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He said only a day ago one Raju was arrested. An electrician, Raju made the mistake of stating his demands live to a TV channel.

Although he did not take part when the October 6 protest turned violent, he was identified because of the TV interview.

As for the violence itself, locals say the protest was going peacefully until Councillor Habibur Rahman Mizan, known locally as 'Pagla Mizan', came to the scene.

According to police, Mizan, flanked by his supporters, came only to talk to the protesters. During discussions, an altercation broke out between the two groups.

At one stage, the councillor came under attack, police said. To disperse the agitating crowd, police charged baton, fired rubber bullets and tear gas canisters.

Over 50 people, including 15 cops, were injured during the fray.



Shuttered shops and vacant alleys present quite a different picture of the usually bustling corridors within Geneva Camp.

PHOTO: RASHED SUMON



Law enforcers are apparently still looking through video footage of the protests to find who else to arrest.

PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

Police alleged that the protesters then threw brick chips at the law enforcers and some even vandalised a police pickup. The protesters, however, said they did not vandalise the vehicle.

"Mizan's men were the ones who attacked the police and then they came to hunt for us," Simon claimed.

Around half an hour later after violence broke out, police armoured personnel carriers entered the scene, along with about a hundred policemen—some wielding sticks and many others shotguns.

Police again lobbed tear gas canisters at the protesters.

Locals maintain that it was Mizan's supporters who had turned the non-violent protest into a violent one.

Some TV footage also hints to the truth of that allegation.

Few can say for certain, however, who to trust.

"From one camp to another"

Many believe the electricity blackout is a precursor to a full-blown eviction.

And to that, plans are already in place.

"The government now has plans to put us in this housing project in

Mohammadpur's Bosila. This comes straight from the Planning Commission and the Prime Minister's Office," stated Khalid.

Videos of the brand-new housing project for residents of Geneva camp have circulated among those concerned for a while now. The videos show five glitzy 20-storey buildings, furnished with lush, green walkways.

It seems like an idyllic setting. Except, all that glitters is not really gold.

Shamim Zamanvi, a well-known Urdu poet, dubbed the entire project a "high-rise slum".

These brand-new buildings bring more dread to camp dwellers than anything else. It isn't a chance of a better future, but of even more uncertainty.

Its very construction may certainly mean the end of not only Geneva camp, but six other such camps in Mohammadpur.

"The flats will cost camp residents Tk 16,000 a month for years. Plus, there will be lifts, so there will be an additional charge for those. If camp residents could pay that much money, why would they even live in the camps?"

He said that those who rented homes in the camps generally paid around Tk 3,000 a month.

The flat themselves also pose a bigger challenge than just rent. For decades the community has extended their single-storey rooms vertically to four and even five storeys, as family members multiplied.

"These new flats are 650 square feet each. Considering that families here usually have around eight members, the quarters would be crammed. The reason why people add storeys on top of their allocated homes in the camp is because there isn't space for all of us in the family," Khalid said.

He also claimed the entire project was designed without any input from members of the community. "If you ask the people, they don't want these flats. They say one katha land would suffice."

One katha land for each of the 3,000 families, however, would not be feasible for a country already facing a crisis of land.

Considering this, community leaders have approached an architect to design a new project, one that takes integration into the deliberations.

"We cannot go from camp to another. We do not want to live isolated. What we suggest is that there should be a 65:35 ratio. 65 percent Urdu-speakers and 35 percent Bangalis. This way, there can be integration. Otherwise, what is even the point of citizenship," Khalid said.

But if all these issues remain, why don't the Biharis just move elsewhere?

While the questions seem easy enough to answer on the surface, dig a little deeper and a different picture emerges.

A barber by profession, who declined for his name to be used, said once he started making good money, he wanted to move out of the camps.

But no one was renting to "Biharis".

"They hear our accent and they know where we are from. Immediately, they decide against renting to us even though we can pay," he said.

Khalid Hussain recounted a similar tale. "The house where I live is owned by an expatriate. Over the years we developed trust and now she sometimes asks me to look after some of the needs of the buildings when certain situations arise."

He said once a member of the Urdu-speaking community was looking to rent a house. He made good money and came to Khalid to find him a place.

Coincidentally, at the time the house Khalid lived in had a vacancy.

"I told my landlord and she agreed to take him in. But when he came and spoke to the caretaker, the man immediately informed my landlord that the prospective renter was a 'Bihari'."

"She called me and told me she did not want to rent to him anymore. I then had to vouch for him. But because I was there, he got the house. There are 3,000 others who are not that lucky," he said.

The issue here is so complicated that it cannot be summed in one or two buzzwords. But the fact is the issue remains as a thorn on the government's side; the same government that promised citizenship, but never mentioned what it would cost.