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A Bangladeshi-Born Stranded Pakistani

MOAZZEM HOSSAIN

A Bangladesh-born 'stranded Pakistani', Abdul Ghani, believes he has been suffering many inconveniences since his birth in 1976 at the Mohammadpur Geneva camp for no fault of his own.

'Many like me, born in independent Bangladesh, have been punished for a "fault" they could, in no way, be blamed for,' On the eve of the World Refugee Day that is to be observed throughout the world today, Ghani detailed his miseries and placed 'discrimination' at the top of his grievances. 'In the school and college, I never disclosed my identity to my friends because of the fear of discrimination. Yet the trouble began when the question of nationality came up as I had to fill up the registration form in the school.'

The boy was refused admission, but at last with the help of his favourite teachers he could fill up the registration form by providing false information, saying that he did not live in the camp but in a house in the old town.

He told New Age that he was recently refused by Pubali Bank when he applied for opening a savings account. 'After a lot of effort, the ward commissioner, Atiqul Islam, issued a certificate which refrained from mentioning my nationality.'

Ghani claimed the property of his father which was acquired by the government after the War of Independence as abandoned property.

'Why should I not claim the property of my father which was looted? I am a Bangladeshi by birth and the right heir of the property of my father,' said Ghani. 'Should I not care for the well-being of my children?' He has a 'simple' formula for a solution to their long-standing problems. 'Give us back our property, and you do not need to worry about our rehabilitation.' He refused a government proposal for rehabilitating them at the camps outside Dhaka, and said, 'I must not leave the camp to start another life at another camp. If we are relocated to another camp, it will be a great farce in the name of rehabilitation.'

The 29-year-old man, however, termed his camp life 'purgatorial' and deeply believed that it would have been ended many years ago if the political leaders had dealt with the issue sympathetically. 'We are a persecuted minority...This criminal politics has crucified us.'

Ghani, however, defended his parents' generation. 'Have they not been punished enough? Many of them were killed, their property looted and they were also ousted from their own residences. Many of them who had led a prosperous life in the country died miserably. How much more will they have to suffer?'