**Stranded Pakistani’s**

[Muneezay Moeen](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/muneezay-moeen/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20Muneezay%20Moeen)

February 1, 2021

In 1947, India was divided and Pakistan, a Muslim-majority nation, was created. During the partition,marked by violent communal clashes, many Muslims from Bihar left for East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.In 1971 however, Bangladesh gained independence after a bloody war ,man Urdu-speaking Biharis, who largely maintained a pro-Pakistani stance during the 1971 war, failedto make their way to Pakistan. Their support for Islamabad caused Bangladeshis to be distrustful of themand consequently, Dhaka did not take any steps to accommodate Biharis into its society. ‘Biharis’ are unfortunately those non-Bengali citizens of the former East Pakistan who remain stranded in camps in Bangladesh.

As a result, hundreds of thousands of members of the community have been stranded in Bangladesh forseveral decades, sequestered in camps and lacking basic rights.

Today many Biharis also live in Pakistan and India. Neither Pakistan nor Bangladesh agreed to grant citizenship to the Biharis (also called stranded Pakistanis) which resulted in their being effectively stateless since the independence of Bangladesh. Until a 2008 Supreme Court ruling that recognized their right to Bangladeshi nationality, many lacked formal citizenship and were therefore stateless. the Biharis found themselves unwelcome in both countries. Since then, most of these Biharis have been living in refugee camps in Bangladesh, hoping to be repatriated to Pakistan. Most of these people originated from Bihar which is a state in East India, bordering Nepal.

*Anti-Bangladeshi social stigma is a major concern for the Biharis. Many of them are paying for the previous generation’s support for Pakistan during the 1971 war and are still labelled as being against Bangladesh*

According to local NGOs working for Bihari welfare, around 400,000 members of the community live in camps in Bangladesh. Bangladesh government revealed that most Biharis

are currently housed in 116 camps in the country’s 13 different districts. Of these, the capital Dhaka hosts around 100,000 Biharis in 45 settlements. Houses inside these settlements are separated by a narrow passage hardly one meter wide and often occupied by domestic cattle. Senior analyst from Pakistan Abdul Rouf states that he has witnessed those settlements and camp, their condition is worst and life in those camps is worse than imagination. Families are crammed into tiny rooms, with little or no privacy for members. Rainy spells often lead to overflowing toilets and flooded paths, and lack of water and poor sanitation make life even more difficult Biharis live in 70 shanty towns that were initially temporary relief camps. The largest settlement, ‘Geneva Camp’, has 25,000 residents: it is estimated that only 5 per cent have formal education. As ownership of the settlements is uncertain and land prices have risen sharply, these areas have become increasingly attractive for investors. Many apparent incidents of communal violence against Biharis are intended to displace them from their land. On 14 June 2014, for instance, a Bengali mob attacked a Bihari settlement on the outskirts of Dhaka after an altercation broke out between communities, resulting in 10 deaths and widespread damage from arson. A local leader alleged that the attack was motivated by the desire of local politicians to evict the community.

Anti-Bangladeshi social stigma is a major concern for the Biharis. Many of them are paying for theprevious generation’s support for Pakistan during the 1971 war and are still labelled as being againstBangladesh. Khalid Hossain, a Muslim Bihari says,”We would like to get a chance to integrate into Bangladeshi society and not remain isolated in camps andbear the brunt of being anti-Bangladeshi,” .

According to Sattar who is an analyst, there are several reasons why Pakistan seems to pay slender attention to accepting Biharis. One reason could be that it has to bear the burden of over a million Afghan refugees conflict in their country. Furthermore, the last rehabilitation of the Biharis in Pakistan in the early 1990s triggered huge protestsfrom the locals of the country in Sindh. No government in Pakistan has dared to speak of Biharis settlement ever since this case emerged.In 1974, Bangladesh and Pakistan signed an agreement mediated by India to repatriate the Bihari community in Bangladesh. Following the deal, 178,069 Biharis were sent to Pakistan between the years1973 to 1993 stated byZaglulHaider who is a Bangladeshi researcher at York University, Canada. ultimately Pakistan needs to look after the stranded Pakistanis who are yet in Bangladesh and deprived of their basic rights. referring to those who have declared allegiance to Pakistan, those who remain committed to their allegiance should be repatriated to Pakistan because they are actually stranded Pakistanis. They have never taken Bangladeshi citizenship and are looking for support and right to live from Pakistan.

In this regard the United Nation refugee agency is to safeguard the rights and well-being of people who have been forced to flee or migrate because Together with partners and communities, they work to ensure that everybody has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another country. UNHCR also strive to secure lasting solutions and for over half a century, UNHCR has helped millions of people to restart their livesi.e., refugees, returnees, stateless people, the internally displaced and asylum-seekers. their protection, shelter, health and education has been crucial, healing broken pasts and building brighter futures.

the international community is focused on the plight of Rohingya ,African ,Syrian ,afghan refugees and at the very time not many in the worldare aware of the ordeal of Bihari Muslims who migrated from India in 1947.it is certain that Life as a refugee can be difficult to imaginebutt, for 26 million people around the world, it is a terrifying bitter reality.

*The writer is a human rights activist, a belogger*