



AS IT IS

Fire Destroys Thousands of Homes in Rohingya Refugee Camp

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A huge fire burned through an area of Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camp in the early hours of Thursday. The fire destroyed about 550 shelters, the poor homes of an estimated 3,500 refugees from Myanmar. Another 150 refugee shops also burned to the ground.

Bangladeshi officials said there were no deaths or injuries.

A Rohingya refugee in the affected area gave **photographs** and video recordings of the disaster to Reuters news agency. The images show families -- including children -- digging through the smoking ruins of their neighborhood, searching for anything that might still be of value.

The Rohingya refugee camp is situated near the Bangladeshi coastal city of Cox's Bazar. In 2017 it became the largest refugee camp in the world, after at least 750,000 members of the Rohingya minority fled Myanmar. They were escaping **vicious** government attacks on Rohingya people and villages.

The fire happened in the E-Block area of the Nayapara camp.

"E block is completely burned down," said refugee Mohammed Arakani. "There is nothing left."

"Everyone is crying," he continued. "They lost all their belongings. They lost everything ..."

The UNHCR said it is providing shelter, clothing, hot meals, and medical care for the refugees in the affected area. Experts and officials are investigating the disaster.

Many aid organizations have established offices in Bangladesh to help the Rohingya refugees. The group Save the Children is among them. Onno van Manen directs its operations in Bangladesh. She called the fire “another **devastating** blow for the Rohingya people,” noting the years of intense hardship they have faced already.

Mohammed Shamsud Douza is a top Bangladeshi official for refugee issues. He said the fire department spent two hours putting out the fire. He said the fire grew when gas containers inside the homes began to explode.

In recent weeks, the Bangladeshi government has moved several thousand Rohingya refugees to a low-lying island in the Bay of Bengal. It is far from the mainland. Human rights groups have protested the move saying the island is unsafe during storms.

They also argue that Bangladesh is forcing the refugees to resettle there. Bangladeshi officials deny the accusation.

I'm Anna Matteo.

The Reuters news agency reported this story. Anna Matteo adapted the content for VOA Learning English. Katy Weaver was the editor.

Words in This Story

vicious – *adj.* very violent and cruel

photograph – *n.* a picture made by a camera

devastating – *adj.* causing great damage or harm

hardship – *n.* something that causes pain, suffering, or loss