

### Face of humanity-Beyond borders

**Margaret Mead once said “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”** Amidst the clamour of Eid festivities in the city, a pall of gloom was visible in the Rohingya refugee camp at Madanpur Khadar. Around 66 Rohingya families have been staying in the cramped makeshift houses since fleeing their homes in Burma’s Rakhine state around 7 years ago. Some faced the perils of the sea while some traversed long distances through train to seek refuge. Eventually, some of them ended up in a refugee camp near Kalindi Kunj. The fear of extermination and violence continues to pervade their lives as the vicious cycle of uncertainty and abject poverty follows them. Rohingya have been described by the UN as one of the most persecuted minorities in the world. They suffered ethnic cleansing and gross human violation at the hands of Burmese security forces that have targeted the ethnic community of Rohingya. The Rohingya were forced to leave their homes in the aftermath of the violence inflicted upon them. They have a long history of facing discrimination and repression under various Burmese governments and have been denied citizenship rights. They continue to live on the margins and find themselves crammed into crowded camps in Bangladesh, India and Malaysia with dire resources coupled with unsanitary conditions. It is like a replay of the horrors of holocaust where the Rohingya are at the receiving end.

On the occasion of Eid, St. Mary’s school decided to bring some happiness at the doorstep of the refugees. A few children accompanied by the school social worker distributed bags full of food items to the families residing in the camp. The students went around the dingy lanes to meet and greet each family and also lend a listening ear to the numerous stories that they were eager to share with us. It was an emotional catharsis for them and for the students, it felt like there is no greater joy in bringing a smile on someone's face. The kids dressed up in their festive attire looked at us with beaming faces. The menfolk came forward to inquire where we had come from and offered to help us in distribution. It was heartwarming to see that everyone was overjoyed to see us and receive some festive eatables. The women were mostly inside the shanties and only came out to receive the bags being distributed. There was no sign of basic amenities and a heap of trash stood piled up attracting swarm of flies. The camp was surrounded with filth and unhygienic living condition continue to pose a threat to the health of dwellers. Upon inquiring, it was found that the refugees receive no medical provision and have to go to local quacks in case of illness. Although India is not yet a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee convention and does not have a national refugee law, the human rights of refugees are protected by the constitution and they are supposed to have access to health care and education. However, the reality in these camps portray a bleak picture where there is no access to healthcare and basic amenities. With reports of the Indian administration pushing for the deportation, the refugees await an uncertain future. Sustainable development goals intend to end poverty, achieve zero hunger as well as promote peaceful and inclusive societies where everyone has access to justice. While ensuring justice for the refugee families still remains a faraway dream but through this gesture, we tried to bring happiness amidst their hardscrabble life. An act of kindness if transformed into a sustained action can create a ripple of change. Isolated acts of kindness need to be transformed into continuous sustainable practices that generate real positive impact. With no country to call their own, with state abdicating responsibility and destiny leaving them at the mercy of

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neighboring states, their only hope is humanity but that too seems a faraway dream in the present reality.



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