

# Bangladesh Spurns 400,000 Biharis

By Lewis M. Simons Washington Post Foreign Service

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DACCA — Hundreds of thousands of Bihari Moslems, desperate to go to Pakistan but unwanted there, face economic privation and starvation in Bangladesh.

Pakistan, which is picking and choosing those Biharis it will admit, is certain to select considerably fewer than 100,000. This means that when the repatriation process is completed in the next few months, some 300,000 frightened Biharis will be stuck in Bangladesh against their will.

The Biharis are the rejects of South Asia: not wanted by the country they left a quarter-century ago, the country they chose to go to or the country in which they now find themselves.

Most have no claims left on the eastern Indian state of Bihar; as destitutes and Urdu-speakers they are regarded as fuel for the fires of linguistic politics in Punjabi-dominated Pakistan; as collaborators and supporters of the Pakistani army, they are detested in Bangladesh.

Although the threat of violence against the Biharis has subsided since the 1971 Bangladesh war of independence, they are still at the bottom of the barrel for jobs and food. "Starvation is certain," said an official of the all-Swiss International Committee of the Red Cross.

"We won't push them into the Bay of Bengal," said Relief and Rehabilitation Minister Abdul Momen, echoing a recent comment of Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. "But finding jobs for them is going to be a problem. If we give jobs to Biharis and not to

Bengalis, there will be an uprising."

About five per cent of the half-million Biharis in Bangladesh now have jobs. But with unemployment soaring among the majority Bengali community, the Biharis command no priority whatsoever.

"I have not had work for two years," said Mohammed Hussain, 32, the father of two children. "If I could find work I would take my chances and stay in Bangladesh, although I know we are not welcome here."

Hussain, who before the independence war was a molder in a glass factory near Dacca, lives in a split-bamboo shack in a festering, stinking alley of Mohammedpur, a major Bihari relief camp. Some 32,000 Biharis—or now Bengalis, as the government labels them—live at Mohammedpur.

Although the camp is supervised by the Red Cross and food comes from various international organizations, there is not enough food. Just a few days ago, the government of Bangladesh ordered the daily adult food ration to be reduced from 11.5 ounces of un-

ground wheat to 11.2 ounces.

The U.N. World Health Organization had earlier determined that 11.5 ounces of wheat, which produces 6.4 ounces of flour, was the minimum daily requirement to keep an adult alive.

But in fact, even the newly reduced ration is nothing more than a figure on paper. At Mohammedpur, the average adult gets just a bit more than six ounces of wheat, by the time the Bangladesh Red Cross gets it delivered and the local police and Bengalis with bogus ration cards get their rake-off.

Mohammedpur is considered one of the better camps in the country, because it is near the foreign community in Dacca. At Saidpur, in the north, they're getting just over two ounces of wheat a day; at the big port of Khulna, where distribution is no problem, the ration is 3.2 ounces.

Asked for the official explanation, Relief and Rehabilitation Minister Momen replied: "I will have to inquire. This is the first I hear of it. I'll have to look into it."

The minister's profession

of ignorance, which could indeed be genuine, reflects accurately the best the Biharis could expect: neglect of a not very benign sort.

Knowing that they're not wanted in Bangladesh, nearly every Bihari refuses to believe that he could be unwanted in Pakistan, too. "Of course they will accept us," said Mohammed Panchu. "We are Pakistanis. We have given everything for Pakistan. They will not refuse us."

Panchu, 48, owned a clothing shop before the war. He, his wife and five children have nothing. Staring at a visitor through thick glasses, his small, thin face covered with a white stubble, Panchu refused to accept what the visitor told him—that under an agreement signed in New Delhi three months ago, Pakistan was free to choose those persons it wanted to admit from among those who applied; and that the overwhelming majority would be rejected.

"Why should Pakistan set a limit?" asked Panchu. "Why should they reject us? They will not."

The Biharis see themselves as loyal Pakistanis

who fought and sacrificed for their country. The government of Pakistan is not grateful.

The New Delhi agreement, signed by Pakistan and by India on behalf of Bangladesh, set the terms for repatriation of three groups of people: 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war in India; 150,000 Bengalis stranded in Pakistan; and "a substantial number" of Biharis.

This "substantial number," which in theory has no predetermined limit, is to be made up of persons who fit the following categories: Those who lived in West Pakistan before the war; those with members of their immediate families in the West; employees of the Pakistani central government and 25,000 "hardship cases."

According to an official in the Red Cross, which is now conducting a complete poll of Biharis, some 400,000 are expected to ask to go to Pakistan by the time registration is completed at the end of December. "Each and every one of them fully believes he fits one of the categories," the source said.

But except for central

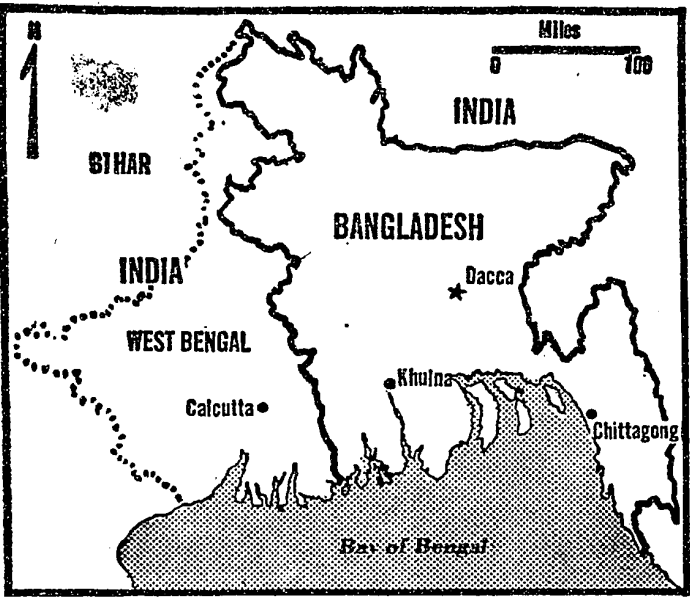
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Associated Press

Bihari women and children loiter in a Mohammedpur, Bangladesh, refugee camp.

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The Washington Post.  
Bangladesh's Biharis originally come from India

## Bangladesh Biharis Find All Reject Them

### BIHARIS, From E1

government employees, about whom records exist, most Biharis have no valid identity documents. Pakistan, taking advantage of this lapse, has so far approved only 30,000 applicants. By last week, fewer than half of these had actually gone to Pakistan.

While the delay is caused largely by Pakistani foot-dragging, there is another complication. More than 100,000 Biharis have escaped from Bangladesh since the end of the war, slipping into India or Nepal. Some go through Burma into Thailand.

"Not a day goes by that a handful of Biharis don't stick their heads out of their holes and tell us they want help in getting to Pakistan," a neutral European diplomat in New Delhi said recently.

Some of those cleared for admission by Pakistan are among these escapees, and the Red cross is unable to contact them, further slowing down legal repatriation.

There is a widespread belief among Bengalis in Dacca that India gave in to loose language on the Biharis to appease Pakistan and get rid of the costly and embarrassing burden of the POWs.

Although government officials refuse to comment on this, they concede that the New Delhi pact gives Pakistan certain advantages.

As to how the Biharis would be able to adjust to

living among the Bengalis under the new rules of the game in Bangladesh, Momen said simply: "They will have to adjust. They have no choice."

Perhaps. But Mohammed Zaqir believes that he has some small choice—and he is not prepared to adjust.

Zaqir is a former *Razakar*, a Bihari who joined the Pakistani army and fought against the Bengali insurgents during the nine-month civil struggle. As an enemy within, the Razakars were often more feared and hated than the West Pakistani troops.

Zaqir, captured by the Indian army on the last day of the war, was held as a prisoner of war for two months. Then he was turned over to the Bangladesh authorities and jailed. He was released last week.

"I have killed for my country," Zaqir said proudly, "and my country wants me. When we were captured by the Indians my commander told us we could come to Pakistan whenever we were freed."

Standing in a soldierly parade rest in a shabby Mohammedpur camp office, the slim, 28-year-old man said that as a former Razakar he had "too many enemies" among the Bengalis to remain in Bangladesh.

"If for some reason Pakistan refuses to accept me, I'll try to make my own way there," he said.

"I'll die trying if I have to."