

# ***A Day-in-the-Life*<sup>1</sup> of Rohingya Refugee Children**

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In reporting on the typical non-pandemic daily lives of the participants who we worked with, in our research on the prosocial development of Rohingya refugee children, we chose two children: One born in Myanmar and one born in the refugee camp. They are not necessarily typical of all refugee camp-dwelling children, but they represent regular children in our sample (for sample details see Callaghan et al., 2024). In adapting the “*Day in the Life*” quasi-ecological approach (Cameron & Hunt, 2018; Cameron & Stella, 2022), we report on the daily refugee camp lives of these two children to demonstrate the structures and contexts, the “ordinary magic” (Masten, 2014) of the children as they appear to surmount their historically challenging situations, that foster their thriving despite unimaginable adversity.



## **Asnan**



Asnan, a 10-year-old Rohingya girl, resides in the world's largest Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Originally from Kulabeel, Maungdaw, Myanmar, Asnan and her family fled to Bangladesh on August 25, 2017, escaping persecution by the Myanmar government. Tragically, her grandfather and

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<sup>2</sup> Nayapara refugee camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, all photos ©Md. Anis

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four other family members were killed by the military junta. For the past seven years, her family has lived in Camp-26, facing numerous challenges. Her goal in life is to become a teacher, driven by a desire to contribute positively to her community and empower others through education.

Asnan's father, a farmer, supports the family by cultivating spinach and vegetables on leased land in a nearby urban area, paying 400 taka per month to a host community landlord. Asnan's mother, a housewife, assists in their farming efforts. Their agricultural activities provide essential financial support for the family. As the eldest child, Asnan carries significant responsibilities. She assists her parents with farming duties, cares for her younger siblings, and helps them with their homework from the learning center. Additionally, she sells the harvested produce at the local market and within the refugee community, contributing to the family's sustenance.

Asnan's day begins with numerous responsibilities, including her education. She wakes up early at 6:00 AM, brushes her teeth, performs her ablutions, and assists her siblings with their morning routines. By 6:30 AM, she ensures her siblings are ready to attend the Madrasha (Islamic School).



Following this, Asnan cleans the neighboring sidewalk of her shelter and helps her mother prepare breakfast. Around 8:00 AM, she has breakfast with her siblings and parents. By 8:30 AM, she heads to the farm to pick spinach and vegetables.





At 9:30 AM, she heads out to sell their spinach and vegetables at the nearby market or delivers them to the community shelter. This typically takes about three hours, and she returns home around 12:30 PM, usually earning about 200 taka, which she gives to her mother. After a brief rest, she takes a bath and helps her siblings with their baths, also washing their clothes by 1:00 PM.



At 2:00 PM, she has lunch and takes another short rest. By 2:30 PM, she assists her siblings with their homework for the learning center and the Madrasa (Islamic School), dedicating an hour to their academic progress. She also uses this time to complete her own homework, effectively balancing her family and personal responsibilities. At 4:00 PM, she takes on another task to help alleviate her family's financial difficulties.



She fetches water for another family, earning 10 taka per pitcher and usually carrying five pitchers. Instead of spending her playtime in leisure, she engages in this task to support her family. She often feels sad seeing other girls her age playing and relaxing while she is working. Despite this, she remains dedicated to her home duties.



After completing the task of fetching water, she prepares to go to the learning center with her siblings.



At 6:00 PM, she goes to the Rohingya learning center with her siblings, where the educational cost is free. There, she studies Burmese, Bengali, English, and mathematics. At 7:30 PM, she and her siblings return home from the learning center and have dinner with their family at 8:00 PM.



After dinner, she and her siblings study at home for an hour under the supervision of their father. Her challenging daily routine concludes as she goes to bed at 9:00 PM

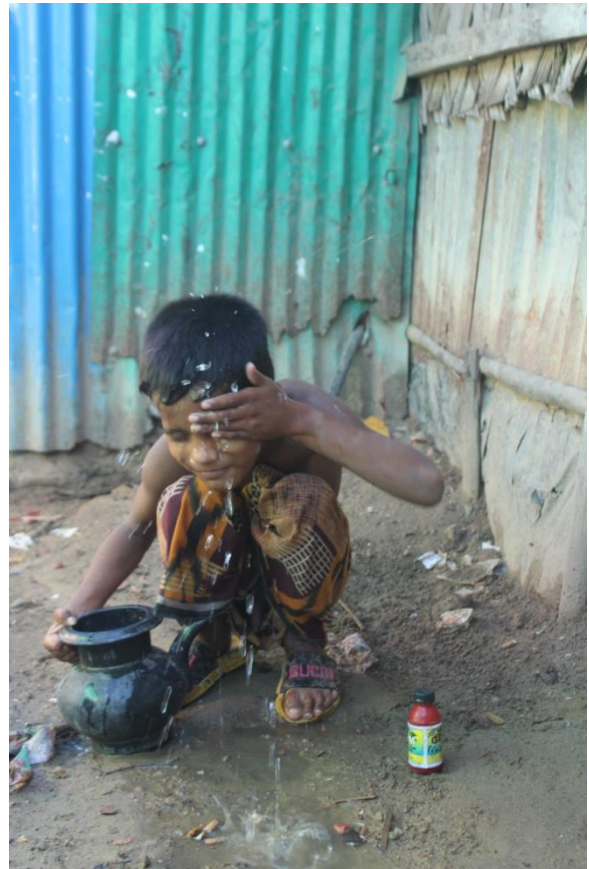


## Robi Alam



Robi Alam, a nine-year-old Rohingya boy, was born in the Nayapara registered refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. He has two brothers, and his mother, a housewife, supports the family by working in other households to alleviate their financial challenges. When Robi was four years old, his father left for Malaysia via the sea route, and the family has since received no

information about his whereabouts or condition. To help mitigate the family's financial struggles and cover the educational expenses of their younger brother, Robi and his eleven-year-old older brother both work. Robi collects scrap throughout the camp and sells it to local shops. Their younger brother attends the Rohingya Refugee United Private Centre (RRUPC), a refugee-led learning center, which provides education at no cost.



Robi Alam begins his day at 6 AM. Upon waking up, he brushes his teeth and washes his mouth, preparing himself for the day ahead. By 6:30 AM, his mother provides his breakfast.



After finishing his meal at 7 AM, he heads out with a sack, a bell, and a bucket of mixed savory snacks, ready for a long day of scrap collecting. Robi scours the nearby drains, roadsides, markets, dustbins, and pool sides for scrap. He collects bottles, plastics, books, iron, and steel, often exchanging his snacks with children in return for these items.



His day is filled with hard work, navigating dirty places in search of valuable scraps.



Around 1 PM, Robi takes a rare break. He finds a place to rest, be it under a tree, in a shop, or a nearby pool. His lunch is modest, usually cakes or biscuits from local grocery shops. To cope with the intense heat, which can reach up to 40°C, he tries to take a bath during this break. By 2:30 PM, Robi is back to work, continuing his search for scrap in shelters and markets.



for the childhood he rarely experiences.



At 5 PM, Robi heads to a shop to sell the scrap he has collected throughout the day. He sorts and weighs the items, earning 20 BDT (\$0.17) per kilogram. On average, he makes about 150 BDT (\$1.28) daily. With his earnings, he buys snacks for his younger brother and mother.



Occasionally, he reads books in the shop, sensing the loss of educational opportunities.



Despite his tough day, he takes time to assist elderly people crossing roads and collecting water. However, there are moments when he feels sad, especially when he sees children his age playing. Sometimes, he watches them and even asks to join in their games, longing

By 6 PM, Robi returns to his shelter. He hands over the money he has earned to his mother and freshens up. Dinner is a family affair, shared with his siblings and mother at



7 PM. After their meal, Robi goes to bed at 8 PM, in preparation to repeat his routine the next day.



### Conclusions

The ordinary magic of family solidarity goes a long way in protecting these children from the extreme adversity of their situations and the community of refugee camp support protects them to some extent, but the futures dreamed of by them and their families require and deserve global support.

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