

HUMAN RIGHTS

In a world post-Syria, 'refugee' has almost become a dirty word. It is no longer an individual seeking solace from a terrible monster or a family leaving everything they have known behind because a fire has come to consume them. No longer does the word invoke the kind of empathy it should have; now refugees are violent people, harbouring perversions from savage cultures, ready to rob us of our national values. Thus, in hindsight, when Bangladesh's Supreme Court ruled to

percent of all surveyed admitted to having an income below the national average. While lack of education could explain this to some extent- only 2 percent have an HSC degree with a mere 1.5 percent having graduated (interestingly only 1 percent have had a Madrasa education) - another is simply the lack of opportunities. Having just acquired some of the benefits of being a citizen, previous generations did not have easy access to education. Secondly, the Urdu-speaking

describe horror stories of when they applied. Some claim to have been asked to "prove their citizenship" whilst others were said to be rejected on the basis of not having a "permanent address" with their Geneva Camp addresses being refused all recognition. To gauge their national involvement, it was further found out that 85 percent were voters and almost 98 percent of them had voted in their first and only election so far when they were granted their National IDs.

almost an everyday torture. Typically, 10 families share a single room, with one latrine shared by almost 90 families, on a daily basis. Long queues are formed before solitary water pumps every day. The sewage line itself is in shambles and 60 percent of the population lives in constant fear of evacuation and evacuations are common place. While they are encouraged to buy land outside the camp, often times they find themselves without the monetary tools required. The camp dwellers have been

MIRPUR CAMP IN NUMBERS

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PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO



finally acknowledge our own so-called refugees, the Urdu Speaking camp dwellers, as Bangladeshi nationals we all heaved a sigh of relief of finally getting ourselves rid of the "refugees". But before resting on the laurels of an achievement borne a decade ago, there remains plenty of work left.

A recent research conducted by the Islamic Relief Bangladesh in the year 2016 paints quite a grim picture of the reality of the 'newest' 44-year old Bangladeshis in our country. Conducted in 20 camps in Mirpur of over 116 spread across the country, it seems the basic rights of citizenships haven't arrived with the label of citizenship. Of 395 households surveyed, it was found that only 3 percent respondents had an income of over 15,000 taka. The national average income of families in urban areas stands at 16,475 taka. 97

community still faces a lot of discrimination and find themselves restricted from mainstream spaces, typecast into low-paying jobs.

When it comes to their Civil and Political Rights, a sinister trend begins to develop. Of those surveyed, 77.8 percent have no Birth Certificates yet almost 85 percent of them received their National Identity Cards. A focus group discussion revealed that the respondents knew of the importance of both NID and Birth Certificates, in terms of opening a bank account, applying for a job, to avail certain government service etc. Interestingly, of the 307 respondents without Birth Certificates, only 13 percent ever actually applied to get theirs. The issue of passports is another bone of contention. 5 percent of the respondents actually have a passport, many of those who don't

If there is some good news, it is lumped together with the bad. While 97 percent of the camp dwellers said to have faced no harassment or harm for being camp dwellers, almost 90 percent of them expressed hesitation in moving freely all around the country, their distinct accent and a language demonised as a national pastime being two key reasons. The camp dwellers also said their access to justice lay with the Camp Chairman and Members with 71 percent reporting to have gone to them for help.

An 80 percent drop-out rate and with 34 percent of the children out of school, the academic side of things cannot be classified as rosy. Worse than that are, still, the living conditions. Poor sanitation, lack of hygiene, poor drainage and meager resources all couple to make living in the camps

called, at least officially, as citizens of the country yet over 98 percent are yet to receive any government benefits. They aren't called refugees anymore yet the disdain attached to them has evidently remained.

Islamic Relief Bangladesh is one of the NGOs to operate in the camps and readily provides a range of services from paralegal work to even providing donations and conducting various projects. Based on their findings, apart from advocacy and income generation programmes, there needs to be a concentrated and dedicated effort to enjoin to our very own citizens the rights that everyone has and the access to the tools to give those rights to them. When in 2016, the term "bihari" is still carelessly tossed about as a cuss word, let that be a reminder that there remains much more work left. ■

HERITAGE

In the history and classical art section of Bangladesh National Museum, a photo of a beautiful mosque taken during the 60's can surprise audiences if noticed carefully. The mosque in the photo is seen standing by the bank of a mighty river which is so wide that it's other side is not visible. However, the intriguing fact of the photo is it says that the Mughal era riverside structure is called Sat Gambuj Mosque (Seven Domed Mosque) located at Mohammadpur, Dhaka- one of the most populous residential areas of Bangladesh's capital city.

To reveal the puzzle of such a mighty river and the ancient mosque in Mohammadpur area, I went aboard one of the many city buses from Shahbagh that took me to Mohammadpur Town Hall. After asking many for directions countless times, I finally found the mosque on the side of a busy, narrow road. However, the white plastered, magnificent seven domed mosque is no longer standing alongside the mighty river. Due to the rapid expansion of Dhaka city, the river seen in the photo, which is considered to be one of the streams of Buriganga, has been driven southwards and the serene river bank has been replaced by a gigantic madrasa complex called Jamea Rahmania Arabia. In the jungle of roads, bazaars and buildings, the ancient mosque is still preserving a history that has totally been forgotten by the people living around it.

The mosque is believed to have been built by Umid Khan in 1680 AD, son of Shaista Khan, the legendary Mughal governor of Bengal. The mosque stands on a fifteen feet high platform that can accommodate hundreds of people. There are three large domes on the roof of the mosque. Adjacent to these three domes, the architect gracefully placed another four dome-shaped structures due to which the mosque has been named the Seven Domed Mosque. However, the mosque has actually been roofed over by three domes. The eastern facade of the mosque is intricately decorated with glazed tiles.

The mosque is surrounded by a large rectangular garden. The garden also



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

THE MOSQUE OF MOHAMMADPUR

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

preserves some ancient tombs which are considered to be the final resting places of Mughal aristocrats. On the opposite side of the garden, there is a one chambered, decorated structure which is believed to be the tomb of one of Shaista Khan's daughters. The mausoleum is known as Bibir Mazar "Mausoleum of Bibi".

According to historians, during the rule of Shaista Khan in Bengal, the mosque was the religious centre of rich

agricultural villages called Jafarabad, Sarai Begumpur, Katur, located in between Peelkhana and Buriganga River. The Mughal officials and merchants used to travel along that ancient stream of Buriganga using the quay near the mosque to reach the towns along Brahmaputra river bypassing pirate infested Shitalakhsya River. Ancient drawings depict that boats and merchant vessels used to be anchored at the quay near the mosque.

After the end of the Mughal rule, the villages near the mosque were abandoned and the mosque was almost destroyed due

to disuse and invading vegetation. During the Pakistan period, the mosque and the ancient tombs were renovated and currently these ancient structures are maintained by the Department of Archaeology.

The Saat Gambuj Mosque is a unique example of Mughal architecture. However, many of its Mughal features have been destroyed due to unplanned modifications such as use of terrazzo on the floor inside the mosque. Proper care should be taken so that no further careless modification and encroachment can destroy this priceless heritage structure. ■



A sketch of Saat Gambuj Mosque beside Buriganga River in 1814.

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA



Saat Gambuj Mosque in the 60s.

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