**“They are human beings!” Plea for help for fire victim of Rohingya Refugee camp in Bangladesh**

*After yet another outbreak of fires on 22 March 2021 at Balukhali refugee camp, Covid Chronicles from the Margins project received the string of WhatsApp messages below with a series of devastating photos of the fires from residents. They wish to remain anonymous due to the political sensitivities around these fires and police arrests of suspects. To date, according to news reports and residents’ confirmations, more than 17,000 shelters have been burnt and destroyed. More than 45,000 people have been affected by the fires. Eighteen people have died, 560 people have been injured, and more than 400 people are missing.*

**[11:17, 22/03/2021]** The fire 🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥 is burning still and spreading faster in Balukhali Rohingya refugee camp, and around**.**

**[11:18, 22/03/2021]** Over one hour and fire is still going on but no fire service has arrived

**[15:43, 22/03/2021]**We need urgent emergency Support to help Fire Victims.

My guess is tens of thousands of families’ homes have been burnt and destroyed and 2000 thousands schools, shops, community centers, mosques, help centers has burnt - gone to ashes. Many people dead and injured, children, old people, babies, and women, etc still i don’t know how many people have died or are injured. Who or what is responsible for this dreadful fire?

**[17:15, 22/03/2021]**You can see the most horrific and devastating fire 🔥 in the world’s largest refugee camp not only destroyed homes and made the people destitute but also many people burnt alive. #Fire #BurntAlive#RohingyaRefugee #RefugeeCamps#CosBazar

**[18:54, 22/03/2021]** Please can your project make a [GoFundMe](https://justgiving.com/crowdfunding?utm_medium=cpc&utm_source=google&utm_term=go%20fund%20me) for Fire victim Rohingya refugees. Or if u know any NGO please request them for help to Fire victim Rohingya refugees of Bangladesh. Please do something if u can for our innocent and helpless. We need to give emergency support to them. They are human beings. Children have lost their parents and are crying, searching everywhere for lost loved ones, walking alone in tears along main roads. They have no food, no place to sleep, no mosquito nets, no clothes, no home materials, nothing, they have nothing

The residents continued sending WhatsApp messages about the unfolding crisis following the outbreak of the fires and then in an interview on 5th April 2021one resident summarised and shared their thoughts with us.

**Cov19Chronicles:** *Rohingya refugees have seen a number of fire incidents in Cox's Bazar recently. Are such incidents on the rise? What are the reasons behind such incidents?*

**Resident:** Yes, I have been seen a number of devastating fire incidents in our Rohingya refugee camps off Cox's bazar in recent months, so the number of incidents is definitely on the rise in camps. It is unclear what are the reasons behind such fire incidents. Some people blame Bangladeshis who are against refugees and some blame Rohingya refugees themselves for starting inhumane fire incidents, but they might also have been caused by an explosion.

It is difficult to know from the [news reports](https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/hundreds-missing-after-devastating-fire-idUSRTXARQOU) and rumours and to get to truth of the cause os the situation and who or what is responsible for the fires. On 22 March the Armed Police Battalion [APBN police arrested](https://www.facebook.com/tbsnews.net/posts/the-armed-police-battalion-apbn-arrested-16-rohingya-men-from-ukhiya-upazila-of-/3409987395715852/) one Rohingya boy in Balukhali refugee camp according to reports. On 25 March, there was a rumour the Bangladeshi police, APBN police arrested some Bangladeshi youth boys following fires in Thangkhali camp. In another version of events an elderly Bangladeshi woman claimed she had set fire to Nayapara registered Rohingya refugees camp on 14 January in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar. She then said she set fire to Balukhali refugee camp on 22 March. Another rumour has a [BRAC](https://muslimhands.org.uk/latest/2021/04/rohingya-fire-explained-impact-on-displaced-refugees) Bangladeshi employee was trying to set fire in camps on 22 March. So it is difficult to get the truth behind these news stories, rumours and claims. I am not personally aware of anyone involved in these incidents, nor have I witnessed anyone setting fires off.

**Cov19Chronicles:** *Some local Bangladeshi politicians have claimed that on March 22 refugees intentionally set off fires at the camp that killed several refugees. Do you consider such claims to be accurate?*

**Resident**: I cannot find out and do not know who set fire in refugees camps whether Bangladeshis or refugees or if it was a gas pipe explosion or an accident. We don’t know but both groups refugees and Bangladeshis it seems have been arrested by police. Why would refugees burn their own shelters? It would only add to their suffering? We don’t know who or what caused the fires. What we do know is that many are suffering the consequences and are not receiving sufficient protection or support.

**Interviewer.** *What do you think should be done to ensure proper fire safety in the refugee camps?*

**Resident:** I am not an expert of course but[Liquefied Petroleum Gas Cylinders](file:///Users/mg2642/Desktop/Liquefied%20Petroleum%20Gas) are used on large scale in the camps. [They can explode on a hot day](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/bangladesh_advisory_missison_report_final.pdf) with terrible effects. NGOs should provide [information campaigns about safe use](https://www.wlpga.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Opportunities-for-LPG-use-in-Humanitarian-Settings-FINAL.pdf).

Fires are also often caused by [unsafe cooking practices](https://mei.chathamhouse.org/cooking-with-clean-fuels). Further information campaigns about safe use of gas and liquid fuels should be a priority. Electric short circuits and overloading is another risk, together with careless throwing away of cigarette butts. Children playing with candles, lamps, and maybe burning of waste. More raising awareness of such risks should be the basis of any strategy.

But main problem is we need [stronger homes, not weak flimsy shelters](https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/08/05/bangladesh-not-my-country/plight-rohingya-refugees-myanmar). Tarpaulin homes are fragile and not suitable for living in. Our homes are always getting damaged. How are we to pay to repair them? It would be best if homes were made half bricks, half tin fence, full tin ceiling. Then we might feel more safety and peace than we do now. [We need better homes](file:///Users/mg2642/Desktop/Even%20more%20than%20that%20is%20the%20fundamental%20material%20infrastructure%20of%20the%20camps) that shelter and protect us.

***Interviewer:*** *Should the Bangladesh government remove barbed-wire fences around the camps that hamper rescue work during such incidents?*

**Resident**: Believe me, [barbed wire fences around the camps](https://www.removethefence.com/home) are very dangerous, unsafe and do not provide protection during such incidents. In fact, they caused more deaths because people could not escape. All people love freedom so barbed wire is not the answer. Rohingya refugee camps have no proper support inside so people need to go outside the camps.

Urgently, we need 100% medical support from NGOS to support victims of the fires but, so far, we have only been getting 5% medical support from NGOS. Also, we should be allowed to leave our camps to access better medical treatment, to get medicines any time, day and night. If we can’t get medicine in camps and can’t go out of camps for medicine, how we can treat our people for burns and infections? How can we save our people from sickness? So, it’s totally inhumane, in my opinion, to cage us like animals behind fences around our camps, When we come face to face with fire incidents like the recent ones then people cannot escape from blocks, nor can their children and their homes are burnt down, their clothes are burnt, they have no sustainable supplies of food, clothing or medicines. Our people have nothing.

**Interviewer:** Thank you!

Note: Interviewer has inserted links for reader for further information.

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