



The aftermath of months-long bombings in Beit Hanoun, North Gaza near Kamel's house in February, 2024.



Kamel in Beit Hanoun, Gaza, on February 1, 2024, after they evacuated the deadly camps.



Kamel's family home, bombed twice, captured, on the 120th day of war, in February, 2024.

LIVING THROUGH THE GAZA GENOCIDE: A SURVIVOR'S STORY

'Parts of us died every day'



PHOTO: IBRAHIM KHALIL IBU

I don't wish this life on my worst enemy.

KAMEL ABU AMSHA 24, in Faridpur on April 26, 2024. His right eye has a corneal tear and keratitis.

RAMISA ROB

Each night, in his bed in Faridpur, Kamel Abu Amsha keeps waking up every thirty minutes, hearing thumping sounds of air raids, tanks and bombs. The bed is more comfortable than all the cold, mucky floors, slick with blood, of overcrowded refugee camps, and the blood-drenched hospital beds of injured patients, where he's slept over the past seven months, in his hometown: North Gaza. But he keeps waking up, because that's what he's used to.

On April 5, 2024, Kamel landed in Dhaka after living through 170 days of uncountable near-death experiences, back to "normal life." He does not know what to do with peace in Bangladesh. He appreciates that people in Bangladesh stand with Gaza, that they want the freedom of his people. But he doesn't know what to do with that either. He feels too often that the solidarity for Palestinian lives in Gaza, their real human lives, are reduced to a faceless number of casualties. "No one

house in Beit Hanoun, Northern Gaza, just over 10 kilometres away from the barbed-wire border of Israel. Akram always encouraged Kamel to make something of himself, "to help people". Since he was young, Kamel had wanted to study in Al-Azhar University in Gaza and become a doctor. But the expenses were too high for his father. So, Kamel applied to scholarship programmes for disadvantaged Palestinian students in foreign universities.

In 2019, he left Gaza for Bangladesh. It was immensely difficult for Kamel; his family of six brothers and one sister have always been tight-knit. They shared rooms in their three-story house, and ate dinner together every single night. They celebrated Eid cherishing their Palestinian custom of eating *Fasekh*—a specialty dish of gray mullet freshly fished from the sea, and marinated for fourteen days, served with fried tomatoes.

Kamel grew up close to his cousins too. Hasan, from his mom's side, was Kamel's age, and his best friend and confidant. Kamel loved his little life

he was planning on getting married soon. "Then you must do it quickly so I can attend while I'm here," Kamel had joked.

Then in an instant, life as he knew it, turned upside down. Hasan was killed in an airstrike in January, 2024. "I buried him," Kamel shared with me, shaking his head and reaching out for a tissue, as a welled up tear began trickling down his cheekbone. "Remembering those beautiful days, that's what hurts the most."

PART II: REFUGEE CAMPS AND NEW LIFE

On October 7, 2023, Kamel was sleeping, when he heard rockets and missiles barrage the sky. "Please not now," he thought to himself. He had lived through many flare-ups in Gaza, in 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2014. Even while he was in Faridpur, the Israeli army had attacked Gaza in 2021 and 2022. He had prayed that this month, this time, it would not happen again.

Soon, he heard the news: Hamas



Kamel recorded the bombing of a vegetable market near the camp in Al-Falujah.

him—he respectfully refers to everyone as martyrs—had become normal.

Kamel's family had one priority: the baby, who they had decided to name Akram after his father. Around the 15th day of war, as his sister-in-law's due date approached, Kamel went back to their house to retrieve the baby's clothes and diapers. Shells exploded from rooftops nearby. He quickly packed the baby's panjabi that he had bought in Bangladesh. The same day, once he returned to Al-Falujah, Kamel buried two of his cousins who had been killed in airstrikes.

At dawn, on 27 October, 2023, his sister-in-law's water broke. Nerves running high, as bombs pounded the northern strip, they managed—by a stroke of luck or fate—to take her to Kamal Adwan Hospital, which had an obstetrician facility, reaching around 4am. And like a miracle, baby Akram made it into the world. He had sepsis, but he was brought to the camp two hours after he was born, as there was no space in the hospital. Even as death engulfed the north of Gaza, they celebrated the birth of new life.

Then the rumours of the Israeli ground invasion became a reality.

PART III: DODGING DEATH

life they had built in it for 35 years.

They began searching for a safe place nearby and went to a school in Al-Falujah, which was turned into a refugee camp, crammed with thousands of displaced Gazans. His pregnant sister-in-law was with them. They ate canned beans and corned beef, and showered every fifteen days. He doesn't want to remember the bathrooms, but the stench and visuals of mud mixed with feces of children—who couldn't control themselves waiting in the long queues like the adults—is etched on his memory.

And every day, they experienced heavy bombing. Soon, the supply of food got thinner and thinner, as did the people. They chopped up wood to make fire as gas had run out. When wood also became scarce, Kamel's family had no options but to use his medical textbooks that his mother had taken, to make fire and cook some food to survive.

Often times shrapnel, shells and stones from the bombs would spray onto their camp, and injure people next to him. Some died in the school. In just a week, the sight of people dying around

As a medical student, Kamel felt it was his duty to help. So, he began volunteering at the Indonesian Hospital in Beit Lahiya. It was a 45-minute walk from the Al-Falujah camp. He would work at the hospital for two days at a stretch, go back to see his family, and rotate again. He worked in the emergency room of the Indonesian Hospital for 40 days, then in Al-Ma'amadani Hospital for 30 days and Al-Shifa hospital for another 40 days. He had forgotten that he was, in fact, just a 24-year-old student, that he'd come to Gaza because he was stressed about exams.

In the Indonesian hospital, each day, every hour, they received more than 100 injured patients, screaming in pain. The hospital was a 140-bed facility and was used to treat 250 patients per day, after it was launched in 2016. Kamel witnessed families like his get shattered, and whole families wiped out. On the 40th day of war, he

KAMEL'S FAMILY NOW AFTER HE LEFT



(L) Kamel's brother, Ahmed, 20, got injured when he went to fetch air-dropped food, on April 8, 2024. (M) Ahmed was shot at by the Israeli army. They don't know if he has intracranial hemorrhage as there is no functional hospital in Gaza. (R) Kamel's brother Tareq, 10, drags water cylinders on a wheelchair to retrieve water from the tube well, on April 26, 2024.



(L) Kamel's father, Akram, stands in front of the grills of his bombed house in Beit Hanoun on April 26, 2024. He has lost more than 25 kgs since the war, and remains in starvation. (R) On the same day, Kamel set up a table to eat *Makluba*, which he cooked with his flatmates in Faridpur. He can't eat much; his stomach has shrunk.

really gets what happens there every day, especially in North Gaza, even if you see it on your phone. We lived many lives every day, and parts of us died everyday," he told me.

He walks to class in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical College (BSMMC); his life is confined to his doctors' quarters, medical courses and mostly, to his phone. Bangladesh faces dangerous heat waves currently, but Kamel is beyond grateful that he has a fan and a room. Nothing really bothers him anymore, except the thought and the fear of having survived war, genocide, being safe himself, and hearing that his family has been killed.

PART I: THOSE BEAUTIFUL DAYS

Kamel's father, Akram, 55, means everything to him. Akram ran a small store where he sold chicken, near their

in Gaza, even though the hope of liberation one day from the "open-air prison" always seemed too distant.

During his four years in Faridpur, Kamel missed everything about home. Last year, on September 29, Kamel finally went back. He cannot articulate the feeling of seeing his father after thousands of days, when he got out of the taxi; both broke down, loudly. It was also his 24th birthday. They celebrated with a little cake that read "Happy Birthday Dr Kamel." He felt embarrassed that they were "too proud" of him, he told me.

He excitedly opened his suitcase full of gifts the same night. He bought panjabis from Faridpur for everyone, even a mini-size one for his nephew who was still in his sister-in-law's womb. Over the next few days, his relatives came to visit him. He was reunited with his cousin Hasan, who told him

had carried out its biggest attack in Israel and Israel had declared war. The uncertainty of what would unfold reigned over his body. His family quietly locked themselves in house arrest; they hoped that it would pass soon like previous conflicts. But the bombs this time were far more destructive; at every thunderous explosion, his family was sure they were going to die. They hadn't heard from his elder brother, Emad, 28, who Kamel had met just a day before. Till today, they don't know whether he's alive or dead.

The Israeli army had ordered the residents to evacuate the north. On the 5th night of the war, as bombs exploded like a dance of murderous fireworks, his family knew there were no options anymore. His mother rushed to pack his medical textbooks. "Where will I study, let's go," he had said as they all vacated the house, leaving behind the



170 DAYS OF WAR

In the first refugee camp in Al-Falujah

Kamel on October 15, 2023, in the refugee camp in Al-Falujah, North Gaza, before the Israeli ground invasion.

PHOTO COURTESY: KAMEL ABU AMSHA