

REHABILITATION OF ENCLAVE PEOPLE

Sites selected, but houses not built yet

A CORRESPONDENT, Kolkata

Residents of Indian enclaves in Bangladesh's territory will be entering the mainland of India from tomorrow until November 30 as announced by both the governments but little has been done for their accommodation.

The central government of India has promised to provide 979 people of the enclaves, who want to become Indian citizens, with a house and a lump sum amount of money so that they can make a living there.

The administration is to build rehabilitation centres for them in Dinhata, Mekhola Ganj and Mathabhanga sub-divisions of Cooch Behar district but not a single brick has been laid in any of the centres, according to local people and members of the enclave exchange committee.

The biggest of the three centres will be built at Agriculture Fair Ground in Dinhata. On a visit to the place on July 20, the correspondent saw Indian Border Security Force personnel deployed there and bamboo poles planted to demarcate the boundary.

Khurshid Miah, secretary of Dinhata Businessmen Association that leased out the 90 bighas of land to the district administration for two years, said the area was not fit for rehabilitation at all.

It lacks proper supply of drinking water and sewerage and anti-social activities take place there in the dark at night, local people said.

Khurshid wondered how the government would accommodate the refugees if they started coming from August 1.

As many as 500 houses can be built on the premises to accommodate around 2,000 people.

It will take at least one month to build the houses, said members of the committee.

The Indian government estimated that some 37,000 people from Bangladesh side would go to India and so planned to build rehabilitation centres accordingly. Now the number has come down but choices have already been made as to who wants to live where.

The majority of the 979 people opted to live in Dinhata and so the administration considers Agriculture Fair Ground the main rehabilitation centre.

P Ulaganathan, Cooch Behar district magistrate, said the rehabilitation centres would start functioning soon. No refugee will be left out.

Diptiman Sengupta, a leader of Bangladesh-India Enclave Exchange Coordination Committee, said the Indian government would provide safety and rehabilitation for those going to India.



Agriculture Fair Ground at Dinhata of Cooch Behar in West Bengal of India, a site for the rehabilitation of dwellers of Indian enclaves in Bangladesh. Not a single brick has been laid and also garbage can be seen littered there. The photo was taken on July 20.

PHOTO: STAR

Separated again 68 years after

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however small may be the number - 979 to be exact and only one way from this side to India - will take place anytime soon once the enclaves will no longer exist from midnight today.

For the second time in our history, people were given a choice, just as in 1947, to choose their homeland.

In Dashiarchhara, an Indian enclave in Bangladesh, 284 people - 158 of them Hindus and 126 Muslims - will travel to India, cross the border and say goodbye to this land for ever.

Mrinal Chandra Barman is one of them who is waiting to migrate. He had ten bighas of land here which he farmed. But now he is taking preparation to leave. He has already sold all the tall trees on his homestead for Tk 10,000.

"I don't know what I will do there, but I will go," Mrinal says, his wife and children waiting in the background. "This was my fate. What can I do?"

Mrinal knows he will not get any land from the Indian government against the land he will forego here. He knows he will have to stay in a camp. And he does

not know what will happen to him next. He also does not know what will happen to his land here.

"I have to surrender the land to the administration. But I am not sure whether I can sell the land because there will be no buyers, or they will quote ridiculously low price because they know I have no option."

Krishna Kanti Barman also does not know how and when he will reach India.

"I hope the government will provide us vehicle to transport our stuffs - beds and utensils," he says. "I was an Indian enclave person. So I opted to be an Indian."

Krishna however has a better hope because he is a mason and he has some relatives there who had migrated illegally before India put up the barbed wire fence.

"I know how to build a building. I have heard that there is a big town over there. So there must be a lot of constructions. If you know how to work, you will not go unfed," he laughs, nervously.

Like Krishna and Mrinal, 30 percent of the Hindus of Dashiarchhara will go to

India and become its citizens. For Muslims, the comparable figure will be much lower at only about 1.5 percent.

Shahjahan Ali and his entire family of three brothers and two sisters are among them who are also getting ready for the migration. They however have very little to take with them. They do not even have any land.

"We will just grab our clothes and go," Shahjahan says.

"I will take my ornaments," says his sister Asma, who shows her box of imitation bangles. "I love them. I don't want to go without my bangles."

And as Mrinal, Shahjahan and others like them are preparing to leave, the moneyed people in Dashiarchhara are getting ready too for a different reason.

They know those who are leaving will have no choice but to sell their property, now or later.

"I will buy their land. It must come cheap because if we do not buy who will then?" Shamsul chorlal in front of his pucca house. "After all it is the time for making hay."



Mrinal Chandra Barman, left, and others at Indian enclave Dashiarchhara in Phulbari of Kurigram. They want to become Indian nationals.



PHOTO: ZAHED KHAN

Close shave

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people in the Bay near Cox's Bazar on Wednesday. Six others on the boat were missing, reports our correspondent there.

One person died when a tree branch fell on him in St Martin's and a minor boy was killed in a wall-collapse in Maheshkhali yesterday.

In Hatiya of Noakhali, a newborn died as her parents ran to a cyclone shelter through rain and high winds. The baby was found not breathing at the shelter yesterday, reports our Noakhali correspondent.

A 55-year-old woman died in Bhola after a tree fell on her yesterday, reports UNB.

The people living on the coast were in panic yesterday, especially those in cyclone shelters of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Feni, Bhola and Laxmipur.

The sky was dark the whole day and the sea was rough, our Cox's Bazar correspondent reports.

Over five feet high storm surges

inundated around 100 villages in Ukhia, Pekua, Maheshkhali, Teknaf and Cox's Bazar sadar upazilas. Many trees were uprooted and thatched houses were damaged.

High winds toppled trees at Ispahani intersection, Battali Hill at Lalkhan Bazar, Jamal Khan and Patenga areas of Chittagong as well.

"If Komen hits the Chittagong coastal belt, it would hit with 60kmph to 80kmph wind speeds," an official at the Chittagong Met office said.

The authorities closed all educational institutions and had announced that they would be used as temporary cyclone shelters.

The government has also cancelled all leaves and holidays of all civil servants in the coastal areas until next Saturday.

Over three lakh people took cover in cyclone shelters in Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, and Bhola until yesterday afternoon, sources said.

They were asked not to leave the

shelter until further notice, said Shahina Sultana, in charge of the control room of the ministry of disaster management yesterday afternoon.

All river vessels, including fishing boats and launches, were asked to stay anchored to shore until further notice. Two flights to Chittagong had to be diverted to Sylhet yesterday morning.

"We have suspended all river traffic as a precautionary measure. We will stop ferry service too if the situation worsens," said Mahiuddin, an official of Shimulia river port in Chandpur.

The Chittagong and Cox's Bazar maritime ports were asked to hoist cautionary signal-7, which means the port would experience severe weather from a storm with wind speeds of 62-88kmph.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) sources said they were scheduled to bring back 159 trafficking victims home from Myanmar yesterday but had to cancel due to rough

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GREEK BAILOUT

PM calls party congress to stem rebellion

AFP, Athens

Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, under fire from his Syriza party comrades over an unpopular EU-IMF bailout, yesterday proposed holding an emergency party congress in September to determine government strategy.

"I call on everyone to share the political responsibility for the unity of Syriza," Tsipras told members of the party central committee.

"I propose holding... an emergency congress in September," the 41-year-old premiers said.

Tsipras is under pressure from a sizeable minority of Syriza members who say the tough agreement he signed with international creditors on July 13 goes against the government's anti-

austerity promises.

Over 30 Syriza lawmakers this month refused to vote for reforms needed for a three-year bailout in two separate votes, and Tsipras on Wednesday said early elections would have to be called if this resistance continued.

To silence his opponents, who said the government should have refused the new bailout, Tsipras said the question should also put to a party referendum on Sunday.

"The evaluation of this view... that there was no real blackmail (by creditors)... cannot wait for an emergency congress," he said.

"We should appeal to the party base... by organising... an internal party referendum on Sunday so the entire party can openly state its position," the

Salahuddin's trial begins in Shillong court

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The trial of BNP leader Salahuddin Ahmed, accused of entering India without valid documents, began in a Shillong court yesterday.

The BNP leader was present during the hearing in the room of Chief Judicial Magistrate KML Nongbri.

"One of the two witnesses was questioned in the case against the Bangladesh political leader who faced the charge of entering India without any valid document," public prosecutor IC Jha said.

Another witness in the case would be produced for questioning at a later date, he said.

Salahuddin was represented by his counsel SP Mahanta.

Police had arrested Salahuddin on May 11, about two months after he went