

South Asian Repatriation Moves Begin

NEW DELHI, Sept. 18 (AP) —An exchange of more than a quarter of a million people displaced by the 1971 war on the Indian Subcontinent will begin Wednesday, the Indian government announced today.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said the first phase of the exchange, to be spread over an 11-day period, will involve 2,600 Biharis from Bangladesh, 2,000 Bengalis from Pakistan and 1,680 Pakistani prisoners of war held in India.

The exchange was set up last month in an agreement signed by Pakistan and India, with the approval of Bangladesh.

The agreement covered an estimated 160,000 Bengalis in Pakistan, all but 195 of 90,000 Pakistani POWs and a "substantial number" from the 260,000 Biharis, an Urdu-speaking non-Bengali minority in Bangladesh.

The 195 excluded POWs are those whom Bangladesh wants to try on war crimes charges. The agreement stipulates they will remain in India until the three countries "discuss and settle the question" of possible trials.

In Rawalpindi, Foreign Ministry official Abdus Sattar disclosed that Pakistan would initially accept about 60,000 Biharis from Bangladesh. Sattar said there was no dispute among Pakistan, India and Bangladesh on the issue, but that the number who wanted to come was unknown.

Sattar said that priority would be given to Bengali civil service officials and defense personnel in the repatriation to Bangladesh. He said this was to convince India that Pakistan was "serious" in implementing the agreement.

By the same token, Sattar added, he hoped India would adhere to the principle of simultaneous repatriation in the agreement and would not slow down the flow starting today.

The 4,600 Bengalis and Biharis will be the first to be ferried between Dacca and Lahore, Pakistan, in aircraft chartered by the United Nations.

Before completion of that operation on Sept. 30, he said, India will send home 1,680 Pakistani prisoners of war on troop trains.