Call Home

Zubeida was born in the Mohammadpur Geneva Camp about 20 years ago. she got married last year, and her in-laws formally brought her to their home in another part of Geneva Camp. Their home is an 8 feet by 8 feet room where Zubeida shares a bed with her husband and ailing mother-in-law. Her brother and sister-in-law sleep on the floor of the same room with their two-year-old child. Her husband works in a barber's saloon and makes just enough to make ends meet. But they are unable to move out of their little room and live elsewhere. Zubeida's husband will not get work anywhere else. Zubeida herself was unable to study beyond 4th grade. Her parents could not afford the Tk 150 monthly school fees. Zubeida's family were packed into one of the 116 camps all over Bangladesh right after the Liberation War. The plan was to eventually send them to Pakistan. That was thirty six years ago.



Without a citizenship they are being deprived of education and the prospects of getting a job in the future.

After the partition of India in 1947, faced with large-scale communal riots on both sides of the border, a few hundred thousand Muslims from Bihar, Kolkata, Uttar Pradesh, Maddhya Pradesh and as far away as Hyderabad came to the then East Pakistan. All India Muslim League Chief Muhammad Ali Jinnah promised them that Pakistan would be 'a safe haven for all Muslims'. As is typical of people migrating from a common locality, 'Biharis' lived in separate clusters from the Bangalis. Their communities were concentrated in areas in Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Khulna, Chittagong and Santahar. Bangali animosity towards Biharis started growing in the 1960s due to the perception that the Pakistan government preferred to give Biharis better jobs. By 1971, there were about 15 lakh (according to RMMRU) non-Bangalis living in East Pakistan. The West Pakistanis and Biharis enjoyed special privileges and when Sheikh Mujib declared war in 1971 for a free Bangladesh, the Biharis were in a dilemma. They had suffered through terrible communal riots in 1947 for the idea of the state of Pakistan, and they had antipathy and deep suspicion towards the state of India. Believing the Pakistan army's propaganda that Mujib was 'plotting with the Indians to break up Pakistan', their sympathies naturally went against the Bangali liberation war. The Pakistan army exploited this weakness to recruit Biharis to join the Rajakar death squads. Not all Biharis joined, but those that did not remained silent spectators of the conflict. They did not join the refugees crossing the borders, or take up arms against the Army.