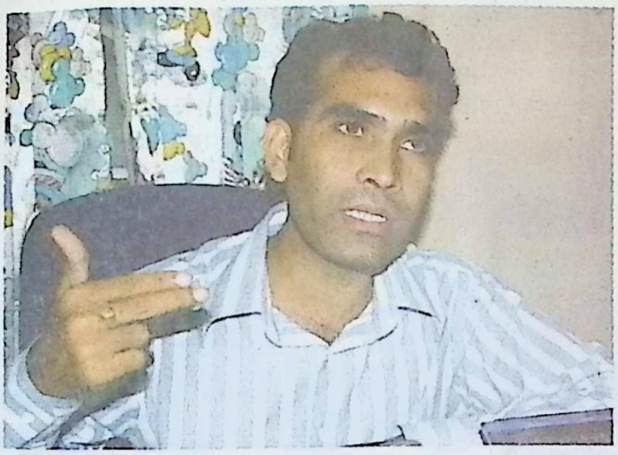


Khalid Hussain has been fighting for the fundamental rights of the Urdu-speaking community for years.



Ahmed Ilias, Writer and Executive Director of Al Falah Bangladesh.

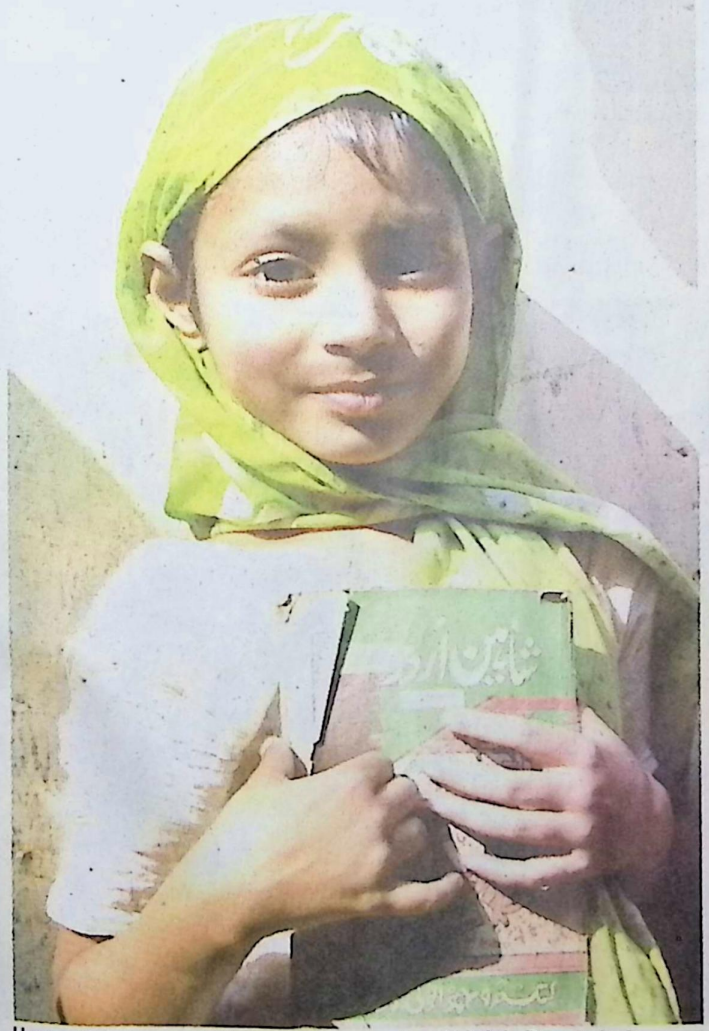
agreement, about 2.5 lakh Bangali prisoners were airlifted from Pakistan to Bangladesh and the stranded Urdu-speakers in Bangladesh were to be repatriated to Pakistan. In 1974, 1.2 lakh stranded Pakistanis were airlifted to Pakistan. By 1993, 17,8069 Urdu-speakers were repatriated to Pakistan under government initiatives. Others went on their own initiatives. According to latest UNHCR reports, there are around 1.6 lakh Urdu-speakers living in 116 camps in 14 districts of the country. But 36 years have passed by and 70% of the Urdu-speakers were born in Bangladesh after the war.

Twenty-eight-year-old Ahmed Hussain does karchupi work on saris inside the camp. Many of the Urdu-speakers have taken up handicrafts as their profession and their one-roomed homes are turned into their work place during the day. Ahmed works with four others in a room for five hours on a sari. He has been doing this work for 18 years. "I don't want to go Pakistan," he says, "I have my work here and I enjoy it. It is a little problem to live in such a congested room but otherwise I'm really happy the way I am." Ahmed earns Tk 500 a week with this work. Ahmed's 24-year-old co-worker Mir Jafar says that most Bangalis are nice to them. "Some Bangali people hurl abuses at us and call us 'mauras' but most Bangalis are not like that."

According to Tanvir Mokammel, director of Shopno Bhumi (The Promised Land), a documentary on the plight of the Urdu-speaking community, most of the young generation of Biharis want Bangladeshi citizenship. "Unless you have citizenship rights, it is very difficult to get a job or venture in economic activities," says Mokammel, "besides, a section of the leadership of the community discouraged them to go out and mainstream themselves as the illusion to migrate to Pakistan was kept alive."

Mokammel says that he understands the animosity of the general Bangladeshis towards the Urdu-speaking community but adds, "What is happening to this community now is sheer insensitivity and negligence by the concerned governments and international bodies".

For Khalid Hussain, President of AYGUSC (Association of Young Generation of Urdu Speaking Community) and Assistant Co-ordinator of Al Falah Bangladesh the most important requirement for the



Her mother tongue is Urdu but her country of birth is Bangladesh. But what is her identity?