

Shaymoli, a northern place in Dhaka, was so named as the area was covered with greenery by Abdul Gani haider, a social worker of Becharam Douri who came here and built his own house in 1957. The local people at a meeting led by Gani decided on the name. Former Minister Hafizuddin was present in the meeting where the name Shaymoli was proposed and accepted by the participants.

Citizenship debate comes to end but doubts and worries remain

Eviction fear, uncertainty grip Geneva Camp after the High Court ruling

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN
Biharis residing in camps are in a fear of eviction and uncertainty after the High Court on May 18 granted them citizenship, ending a long-lasting argument over their status.

The Urdu-speaking people at the Geneva Camp in Mohammadpur and Benaroshi Palli in Mirpur are now confused whether they will lose the refugee status that ensures guaranteed housing, free water and electricity for them.

The younger generation sees new hopes in the court ruling but doubts remain about their future. Older generation of Biharis still considers Pakistan as their home country.

"This has been my home since I moved here as a boy in December 1971. Where will I end up after this?" said Mohammad Jasim, a resident of Geneva Camp. "I don't have any property anywhere or a secured income source to rent a place in this city."

On a writ petition, the High Court (HC) last week ruled that about three lakh Biharis living in different parts of the country are citizens of Bangladesh. The court also directed the Election Commission (EC) to include the petitioners' names in the voter list.

The petition was filed on November 26 last year by 11 members of the Stranded Pakistanis Youth Rehabilitation Movement seeking HC orders to register as voters the Urdu-speaking people living in 116 camps in the capital and elsewhere.

According to a survey conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are around 250,000 to 300,000 Urdu-speaking people in Bangladesh. Of them, around 160,000 are languishing in camps.

The survey also reveals that some 50,000 to 52,000 Biharis are living in 30 camps in Dhaka. Of them, around 20,000 to 25,000 live in the largest camp, Geneva

Camp. Without citizenship the community did not have the right to vote, own property and travel outside the country. They have very little access to resources and employment. They lack proper schooling and healthcare facilities. "My father and uncles were

the mainstream population in the employment market. Literacy rate is still very low among them.

Today there are only six primary schools for them in Bangladesh. One of them is for Geneva Camp dwellers run by Plan Bangladesh, an NGO.

Bihar, India, during the decades following the partition in 1947.

Many migrated fearing persecution during communal riots that occurred right before and after the partition that gave birth to two countries -- India and Pakistan.

During the Liberation War of

oners of war. The government of Bangladesh later offered the community the choice of repatriation to Pakistan. In December 1973, International Committee of Red Cross completed registration of 539,669 persons who wished to return to Pakistan.

who were born in Bangladesh have been waiting for a change of their status as the 'citizens of nowhere'.

Their living condition in the camps is inhuman. Broken toilets, dirty water, messy pathway and damp living quarters are part of their life.

Despite the HC ruling, worries remain about whether the mainstream population will accept the Biharis as they are. Maimunnisa, a mother of three, said, "Now that we are citizens here, we will definitely try to blend in with the mainstream. But will they accept us normally and let their children play with ours without pointing finger?"

Sadkat Khan, president, Stranded Pakistanis Youth Rehabilitation Movement and one of the petitioners to the HC, said, "This is a historic event. We endured immense sufferings in the camp. With citizenship it should be over. We hope to get our life back."

"But the authorities should not evict the Biharis from the camps right now. They have been living in the camps for a very long period. Without proper arrangements for their rehabilitation and skill generation these people will not survive outside," he added.

After the HC ruling, the question of returning the property that once belonged to the Biharis is now being debated. Neaz Ahmed who arrived at the Geneva camp as an 8-year old, said, "My family had everything before the war. We had a home and land here in Dhaka. But I will probably end up in a slum if we lose shelter at the Geneva Camp."

Shoukat Ali, general secretary, Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee, said, "We respect the High Court ruling, but it is going to create a new chaos."

"Our assets and liabilities were declared enemy property after the war and these are now occupied by locals. Without addressing the property issue it is not possible to ensure rights of the Biharis," he observed.



GENEVA CAMP: High Court ruling has granted the Biharis citizenship. But will it change their life and living?

highly educated men but I am a complete illiterate. I can hardly spell my name," said another camp-dweller Mohammad Iqbal. "At least I have a place to stay in this camp. How will I survive outside, if evicted?"

Majority of the Biharis do not have any skill to compete with

Around 100 children go there.

The community produced only two master's degree holders in the last 36 years. One of them recently obtained a degree on law from Open University.

Residents of today's Geneva Camp or camps outside Dhaka migrated to Bangladesh from

Bangladesh, most of the Biharis rallied behind the Pakistani regime and collaborated with the occupation army.

After the end of the war, Bihar faced the wrath of newly liberated Bangladesh. They were confined in various camps across Bangladesh along with the pris-

oners of war. In the following years the country witnessed some important political events that shaped the future of the Bihari community. Many of them went to Pakistan while the rest have been living in the camps, searching for a place called home for the last 36 years.

The post-1971 generation

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"Religious bigots who opposed Liberation War in 1971, have been protesting against women's policy in violation of the Emergency Power Rule (EPR). But why has the government not arrested them for violating the EPR? Why has the government formed the so-called review committee comprising religious bigots?"

-- Ayesha Khanam
President, Bangladesh Mohila Parishad
Said at a discussion meeting organised by Shamajik Protonodh Committee, an alliance of 46 women, human rights and social organisations, at the Engineering Institute, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"I also believe that party leaders including Chairperson Khaleda Zia would be released soon and Khaleda Zia would bring about timely reforms [in the party] through council of the party."

-- Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan
Former secretary general of BNP and a top reformist leader
Told reporters at his Gulshan residence before going to court for surrender on charges of Gatco graft case, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"Who has given the right to the government to prepare national charter?"

-- Zillur Rahman
Acting President, Awami League
Told reporters, on Thursday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"High Court has given wrong verdict. We hope to get justice at the appellate division."

-- Barrister Abdur Razzak
Jamaat Ameer Matur Rahman Nizami's lawyer
Told reporters after Nizami's bail was denied at the High Court, on Sunday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"We did not want the machine for the hospital but it was given by the ministry."

-- Dr Lutfar Rahman Khan
Civil Surgeon, Khulna General Hospital
Told reporters about three state-of-the-art autolave machine lying idle in the veranda of the hospital, on Tuesday. Source: Prothom Alo

Compiled by Durrdana Ghias

Where every family is an island

Tale of some peculiar problems of apartment life

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Fatima Ahmed has been getting a foul smell in her apartment. Her bedroom reeked of something faecal. And it did not take the schoolteacher long to find the culprit--a leaking toilet pipe coming from the apartment above hers.

When informed about the pipe and the intolerable discomfort, the family living upstairs shrugged off Fatima's complaint saying 'it is not our problem'.

"How irresponsible it is," bellowed Fatima, a resident of Green Road. "It is clearly their toilet pipe sticking into my room and they say it is not their headache to do anything about it. This is outrageous."

Just two blocks away, Ashraf Hossain was stunned when his neighbours told him he could not install an air conditioner in his apartment. The service provider had long been planning to fix the system in his 8th level flat before the unforeseen veto came.

"They simply put an embargo saying I cannot go for an air conditioner. They would not explain why. They just said I cannot and that is all," he said.

"They [union of the neighbourhood] represent the whole building community. They have stood up for us and resolved many problems we faced before. So, going against them was a real tough option," he said.

While housing still remains a burning desire for most Dhaka dwellers, apartment life has brought some nagging and rather peculiar problems that the city's urbanites have never experienced before.



brought issues and problems that never existed in the city. Although most of these issues are rather trivial and peculiar in nature, they can easily fuel anxiety and communal disputes," said Jahangir Alam, an urban architect.

Worst part of the problem, as Jahangir believes, is that the lodgers have nowhere to complain, as there are no laws or provisions backing them.

"There are some laws regarding house rents which are rarely practiced. Apart from that there are barely any laws or policies to protect the tenants or lodgers," he said.

"The developers build the apartments, hand them over to buyers and move over to another project. Most of them do not

even provide any guidelines or procedures for the lodgers to follow," he said.

In many apartment complexes, the residents form associations to mitigate their own problems and sufferings. But the members in most cases either accept the rulings against their will or ignore them on personal grounds.

In the absence of any formal guidelines or policies, lodgers at times fall back on conducts that become irritating or harmful for their neighbours, Jahangir pointed out.

To prove his point, Jahangir gives the example of his own apartment in Dhanmondi. He lives in a residential complex where multiple buildings are separated by a scant space

between them.

"As I live on the first floor, the rooftop of the ground floor garage is next to my dining room window. The upper floor people throw litters and waste food items, which pile up on the garage rooftop beside my window. As you can imagine, dining in my apartment sometimes becomes a nauseating experience," he said.

He asked his neighbours to properly dispose of their trash, and even complained to the housing complex authorities, with little results. "Luckily, they [authorities] send someone to clean narrow lanes between the buildings from time to time, otherwise it would have been impossible to live here," he said.

Allegedly, a lot of flat owners

also tend to overlook the problems causing inconveniences to the lodgers.

An elderly couple living in Mogbazar have virtually become prisoners in their third level flat since the lift broke down. Mohiuddin Ahmed, 86, and his wife Nargis, 79, said they were told it could take three months to fix it.

The lift in the building has already been out of action for two months, leaving the pair virtually stranded in their home. Friends and relatives of the couple have been forced to deliver the couple's groceries to their flat.

"This sort of problems usually arise when the house owner settles abroad giving the responsibility of the house to relatives or a caretaker--who shows little regard for the convenience of the lodgers," said Engr. Abdul Sattar, a homeowner from Dhanmondi and a residential architect.

According to Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) officials, there are no official policies to distinguish between right and wrong in our everyday urban lives.

"The problem lies in social values and ethics, something we urban engineers can do little about. There should be courses in schools and colleges to teach these things," said a Rajuk spokesperson.

"It indeed boils down the issues of human values and etiquettes," said Ahmed Hossain, a social worker and activist from Malibagh Chowdhurypara. "People these days are more concerned about their own interests than the convenience of others which is bound to result in socially destructive attitudes."



Every time the government demolishes the slums along the rail tracks they crop up again as soon as the drive is over. Most of these slums are built too close to the rail tracks putting the squatters under the risk of getting run over by trains. The picture was taken near the Khilgaon Rail Crossing yesterday.