
Rumana Afrin Reza
Taraque Hasan Masum
Rafiqul Islam
Mahmudul Hassan
Adil Tafadar
Rahela Khan
Abdul Quader Syed
Abdul Rahim
Disha Akther
Mahmoud Iqbal Hossain
Dr Abdul Kadir
Md Ziauddin Siddique
Md Likhonuzzaman
Sanzida Aktar
Jasmin
Mohammed Abdul MOSOBBIR
Mosthafa Miah
Jabir Hussain
Clara Haruna
Chandrima Lala
Amrita Lamba
Sanzida Aktar
Syed Mohammed Abdul Quader
Aquib shabab bin Sharif
Wahab Bhuiyan
Muhammed Iqbal Hassan Chowdhury
Md Jubaid Hossain Druvo
Shiju

Guest Speakers

Geraldine O'Callaghan, United Nations World Food Programme (remote)
Maruf Mohammad Shehab, Action Aid UK (remote from Dhaka)

Apologies

Bangladesh High Commissioner Abida Islam
Sarah Boyack MSP
Evelyn Tweed MSP

Welcome

Convenor welcomed newly appointed Assistant High Commissioner of Bangladesh (Manchester), CPG Members and guests at the meeting. He reiterated the aims of the CPG to strengthen the relationship between Scotland and Bangladesh.

Agenda Item 1:

Update from new Assistant High Commissioner of Bangladesh Manchester, Mohammad Jobayed Hosen

- Mr Hosen represented new High Commissioner and read out her address to CPG members as she could not attend due to commitments in London.
- Acknowledged CPG work at promoting interests of Bangladeshi diaspora in Scotland and enhancing ties between Bangladesh and Scotland and recognised efforts of CPG Members on fostering cooperation, trade, culture and engagement.
- Provided update on situation of Bangladesh: under leadership of Hon. Chief Adviser of interim Government of Bangladesh, Prof. Mohammed Yunus – Bangladesh is seeing massive democratic transition after July Mass Uprising in 2024.
 - **Institutional transformation:** Reforms from commissions established to rebuild pillars of the state from electoral and judicial reform are central - not to only govern better but build more just, inclusive and accountable democracy.
 - **Economic reforms:** Interim govt. launched bold reform package to stabilise payments balance, rebuild reserves, reform banking sector, recover bad loans and engage with development partners to restructure and attract sustainable investment.
 - **Rohingyas Crisis:** Bangladesh currently hosts 1.1 million Rohingyas from Myanmar – a burden they cannot manage along. Noted appreciation of UK's support and urged international community to facilitate safe, voluntary repatriation. Bangladesh enhancing safety on camps, launching vocational training but seek ongoing cooperation with international partners incl. Scotland for just resolution to problem.
 - **Scottish Bangladeshi Diaspora:** Remains strongest bridge between Bangladesh and Scotland – making remarkable contributions to healthcare, media, academia, local government etc.
 - **Culture:** recognised cross cultural bond between Scotland and Bangladesh citing the timeless Purana song by Rabindranath Tagore inspired by Scotland's old Lang scene by Robert Burns.

High Commissioner Recommendations for CPG consideration:

- Continue to support Rohingya case and table motion in support of ICJ case brought by Gambia against Myanmar and alleged violations of Genocide Convention
- Mobilise political and moral support in the Scottish Parliament to recognise the 1971 Bangladesh Genocide
- Digital & Entrepreneurship cooperation – encourage MOU between Scottish Enterprise and Bangladesh ICT Ministry to boost.

- Private Sector linkages to promote trade via MOU between Scottish Chamber of Commerce and Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry.
- Assistant High Commissioner concluded thanking Foysol for leadership in strengthening Bangladesh's Scotland relations.

Agenda Item 2:

Cllr Rahman Habib, **Rohingya Action Northeast Charity Founder (Former Lord Mayor of Newcastle)**, Update on UK's first Rohingya Memorial Stone

- Cllr Habib introduced himself, highlighting his background as a human rights activist with a focus on the Rohingya cause.
- Spoke about his role leading *Rohingya Action NorthEast*, a grassroots charity dedicated to education and public awareness on the Rohingya genocide.
- **Educational Initiative:**
 - Educational pack on the Rohingya genocide is being developed for distribution to schools, community centres, and public institutions.
 - Emphasised education as key tool to combat injustice, prevent conflict, and promote historical truth and human rights.
- **Rohingya Memorial Update:**
 - Provided an update on the UK's first permanent Rohingya Memorial Stone.
 - Highlighted its significance in honouring victims, recognising survivors, and serving as a lasting symbol of truth and remembrance.
 - Project has been approved by Bradford Council following public consultation.
 - Fully funded by the British Rohingya Community (BRC) and the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK).
 - Memorial Official unveiling scheduled for **25th August 2025** (Rohingya Genocide Remembrance Day) at Bradford Council's Peace Garden. Invitations extended to MSPs and CPG members to attend.

Agenda Item 3:

Maruf Mohammad Shehab, Head of Innovation and Resource Mobilisation Partnership, **Action Aid UK**, Presentation on current situation in Cox Bazar Rohingya Refugee Camp and impacts on recent aid cuts

- **Refugees Numbers:**
 - 118,000 new biometric arrivals since 2021; actual number likely higher.
 - Ongoing new entries and high birth rate in camps continue to increase population.

- **Critical Issues:**
 - Severe malnutrition in children (UNICEF: 27% surge in acute cases).
 - Highest levels of violence and trafficking in years, especially affecting women and children.
 - 1,200+ sea journeys by refugees in 2024; 427+ deaths/missing reported.
- **Funding Crisis:**
 - Education and protection sectors severely impacted.
 - Thousands of Bangladeshi teachers laid off;
 - School closures and loss of psychosocial services for women and girls.
- **Advocacy & Interventions:**
 - Supporting 800,000 refugees and host communities in 24 camps.
 - Focus: GBV prevention, youth skills, shelter, hygiene, and food security.
- **Sports for Protection Programme:**
 - Active in 5 camps (with UNHCR); focuses on mental health, empowerment, and GBV prevention through youth sports.
 - Seeking expansion in 2025; open to collaborating with UK-based orgs.

Agenda Item 4:

Geraldine O'Callaghan, Director, **United Nations World Food Programme**, Global Office London, Presentation on their work in Rohingya Refugee Camp

- Geraldine thanked attendees and praised efforts to keep attention on the Rohingya crisis.
- Noted importance of proposed memorial as symbol that Rohingya are not forgotten.
- **Key Points of presentation:**
 - ➔ Rohingya crisis has faded from public attention despite worsening conditions.
 - ➔ Global food insecurity has tripled since 2019 (135M → 343M), while donor funding has declined.
 - ➔ WFP operations are under severe strain due to funding shortfalls.
- **Situation in Cox's Bazar & Stats:**
 - 1 million Rohingya remain, fully reliant on aid.
 - Malnutrition rates are critical: Acute: 15% ; Chronic: 41% ; Anaemia: 38% (children) and 24% (women).
 - Over 560,000 people are in crisis or emergency hunger levels.
- **WFP Response & Challenges:**
 - Monthly food voucher: \$12 per person; almost cut to \$6 due to funding gaps.
 - Major risk of pipeline break in August due to front-loaded US funding.
 - Long-term issues from undernutrition and limited resources.

- **Donor Context**

- UK funding dropped from £28M (2019) to £15M (2024); future uncertain.
- UK support to host communities is a positive step; continuation urged.
- Appeal made for Scotland to consider supporting humanitarian crises.

- **Concluded with action points/recommendations**

- Emphasis on need to support forgotten crises.
- Call for continued advocacy and flexible funding to sustain critical aid efforts.

Q&A

1. Miles Briggs MSP asked about Turkish Medical Corps operating in Cox's Bazar and WHO vaccination programme update – which was raised concerns during CPG visit to Cox Bazar in 2023.

- ➔ WFP responded final-year medical trainees providing daytime-only services. Acknowledged effort but had no direct information, suggesting WHO or NGOs may be more involved.
- ➔ Action Aid Rep. responded unclear whether vaccination programme will continue due to prioritisation on shelter, sanitation, food due to funding aid cuts – decision expected soon

2. Question was also raised re sustainable income-generating options for Rohingya, given limited land?

- ➔ WFP suggested focus on climate-smart agriculture, small-scale farming, and connecting to value chains for food and income.

Agenda Item 5:

Open discussion & Actions to follow-up

- Uni. Lecturer emphasised on health and education reform in Bangladesh; urged partnerships with Scottish universities.
- Concerns raised about Rohingya influx, flooding, and water sharing disputes with neighbouring countries
 - ➔ MSP members noted limited powers in foreign aid – reserved matter (UK Government remit) but emphasised importance of raising awareness
- Jelina Berlow-Rahman noted advocating for trainee medical missions to Rohingya camps - proposed introducing hydroponics for sustainable food growth.

Concluding points

- Agreement to explore joint fundraising, student engagement, and collaborative NGO work.
- Pledge to raise the Rohingya crisis in the Scottish Parliament and possibly initiate a Members' Debate.

- **Suggestions for future topics and follow-ups**
 - ➔ Climate Change ahead of COP30
 - ➔ Education & Health

Agenda item 6:

Date and Time of **Next Meeting** to be confirmed

AOCB