

## SETTLEMENT OF BIHARIS IN PAKISTAN

Syed Mahtab Ali Shah  
Abdul Khalique Chachar

## INTRODUCTION

The repatriation of the so-called stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh is one of the burning issues of a political debate in this country. It is a highly sensitive issue and there are two diametrically opposite views on it, expressed by the two communities ironically, living in the troubled stricken province of Sindh. The Urdu speaking segment of the population of the province, mainly personified in the political shape of the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), argues that the Biharis are genuine Pakistanis and they should be brought to Pakistan without any delay.<sup>1</sup> The native Sindhis, on the other hand, vehemently oppose such an idea. Sindhis argue, if the Biharis were brought to Pakistan, they would prefer to settle alongside their kith and kin in the big cities of the Sindh Province. That will reduce the indigenous Sindhis into minority even in their ancestral homeland, and would ultimately lead to the partition of the province.<sup>2</sup>

The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) which earlier had formed a coalition government in the province of Sindh, found itself caught in the middle. Throughout its rule, the PPP, whose major constituency has been the rural Sindh, remained opposed to the proposed settlement of the Biharis in Pakistan. Whereas, the PPP's coalition partner, the MQM, composed of the Urdu speaking community, many of them Biharis themselves, as strong supporter of their settlement in Pakistan. The PPP's position on the settlement of the Biharis, was to some extent, comparable with the British Mandatory Power in Palestine

(1919-45) which faced a dilemma of adjusting irreconcilable interests of the native Palestinians and the waves of Jewish immigrants, both scrambling for gaining mastery over the same small piece of land.<sup>3</sup>

The point of view of the Urdu speaking community on the issue of the settlement of Biharis has been presented by a number of politicians and intellectuals. This article purports to analyze the issue from its political, economical and legal aspects.

#### JUSTIFICATION FOR THE SETTLEMENT OF THE BIHARIS

The main postulate of the supporters of repatriation is that the 1940 Resolution which envisaged the idea of the creation of Muslim homeland in the contiguous Muslim majority provinces in North West India, entitled the Muslims from all over India to settle in these provinces. Any opposition to such a settlement in the existing boundaries of Pakistan will be tantamount to the opposition of the very idea of creation of Pakistan.<sup>4</sup>

The above argument appears to be out of touch with the reality. If one looks at the very spirit of the 1940 Resolution which did not talk about Pakistan, but a 'Muslim Homeland', composed of 'Sovereign States', will find that, the said Resolution was passed for the purpose of creation of a Muslim homeland where the Muslims would be protected from their economic and social exploitation by the vested interests who happened to be non-Muslims. Nothing was mentioned about immigration of religious communities from one area to another.<sup>5</sup> The latter day historians suggested if the leaders of the Muslim majority provinces, had foreseen the biggest migration of the human history they might had refrained from form-

ing the grouping of 'Sovereign States', in the Muslim majority areas. It is also a widely held view that, if the father of the nation, the Quaid-e-Azam, had foreseen the blood bath and subsequent migration of people, he might have not insisted even on the partition of India.<sup>6</sup> The blood bath and migration of people, was a result of evil design of Hindu and Muslim chauvinists, wreaked for the purpose of grabbing other community's property and jobs. And the Biharis were victims of that conspiracy. Thus the 1940 Resolution, the creation of Pakistan in 1947, and the secession of its Eastern Wing in 1971, does not *ipso-facto* entitle the Biharis for their repatriation to Pakistan. The term 'repatriation', according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means to restore, or return a person to his native land.<sup>7</sup> Biharis, of course, may be repatriated to the place of their origin, i.e., the Indian State of Bihar, but by no means to any of the geographical units of present Pakistan.

#### WHO IS BURDEN ON WHOM

The views of many Urdu speaking intellectuals and politicians from other provinces are not in line with the views of those who suggest that 'Sindh's' and rest of Pakistanis are a burden on Muhajir inhabited Karachi!<sup>8</sup> In fact, Karachi was built with blood, toil and sweat of Sindhis, who have been living there from the times immemorial. And today Karachi is an inseparable part of Sindh. For instance, if a demagogue of Pakistani origin claims that Birmingham and Breidford are Pakistani inhabited cities and the Britishers are a burden on them, what treatment he would receive? He will be ridiculed or possibly brought to the book under the race relations Act. Similarly, if a self appointed leader of the migrant workers in the Gulf states claims that the local Arabs are a minority and thus burden on the migrant workers, he will be immedi-

ately expelled. Demographically, the Urdu speaking community do not outnumber the natives in Karachi as a whole. On the contrary they are a minority.

A person with a deep knowledge of history, will appreciate that the Sea Port and the Air Port of Karachi were built by the Britishers, before the arrival of the Urdu speaking people, because Karachi was (and still is) a vital communication link between Europe and the East. Foundation of industrialisation of Karachi was laid by the government of Sindh during pre-partition era. And most of the industrialists do not use Urdu as their first language. The major determinant of the industrialisation of Karachi is its coastline, which nature has bestowed on Sindh and Baluchistan. Thus the Urdu speaking community has a marginal role in the industrial development of Karachi. The second largest industrial base in Pakistan is located in the Central Punjab, where the Urdu speaking persons were made rare species. One is, therefore, forced to argue that it was Sindh which embraced the Urdu speaking refugees when they were shelterless and still struggling for their survival, they consume the waters of the Indus and the grains of Sindh.

#### FALLACIOUS ANALOGY

Some Urdu speaking intellectuals and politicians compare the issue of repatriation of the Afghan refugees with the settlement of the Biharis. They complain that the Afghan refugees who are a security risk and financial burden on Pakistan are harboured by the successive governments in the country, while the settlement of the Biharis is avoided on one excuse or the other. The present government, and no sensible person will disagree with them on the repatriation and rehabilitation of the Afghan refugees to their native place, i.e. Afghanistan.

However, it may be reminded to those having sympathy with the Biharis that Pakistan is not a native place of the Biharis and they can not be brought over here for settlement.

From their point of view, Sindhis are bigots.<sup>9</sup> But the whole world is imbued with the deep imprints of Shah Latif's humanistic and universal message on their minds. Sindhis feel pity about the self-inflicted wounds of the Biharis and wish that their sympathizers such as their co-linguists in Pakistan, Lord Ennals and the House of Saud, should facilitate their rehabilitation in the Muslim states of the Middle East.

#### THE ROLE OF THE I.J.I. GOVERNMENT

After winning the general elections of October 1990 the MQM joined the IJI (Islami Jamhoori Ittehad) Government at the centre and Sindh Province. After assuming power the question of repatriation was taken up with new vigor. The issue assumed new dimensions when the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif declared, as part of the deal for MQM's support at the centre and Sindh Province level, that the Biharis would be settled in Southern Punjab. The Siraiki speaking Punjabis, who consider themselves a distinct nationality in their own right, reacted strongly against the government decision.

Commenting on the Biharis issue Ahmed Bashir wrote: "The worst part of the repatriation of the Biharis is that they will always live as Muhajirs in Pakistan, and because of their cultural inhibitions, they will never identify themselves with the Siraikis, giving rise to new social contradictions . . . The support they are likely to get in their settlement has never been available to Siraikis".<sup>10</sup>

He further argues that the Biharis, after their settlement in the Siraiki belt, will sell their properties and residences as soon as they can, and move over to the urban centres of Sindh for resettlement.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the views of native Sindhis and Siraikis, who are going to be the worst affected by the settlement of Biharis in their areas, are almost identical.

#### THE ROLE OF PEOPLES PARTY AS OPPOSITION

After the October 1990 general elections, the PPP was not even allowed to form the government in Sindh Province despite her being the largest party in Sindh Assembly. Being pitched against the political vendetta of the Federal Government on the one hand and Jam - MQM coalition in Sindh on the other, the PPP has started opposing the repatriation of Biharis to Pakistan.

PPP leadership particularly Bhutto Ladies who belong to Sindh know very well that their power base for all practical purposes is rural Sindh and who have made tremendous sacrifices during the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) in 1983 against General Zia's dictatorship. They are fully aware of the sensitivities of the native Sindhis, that the Biharis will ultimately settle in the Urban Centres of Sindh, thereby reducing them into minority in their own province. Such an eventuality would shrink their power base in Rural Sindh visa-vis other nationalist groups who are almost unanimous on this issue and PPP is coming closer to their view point on a number of issues directly affecting Sindhis including that of Biharis.

## THE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL ASPECT

If one looks at the Biharis issue from the legal and constitutional point of view they are not entitled to the Pakistani citizenship.

During his rule General Zia had issued an ordinance in 1978 through which a section 16A was inserted in the Pakistan Citizenship Act. This amendment deprived Pakistani Citizenship to all those who at any time before 16th December 1971 were domiciled in territories which constituted the then province of East Pakistan and who were residing in that area or out side Pakistan on that date. 12

Thus on the basis of the above amendment made in the Pakistan Citizenship Act, Biharis are not entitled to Pakistani citizenship and their repatriation to Pakistan is not justified even on legal and constitutional grounds.

## CONCLUSION

Therefore in order to avoid further tensions and acrimony among various sections of population particularly for the peace and harmony in Sindh it will be advisable to settle these people in more prosperous muslim states of the Middle East. The Pakistan Government must take the lead in this humanitarian issue and take up the matter of settlement of Biharis with Organization of Islamic Conference, Rabita Alam-e-Islami and seek their help for their settlement in the Middle Eastern Muslim Countries. This appears to be only viable and acceptable solution to the two decades old problem.

## NOTES

1. See the statement of Mr. Altaf Hussain, the founding leader of the MQM on the issue of repatriation of the Biharis, in the DAILY DAWN, Karachi, December 12, 1988, and Mr. A.A.Usmani 'The Repatriation of Stranded Pakistanis', in the DAILY MUSLIM, Islamabad, April 2, 1989.
2. For different shades of the Sindhi opinion on the Biharis issue for instance, see the statements of Dr. Hamida Khuro leader of the Sindh National Alliance, Mr. Manzoor Hussain Wasan, a PPP member of the Sindh Provincial Assembly and Mr. Mohammad Khan Junejo, the President of the Muslim League, respectively in the DAILY DAWN, Karachi, April 9, 1989, The Daily Dawn, Karachi 11 April 1989, The WEEKLY GUARDIAN, London, 21 August 1988. (Lord Ennals letter to the Editor).
3. For the British position in Palestine, see E.H. Carr, THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS: 1919-39, Macmillan, London, 1967, pp 235-38.
4. Usmani, op.cit.
5. Mr. Latif Shervani is one of the main historians of the Pakistan Movement. He says nothing about the transfer of populations as envisaged in the 1940 Resolution. See his PAKISTAN RESOLUTION TO PAKISTAN: 1940-1947. National Publication House, Karachi, 1969.
6. Larry Collins & Dominique Lapierre, THE FREEDOM AT MIDNIGHT. Vikas Publications, New Delhi, India, 1977, pp.317-44.
7. THE OXFORD ILLUSTRATED DICTIONARY, 2nd edition, Clarendon Press, London, 1976, pp.715.

8. M.B.Naqvi, 'Sindh's Simmering Couldern', THE DAILY DAWN, Karachi, April 12, 1989.

9. Usmani op.cit.

10. Ahmed Bashir, "Repatriation of Biharis" The Frontier Post, Lahore, September 18, 1991, p.9.

11. Ibid.

12. Makhdoom Ali Khan, "Repatriation: the legal aspect", Daily Dawn, Karachi, November 21, 1991, p.11.