

Pulse

# The 'Nowhere People' of India and Bangladesh Finally Have Somewhere to Go

By Sanjay Pandey

July 31, 2015, 9:26am

Share:

As a visitor enters the enclave of Madhya Moshaldanga near the border of India and Bangladesh, excited children holding Indian flags encircle him and chant, "*Bharat Mata ki Jai!*" Victory for Mother India!

The enclave is on the Indian side of the border — but the people living there aren't Indian. Nor are they quite Bangladeshi, as they don't have citizenship there. Instead, they are known as “nowhere people.”

## **VIDEOS BY VICE**

---

According to the Indian government, they are among about 14,000 people currently living in 51 Bangladeshi enclaves — parcels of land technically belonging to one country but encompassed by another — on the Indian side of the border. About 37,000 Indians live in 111 enclaves on the Bangladeshi side. Residents of the enclaves typically have no access to public services such as roads, power, schools, and hospitals. And they often face persecution from those living around them.

**Related: Indian Army in Gunfight With Rebels After 'Terror' Attack Kills Five**

The population numbers derive from a census taken by India in 2011, but local NGOs and activists peg the population somewhere closer to 100,000. And they say another 50,000 people who fled their enclaves inside Bangladesh due to persecution live as refugees further inside India.

In May, India's parliament passed the India-Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement (LBA), ending a 40-year political deadlock and paving the way for statehood for the 50,000 stateless people living in the 166 enclaves, counter-enclaves, and counter-counter enclaves in India's Cooch Behar and Bangladesh's Rangpur districts. (Bangladesh's parliament approved the agreement soon after Prime Minister Muzibur Rahman signed it — in 1974.)

Under the terms of the deal, India will begin transferring its enclaves to Bangladesh, while Bangladesh will transfer its enclaves to India; as a result, the border between the two countries will be redrawn. Beginning today and lasting for the next 11 months, New Delhi

and Dhaka will implement the LBA. The Indian government has allotted close to \$50 million to aid enclave residents in the transition.

The boy, now 5 years old, is named Jihad in reference to the struggle his parents endured at his birth.

Those affected can choose in which country they wish to settle and have citizenship. A large number of Indian enclave residents plan to return to India proper, but most residents of Bangladeshi enclaves say they don't want to return to Bangladesh because they believe they face a brighter future in India.

This may very well be why people in Bangladeshi enclaves have been in a celebratory mood since the May announcement ("Bharat Mata ki Jai!"). Immediately after the passage of the LBA, residents of Madhya Moshaldanga rallied to celebrate their "freedom," ending up in the neighboring Indian village of Battala.

But Battala residents did not react well.

“A few men armed with bamboo sticks accosted us as our procession crossed the borders of the enclave, and asked if we had the legal permission to enter into Indian mainland,” 25-year-old Jainul Abidin told VICE News. “They said, ‘Go back or get ready to be beaten up.’”

As the sun went down, Abidin said, a group of men armed with knives and sticks invaded Madhya Moshaldanga, attacked the revelers, and set a house on fire.

“What enrages them is that we have been a soft target for them for decades,” Abidin said. “They would come to our village and intimidate us. They would forcefully take away our

cattle and standing crops, but we could not do anything as there was no rule of law that existed in the enclaves.”

But to the surprise of Madhya Moshaldanga residents, Indian police arrested one of the men who'd attacked the village.

“This is just the beginning of the end of apathy for the enclaves people,” said Deeptiman Sengupta of the Bharat Bangladesh Enclave Exchange Coordination Committee, which represents enclave residents. He said they will no longer have to bribe Indian officials or citizens to procure fake birth certificates and identification cards to gain access to public services.

## **Watch VICE News' 'Sex, Slavery, and Drugs in Bangladesh.'**

Thirty-two-year-old Bangladeshi Abdul Rehman of Karola enclave says he can now get married. In 2013, Rehman was set to marry a woman in the neighboring village of Nadina. But when the bride's family learned that he hailed from a Bangladeshi enclave, they immediately cancelled the wedding and told the groom's party to "get the hell out of here," refusing to allow their daughter to move to the "God-forbidden land," he says.

"It was at that time I took a vow that I will marry only when I become a citizen of India," Rehman said.

In 2010, Asma Biwi got pregnant with her third child. While in labor, the 30-year-old was rushed to an Indian hospital where the authorities refused accept her. After activists from human rights groups stepped in, Asma was admitted to the hospital, but her family still made certain to fake the name and address of her husband, since they were residents of a Bangladeshi enclave.

The boy, now 5 years old, is named Jihad in reference to the struggle his parents endured at his birth.

There are different theories about how the enclaves came to be. One legend holds that they are the result of a 17th century chess match between the King of Cooch Behar in India and the Mughal Faujdar of Rangpur state in which they wagered their territories. A 2004 paper by the University of Melbourne's Brendan R. Whyte states the enclaves are the "result of peace treaties in 1711 and 1713 between the kingdom of Cooch Behar and the Mughal empire, ending a long series of wars in which the Mughals wrested several districts from Cooch Behar."

After the partition of India in the middle of the 20th century, which led to the formation of Pakistan and eventually Bangladesh, residents of the enclaves truly became nowhere

people, and the absence of the rule of law turned the areas into a haven for criminals. Enclave residents on each side of the border became easy targets.

**Related: Gold Smuggling in Bangladesh Is at an All-Time High**

“We would be persecuted on a daily basis as Hindus are a minority there,” said 50-year-old Subol Mondal, an enclave evictee who lived on an Indian counter-enclave inside Bangladesh. “Our women, land, cattle, and house were easy targets for religious fanatics who came in numbers with Bangladeshi security personnel.”

Mondal now lives as a refugee in Gaisal, India.

“My heart says I should go back to my parental place in Bangladesh,” he said. “But my mind says, ‘Haven’t you learnt a lesson from the past?’”

*Follow Sanjay Pandey on Twitter: [@sanjraj](#)*

---

Tagged:

[ASIA & PACIFIC](#) [BANGLADESH](#) [INDIA](#) [PERSECUTION](#) [POLITICS](#) [STATELESS](#) [VICE NEWS](#)

[Follow Us On Discover](#)

[Make Us Preferred In Top Stories](#)

## MORE LIKE THIS

---



### **Horny BookTok Girls Are Buying Medieval-Inspired Sex Toys**

BY GIGI FONG | REVIEWED BY YSOLT USIGAN

---

### **Fable Gets Delayed to 2027 to Avoid GTA 6 Launch**

BY BRENT KOEPP

# **We Actually Have Björk to Thank for This Genre-Defining Alt-Rock Band From the 1990s**

BY LAUREN BOISVERT

---

# **Pusha T Released One of the Most Scathing Diss Songs of All Time on This Day 8 Years Ago**

BY CALEB CATLIN

---

# **This Acclaimed Rapper Dropped His Stage Name Moniker and Stepped Away From Music Industry After Feeling Burnt Out**

BY CALEB CATLIN

---

# **Everything We Know About Blue Origin's New Glenn Rocket Explosion in Florida**

BY EVAN ROBERSON



# MORE FROM VICE

## New Music Friday: 5 Songs You Need to Hear This Week (5/29)

BY STEPHEN ANDREW GALIHER

---

BY TONY ALPSEN

**26 Years Ago, 'There's Something About Mary' Cut a Scene Where One Character Got Eaten by a Python**

BY TONY ALPSEN

## 36 Years Ago, 'Married... With Children' Made an Episode So Raunchy Fox Refused to Air It for More Than a Decade

---

BY TONY ALPSEN

## Patton Oswalt on His New Stand-up Special, Things That Haven't Aged Well, and Doing Comedy for Almost 40 Years [Exclusive]

[ABOUT](#) [ACCESSIBILITY](#) [PRIVACY POLICY](#) [TERMS OF USE](#) [SECURITY POLICY](#) [FULFILLMENT POLICY](#)

© 2026 VICE DIGITAL PUBLISHING, LLC