

A DAY AT A ROHINGYA CAMP OFFICE

What are the kind of problems that a camp-in-charge deals with on a daily basis?

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In terms of picturesque views, there are few areas in the camps which can produce a better sight than the one seen from the top of Camp No 3. It's a place that provides a bird's-eye view of the entire site.

You get to see little children playing volleyball on a rare, unoccupied, stretch of land. Then there are the newly built bamboo bridges and the sharp steps carved out of the hills, replacing what used to be dangerous, muddy pathways. Combine the above with a clear blue sky, and it all feels surreal.

Located at the same place, is the camp-in-charge's (CIC) office, which unlike the view, doesn't always produce breath-taking moments. Spending a few hours here will allow one to encounter the wide array of issues—ranging from rape and sexual harassment to illegal renting businesses in the camps—which the CIC has to deal with on a daily basis.

Dildar Begum* waits at a room attached to the CIC's office, with a baby on her lap. Her face is covered—a common sight in the camps where a

majority of the women are covered from head to toe. However, when you talk to the aid workers present in the room, you realise that Dildar has more than one reason to cover her face.

On the evening of August 14, while her husband was away looking for work, a number of men barged into her house and raped her. "They held my neck with two hands, pushed me to the ground and raped me," she says, almost in tears. When she started shouting, one of the men bit her on her neck. She screamed again and the men hurt her even more.

By then, a number of people had gathered and caught the perpetrators. Dildar assumed that the men would be punished. However, in an surprising turn of events, the *majhi*—the leader of that particular block—along with two other elders, decided to strike a deal that would protect the rapists.

She was told that she would be paid Tk 2,000 for her injuries and, in return, she was asked not to complain regarding the matter. With no one around to support her, she was forced to accept the deal and even sign a document. Once her husband returned home, however, the couple decided to go to the CIC's office and complain the next day.

"While telling me her story, she held my leg and started crying. She was begging for justice," says an official working at the CIC's office. A search party had been sent the day before, and the police had been called. While the *majhi* had been detained, the perpetrators were missing. Shamimul Huq Pavel, the CIC of five out of the 32 camps, however, assures Dildar that it would only be a matter of time before the rapists are caught.

"There are several issues which we deal with on a daily basis. However, these are the kind of problems, which need to be addressed more seriously. If we don't catch the perpetrators, they will have the guts to commit these crimes again. Paying Tk 2,000 is not going to save them," says Pavel.

Barely two minutes after talking to Dildar, the CIC's office has to deal with another issue. This time, it's about two men who beat each other up because of a girl. "This man went outside his designated camp area and got involved in a fight with another man who wanted to marry the same



ILLUSTRATION: AABIR KHALID

“Give them hope and make them believe in humanity once again. They need to know that they can rise again from the ashes. Give them pride and they will fight back.”