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PEN

Biharis—the sad and hated minority

By LEON DANIEL

DACCA (UPI) — Saida Bana, at the tender age of 7, is hungry, emotionally scarred and infinitely sad. She is all of these things because she is a Bihari.

The Biharis are a hated minority in Bangladesh. The new nation that emerged from the December war between India and Pakistan.

There are reasons for the

hatred of the Biharis but the plight of Saida is more important.

Several days ago her little brother died, but Saida doesn't know why.

"He just died," she said.

The harried Bihari doctor in the camp where Saida lives like an animal was not sure why her brother died either.

"Probably malnutrition," he

said wearily.

Saida gets a good ration of six ounces of wheat a day from the Bangladesh Red Cross. Some days are better than others, but not much.

"My grandmother gave me some rice today," she said. Questioning revealed that she had some curry made with potatoes along with the rice.

"I like rice better than wheat."

said Saida, whose hair is cropped within a half inch of her scalp to prevent it from becoming infested with lice.

The more than a half million Biharis of Bangladesh which until the war was Pakistan's eastern wing, are people without a country, neither the winners nor the losers want them.

So they band together for protection in some of the most horrid ghettos in the world.

Saida and more than 43,000 Biharis live in an eight-camp complex in a suburb of Dacca called Mohammedpur.

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PENNSYLVANIA

PAGE 11

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tions.

"Every fifth person in this camp has jaundice," said Anwar Eghal, a Bihari who was a civil engineer before the Bengali struggle for independence began in March of last year. Biharis are now forbidden jobs because as non-Bengalis they supported Pakistan in the independence struggle.

Adults get 12 ounces of wheat a

day, Eghal said. Children get half that much.

"We need rice, vegetables, firewood and clothes," said Eghal. He said that cholera had been stopped by vaccinations but dysentery still is rampant.

"All of the people in the camps are jobless," he said. "They have no income at all."

To get money for necessities,

such as salt and a few vegetables, people in the camps have begun to sell half of their wheat ration to Bengalis. They already have sold almost all of their meager possessions.

A very few Biharis have ventured out of the camps to try to find jobs but the great majority are afraid to leave what protection they find in their teeming ghettos.