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Rehabilitation and Settlement of Refugees in East Bengal: Role of Federal Government of Pakistan, 1947-1950

Abstract

Partition of India in 1947 synchronized with the division of Punjab and Bengal provinces that caused a massive migration of people between newly-born states of Pakistan and India. The present study is confined to the refugee problem and its settlement in East Bengal province of Pakistan. The burden of refugees' reception and their settlement was a great challenge to be faced by the nascent state of Pakistan. Much has been written on refugee rehabilitation and settlement in the Punjab but the role of Federal Government of Pakistan in this regard in East Pakistan has generally been overlooked by scholars. It is generally believed that the issue of refugee migration and resettlement in East Bengal province had not been seriously taken up by the government of Pakistan. It seems to be misinterpreted as the matter of refugees remained one of the important issues in the federal cabinet of Pakistan after partition. The State did not neglect the issue of refugees in East Bengal rather kept in view all the problems; many relief works were undertaken and grants were also issued for refugee rehabilitation and settlement to East Bengal's provincial government. Moreover, the government of Pakistan took this matter on the international level with Indian State and inter-States diplomacy was started between India and Pakistan to address the question of refugees' grievances in East and West Bengal. A series of Inter-dominion conferences was started soon after independence and several political delegations held meetings to cope with the refugee issues and finally, in 1950, the Liaquat-Nehru agreement was signed to protect the minority rights across the border. For this research study, primary and secondary source material; Prime Minister Papers, the Federal Cabinet records files, and especially the files of Refugees and Rehabilitation Ministry have been extensively utilized.

Key Words: Refugees, Migration, Rehabilitation and Settlement, East Bengal, Federal cabinet

Introduction

The present research paper is an attempt to highlight the role of the Federal Government of Pakistan in Refugee Rehabilitation and Settlement in East Pakistan. The area of study has generally been ignored by the academicians and scholars regarding Federal government's efforts for refugees' rehabilitation and

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settlement in Eastern wing of Pakistan. The existing gap has been covered in this paper while using primary source material; the Federal Cabinet records files, especially the files of Refugees and Rehabilitation Ministry. This paper seeks how had the federal government addressed the said issue in Inter-dominion conferences with India and Liaquat-Nehru Pact? What relief works had been initiated by the federal government in the Eastern wing? And what long-term policies for rehabilitation of refugees had been initiated in the province for agriculturist and non-agriculturist refugees. It is generally believed, by the scholars who have discussed directly or indirectly refugee issues in East Pakistan, that the Federal Government of Pakistan did not address the refugees' issues in time. Anindita Ghoshal argues that the Centre did nothing for the refugees of East Pakistan or deliberately discriminated Eastern Wing as compared to Punjab.¹ This seems to be half-truth as the federal government not only took East Pakistan's refugees issue separately on inter-dominion level with India but also initiated many plans and issued funds for the refugees' betterment and settlement in East Bengal. This research study is confined to the role of the federal government and its contribution in rehabilitation and settlement of refugees in East Bengal.

Bengal was the largest province of united India. It was divided on the basis of Hindu and Muslim majority areas at the time of partition.² The new province of West Bengal, which emerged as part of India, had 21 million people, in which 25% or 5.3 million were Muslims. However, East Bengal³ had 39 million people, in which 11 million were Hindus and the rest were Muslims.⁴ This partition brought sudden and irreversible changes in lives of five million Muslims who were left behind in West Bengal (India). A high cost had been paid by the Muslims on both sides, whether they migrated to Pakistan or not.

The picture of Bengal was not the same in view of violence and massacres that had occurred in Punjab. The Bengal riots were not abrupt soon after the partition rather a contiguous serial of mob riots which occurred after 1950.⁵ The causes of migration of Bengalis were somehow different from that of Punjab Province. First, demarcation line did not disturb large group of people in Bengal. Second, peace prevailed in Bengal as compared to Punjab in the following months of partition. So the dynamics of migration in Bengal were quite opposite to Punjab. The first phase of migration started in Bengal as an outcome of Calcutta riots in 1946. People started believing that it could happen again in future. In second stage, people migrated from East to West Bengal after the announcement of Boundary Commission's report in August 1947. According to the official report of West

¹Anindita Ghoshal, "The Invisible Refugees: Muslim 'Returnees' in East Pakistan (1947-71)," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, 63, No. 1(2018): 63.

²Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition Bengal and India, 1947-1967*(Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

³In 1947, Bengal was partitioned. Its eastern part became part of Pakistan under the name 'East Bengal,' its western part merged in India under 'West Bengal.' In 1955, East Bengal was officially renamed as East Pakistan. In 1971, this area got separated from Pakistan to become the independent state of Bangladesh. In other words, the terms East Bengal, East Pakistan and Bangladesh all represent the same territory.

⁴Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, 107.

⁵Subhasri Ghosh, "The Working of the Nehru Liaquat Pact: A Case Study of Nadia District, 1950," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 68, Part 1 (2007): 855.

Bengal, 15000 Muslims fled to East Bengal due to fear of disturbances soon after the partition.⁶ Moreover, they considered themselves on the wrong side of the boundary line, with wrong people across the fence and far away from the co-religious mainstream, residing in the other part.⁷ Some other optional factors had also contributed in mass migration on both sides including economics, government employment and violence in some areas etc. While the influx of refugees was remarkable and possibly overwhelming numbers panicked, both the newly born States started to hold meaningful discussion with each other, so the federal government of Pakistan took initiative to hold diplomatic dialogues across the border to reduce the flow of migration in East Pakistan on international level. This proves that the government was fully aware of refugee situation of its Eastern Wing.

1. Indo-Pakistan Diplomatic Engagement

Pakistan's government kept the issues of Eastern wing including refugee rehabilitation and settlement in its priority list at the time of discussion with India. Either it was inter-dominion conference or Liaquat-Nehru Pact, such disputes or matters related to refugees were addressed in detail.

a. Inter-Dominion Conferences

The first Inter-dominion conference scheduled in January 1948 was to discuss the question of minorities' properties, their migration and to secure their rights in East and West Bengal respectively. It was obvious to officials of both states that a wrong legislation from any side would create massive trouble for refugees on the other side. Soon it had been recognized and realized by the two states to take collaborative measures to ensure their citizens to stay at their native places.⁸ It could directly reduce the flight of migrants in both East and West Bengal. Ghulam Muhammad, Minister of Finance led Pakistani delegates and K C Neogy, Minister for Rehabilitation in India led Indian delegation at the conference.

The officials of both the countries recognized refugee issue as a human problem and agreed that the heavy influx of refugees could be controlled only with mutual cooperation.⁹ They also agreed to take every potential step to minimize exodus of refugees and to generate such circumstances, which would check mass migration in either direction. They also agreed to facilitate the returning of the refugees to their inherited homes.¹⁰ Ghulam Muhammad also suggested in the meeting that 'if we are ready to work for the rights of minorities on either side, we should provide necessary arrangements' for the refugees.¹¹ It was suggested that both governments should lay down the visible machinery to facilitate them. A proposal for the joint

⁶Ibid., 167.

⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁸PallaviRaghavan, "The Making of South Asia's Minorities A Diplomatic History, 1947–52," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol II, No 21, May, 21, (2016): 47.

⁹ Ibid, 49.

¹⁰ *Proceedings of the Inter-dominion Conference*, 18 April 1948 at Writers Building, Calcutta; File No F 8–15/48–Pak I; MEA, Pak I Branch; NAI. Cited in, PallaviRaghavan, "The Making of South Asia's Minorities A Diplomatic History, 1947–52," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol II, No 21, MAY, 21, (2016): 47.

¹¹ Ibid.

consultative committee for refugees of Bengal had been floated which later on, after consulting with the federal cabinet of Pakistan, was approved in the same year.¹²

Another Inter-Dominion Conference was held on 13th April, 1948 at Calcutta to discuss five major points; migration of Hindus in West Bengal as well as Muslim migration in East Bengal, encouraging minorities to live in respective territories, ask them to return back to their homes and free flow of goods across the borders.¹³ Both States showed serious concern regarding Bengal refugees and after a few months, another Inter-Dominion Conference was held in Delhi particularly on Calcutta agreement to devise mechanism for implementation. A separate minorities board had been established on either side after that conference.¹⁴

All efforts at the ministerial level did not bring the expected substantial relief on both sides to control the human traffic. Later on, the crisis was directly addressed by the Prime Ministers of both states in 1950.

b. Nehru-Liaquat Agreement

A serious attempt was made by Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan to sort out the issue. He, with Chaudhry Muhammad Ali, visited Delhi to negotiate with the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The discussion was also held between Ch. Muhammad Ali and Girja Shankar Bajpai, Minister of External Affairs of India. Ch., Muhammad Ali argued that 'we are prepared to accept all possible solutions that Indian officials suggest for Bengal and wanted the same solution for the rest of Muslims in India. But Bajpai wanted to remain confined to only Bengal and Assam'.¹⁵ However, their visit did not bring any agreement between both the Prime Ministers as both rejected each other's point of views at that time. Resultantly, the migration continued towards West Bengal, which compelled the Indian government to renegotiate the issue. Finally, on 8th April 1950, both the governments accepted common suggestion and were ready to take the responsibility of minorities of Bengal. This Pact is acknowledged as Nehru-Liaquat Agreement.

The agreement deals with the minorities' rights in detail and addresses how to protect their properties and belongings. Two major decisions were taken in it. First, the migrants who would return to East Bengal before 31st December, 1950 would be handed back their properties. Second, the migrants who would not return to native homelands, their names would be retained in the list of immovable properties and would have unrestricted right to dispose of, sale and exchange it.¹⁶ The Pact was an important step to ensure minority's properties, equality in the

¹² The Meeting of the Cabinet, 3 December, 1948, File No, 641/86/48, National Documentation Center, Islamabad

¹³ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia: Meaning of Freedom in Post-independence West Bengal, 1947-52* (USA: Routledge, 2009):98-99.

¹⁴ Chaudhary Mohammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1998): 273.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 273.

¹⁶ Meeting of Revenue Department, East Pakistan, 1950, File, No, 107-CF-62, National Documentation Center, Islamabad.

context of citizenship and religious freedom.¹⁷ The Pact deals precisely with the condition of refugees in East and West Bengal and most importantly neighboring states of Tripura and Assam. The spirit of this Pact included freedom of movement, continued ownership of property left behind by migrants, the setting up of an inquiry commission to investigate the causes and extent of the recent skirmishes, the prevention of propagation of information or opinion directed against the other country, and the appointment of two central ministers and two commissioners to ensure the enforcement of the Pact.¹⁸ After this Pact, the pace of migration was reduced for a year at least. But the total number of refugees in one or other way were exerting great pressure on Calcutta and Dhaka as refugees rushed to these two cities for employment and preferred to settle down there. Both governments blamed each other and resettled Hindus and Muslims on evacuee properties, left by them in different states. However, this two-way migration was not sponsored by the states and it was against the true spirit of the Liaquat- Nehru Pact.¹⁹

This agreement was a hope for millions of people who were living in Indian and Pakistani Bengal. It ensured the minorities of their rights, properties and protection from the future violence. It had also made it clear to everyone that the matter would be solved by both the governments and people have to accept it accordingly. Governments knew that if they failed to remove the fears of minorities, they would lose their authority in respective provinces. After this pact, migration had been reduced and it restored, somehow, peace on both sides as well. This pact was also a start of diplomatic relations between both the states, which led to the foundation for future diplomacy in the region.

2. Federal Government's Relief Work in East Bengal

This part of the paper explains that the federal government had not neglected the refugees relief work in its Eastern wing, while keeping in view the fact that refugee crisis was not severe in that province. After partition of Bengal, migration, violence and displacement was observed in East Bengal in scattered places. Beside, a few communal disturbances were recorded and migration was also observed as sporadic, which continued by fits and starts. Some of the refugees came in East Bengal in search of better job opportunities and opted for migration willingly but, no doubt, most of them came thereto avoid communal violence in West Bengal.²⁰ In case of Punjab, exchange of population happened one time mostly. However, for Bengal, the influx continued in different forms for many years after partition. Pakistani government wanted to settle the refugee issues in East Bengal on the same parameters as had been treated in Punjab, especially with regard to evacuee property and had desired to extend the evacuee legislation to whole of Pakistan including East Bengal. The matters related to evacuee property

¹⁷ Richard D. Lambert, "Religion, Economics, and Violence in Bengal: Background of the Minorities Agreement," *Middle East Journal*, 4, No. 3 (Jul., 1950): 327-28

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 327-28.

¹⁹ Udit Sen, "The Myths Refugees Live By: Memory and history in the making of Bengali refugee identity," *Modern Asian Studies*, 48, Issue 01 (January 2014): 41-42.

²⁰ O. Ahad, *JatioRajni: 1945 theke 75*, Khoshraj Kitab Mahal, Dhaka, 1982, pp. 5-7. Cited in, Anindita Ghoshal, "The Invisible Refugees: Muslims 'Rreturnees' in East Pakistan (1947-71)," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* (Hum.), 63(1), (2018): 59-89.

were decided in Punjab under the Evacuee Property Agreement 1949 and wanted to introduce the same in East Bengal.²¹ But Indian government did not agree to it as that would be against their financial benefits because Hindus were less in number in East Bengal as compared to Muslims in West Bengal.²² Moreover, the Federal Cabinet time and again asked provincial government of East Bengal to submit its report on refugees issues which were needed to be addressed for the relief works and to answer the Indian allegation on Pakistan.²³ According to the official report, only 13,000 refugees had migrated from West Bengal and Bihar to East Bengal till 1948.²⁴ Second, the provincial government of East Bengal did not prepare any report of expenses and amount which was spent on refugee arrangements as initially the problem was limited.²⁵ Lastly, these earlier migrants came and settled by themselves with the help of their friends and relatives. Owing to this, the federal government utilized all its possible channels to solve the West Pakistan refugee crisis²⁶.

It is a misconception to suggest that federal policies and plans were discriminatory towards Bengalis. The Minister of Finance categorically denied that East Bengal had given any intimation to the centre about refugees' disaster. He said, "No report seems to have been made to the Central Government in Pakistan of these facts, there was no agency in government to take these issues with East Bengal or Indian State"²⁷ As a matter of fact, state granted funds to the provincial government to cope with the problem of displaced persons when circumstances became worst in East Bengal. The federal government employed same strategy, plans and policies in East Bengal which had already been introduced in the provinces of West Pakistan, apart from the fact that the nature and intensity of the issue was different in both wings.

The Federal Government felt acute pain of refugees' rehabilitation. The Federal cabinet of Pakistan held a meeting on 15th October 1949 to review the performance of all ministries related to refugee rehabilitation planning, process and implementation. It had been observed that the refugee rehabilitation and their issues of temporary settlement were mishandled. The Prime Minister of Pakistan said in the meeting that "Nothing had been done in East Bengal, who were stated to number of half million. He considered their rehabilitation as important as the rehabilitation in West Pakistan."²⁸ Two more important decisions were taken in

²¹ The Meeting of the Cabinet, 4 February, 1953, Case No, 67/10/53, National DocumentationCenter, Islamabad

²² The Meeting of the Cabinet, 3 December, 1948, File No, 641/86/48, National DocumentationCenter, Islamabad.

²³ *Ibid.*, File No, 641/86/48, National DocumentationCenter, Islamabad.

²⁴ Cabinet Meeting, 18th June, 1948, File No, 165-CF-48, NDC, Islamabad

²⁵ In Cabinet meeting, Ministers believed that the situation in East Pakistan was under control and this migration did not panic provincial government.

²⁶ In view of the situation of East Pakistan, the Federal Government did not include East Pakistan for the grant of 125 lakhs which was assigned to provinces to meet the refugees' challenges in respective districts.

²⁷ File No, 641/86/48, National DocumentationCenter, Islamabad.

²⁸ Cabinet Meeting, 16th November, 1949, File, No, 264-CF-49, NDC, Islamabad, in Minutes of the Meeting PM Pakistan felt annoyed on the issue of East Bengal refugees

this meeting; first 5 lakhs had been granted from Quaid-i-Azam Relief Fund to East Bengal with the instructions to spend on refugees. Second, a proposal was made to set up East Bengal Refugee Council on same footings as it had been opened in Punjab, NWFP and Sindh.²⁹ After the consultation of federal cabinet and Refugee Rehabilitation Minister, it was decided to establish a separate East Pakistan Refugee Council in 1950.³⁰ This Council was formed and authorized to function in East Bengal.³¹ The first Meeting of East Bengal Refugee Council was held on 24th December 1950 at Dhaka. It addressed refugees' conditions, their issues and rehabilitation etc. The formation of this council was a good step towards solving refugee issues. Following relief works had been introduced for refugees in East Bengal:

a. Safe Evacuation of Refugees by Trains

The Central government, with the help of provincial government, initiated the program of safe evacuation of refugees at two levels; within the province from refugee camps to various villages and cities and inter-state evacuation which meant safe exodus of Muslim refugees from West Bengal to East Bengal. First kind of transfer was materialized with the help of provincial government whereas the second kind of flight of refugees was materialized on state to state level. The Muslim migration in Bengal was not rapid rather people used to move across the borders for work and come back at home in evening.³² During March 1950, situation got worst in West Bengal, Assam and Calcutta and Dooars sections. Muslims refugees started pouring in East Bengal and the railway stations became refugee centres.³³ So the Railway authority was sending reports to the Ministry of Refugee Rehabilitation, Foreign Affairs and Common Wealth for necessary actions. Thousands of them arrived in Dhaka on daily basis that turned this second capital of Pakistan into an overcrowded city. About 150 reached by air and the remainder by train.³⁴ The arrival of refugees transformed railway station into a refugee camp. No arrangements were done by the federal government and the provincial government at the initial stage. The situation of Dhaka of East Bengal was as similar as Karachi of the West Pakistan. A rapid flow of Muslim migrants was noted as their intention was to come first and grab the evacuee properties left by the Hindus. To control this situation, special trains were run between cities and even between East and West Bengal to transfer the displaced persons. Special trains were planned to move refugees from Dhaka and other stations to various cities and villages. In nine-day operation, approximately thirty six thousand, eight

condition. This meeting was attended by the PM of Pakistan, Chief Minister and Governor of East Pakistan, Refugee Rehabilitation State Minister and Finance Minister.

²⁹ Ibid.,

³⁰ Ibid. The Minister informed the Cabinet that he himself was not in favour of establishing a separate Council in East Bengal as there was a separate machinery already working there.

³¹ File, No, 21-CF-50, NDC, Islamabad.

³² MD. Mahburar Rahman and Willem Vas Schendel, "I Am Not a Refugee": Rethinking Partition Migration", *Modern Asian Studies* 37, 3 (2003):557.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Anindita Ghoshal, "The Invisible Refugees: Muslims 'Returnees' in East Pakistan (1947-71)," 69.

hundred and twenty-one refugees had been successfully shifted to multiple but suitable places.³⁵

Table A: The Numbers of Refugees, coming by the Trains

Date	No. of Refugees transferred by Trains
4-3-50	3021
5-3-50	4278
6-3-50	4178
7-3-50	7000
8-3-50	3000
9-3-50	6000
10-3-50	5200
11-3-50	3031
12-3-50	1163
Total	36821³⁶

Source: Ministry of Communication Fortnightly report, 15 March, 1950. File, No, 21-CF-50, NDC, Islamabad.

The situation got tense and communal riots were on peak in west Bengal in 1948. The number of Muslims refugees jumped up and they were found to be waiting for trains. The railway authorities refused to run trains in west Bengal areas. The East Bengal Railway authority made an agreement with the West Bengal Railway authority to start operation in far off stations and load Muslims refugees from there.³⁷ This agreement was not similar to Military Evacuation Organizations in Punjab as it was rather limited and run on specific routes in Bengal. The Special trains were run between Dasani and Bhopal. A number of train operations had successfully performed their work and some of them were also stopped afterwards. Those had their route from Calcutta to Dhaka, Calcutta to Chittagong and Khulna and Calcutta to Parabatipur and Assam.³⁸ In view of more evacuation by trains, provincial government asked Federal Government for extra coal for East Bengal. The federal government arranged the supply to meet the shortage of coal for trains but unfortunately, one shipment sunk off in Colombo which caused a serious shortage again for the train operations in East Bengal. Later on, this shortage was

³⁵ Ministry of Communication Fortnightly report, 15 March, 195. File, No, 21-CF-50, NDC, Islamabad.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.,

³⁸ Ibid.,

covered from the wastage of cotton supplied by Karachi to East Bengal to meet the crisis.³⁹

b. Schemes for Rehabilitation of Refugees in East Bengal

By 1950, the number of Muslim refugees reached to 8,22,000 in East Pakistan.⁴⁰ The provincial government had to undertake construction works for the rehabilitation of these refugees with the help of the federal government. Two kinds of rehabilitation schemes had been introduced for refugees; one for agriculturist refugees and the other for non-agriculturist refugees.

On 30th April 1951, an amount of Rs. 1793447 had been given by the federal government to the provincial government for the speedy rehabilitation works and construction.⁴¹ Apart from this amount, Rs. 125,0000 had been issued by the refugee tax committee and Rs. 100,000000 as a loan from the federal government to the province, particularly for the agricultural and non-agricultural refugees in East Bengal.⁴² With the help of state's relief efforts, 50,000 refugees had been settled in multiple areas and started spending their lives comfortably. In addition to it, 1000 flats with two or three room facility were constructed for the government employees to accommodate them until 1950.⁴³

Table B: The Schemes introduced by the Federal Government Funds for Refugee Rehabilitation

Name of the Scheme	Amount
For agricultural refugees and non-agricultural refugees of East Bengal	Rs. 100 lakhs for the Rehabilitation of Refugee
From the Refugee Tax Collection Committee	Rs.125 lakhs issued to East Bengal
Short term rehabilitation of 40,000 Muslims	Rs. 4,00000 Loan, special grant Rs. 50,000 for Taklis
Rehabilitation of Hindu Refugees	Rs.15,0000 Loan
Scholarship and stipends for poor refugee students	Rs.100000

Source: Cabinet Meeting, 3rd January, 1952, File, No, 278-CF-50, NDC, Islamabad Summary of the 2st Meeting of the Refugee Tax Committee Pakistan East Bengal Refugee Council

³⁹Ibid.,

⁴⁰*The Indian and Pakistan Year Book and Who's Who: A Statistical and Historical Annual of India and Pakistan*, vol. XXXVII, The Times of India Group, Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta, 1951, p. 687.

⁴¹ Ministry of Refugee and Rehabilitation Fortnightly Summery, 30 April, 1951, File, No, 23-CF-51, NDC, Islamabad.

⁴² Ministry of Refugee and Rehabilitation Fortnightly Summery, 21 May, 1952, File, No, 17-CF-52, NDC, Islamabad.

⁴³ "East Bengal on threshold of development," *Pakistan Affairs*, V-25, Washington, D C , August 1952.

As compared to the East Bengal, the Punjab was allocated with Rs. 200 lakhs from Refugee Tax Collection and Sind Rs. 50 lakhs. In term of loans, Punjab was assigned with Rs. 300 lakhsor Refugee Rehabilitation. Moreover, the balance of Rs.2985064 was put aside for the refugee satellite town near Dhaka.⁴⁴Although 80% of the total area of East Bengal was under cultivation, the province faceddeficit in food production. This was due to the fact that the yield per acre was very low. The poor production of land had gained serious attention of the government which was trying its best to solve food and agricultural issues in East Bengal.⁴⁵ Some of important acts had been passed by the provincial legislative assembly and one of the Bills was ‘State Acquisition’ against the *Zamidar* System. Moreover, a Non-Agricultural Tendency Bill 1949 was passed at the end of the year of 1949. It enabled the property rights to non-agricultural tenants for the time period of 12 years.⁴⁶Such steps were well appreciated by the central government.

The provincial government of East Bengal launched many schemes for the refugees after passing loans and grants for them. In 1950, the provincial government had 8, 50,000 refugees in East Bengal In the beginning, the government of East Bengal initiated several schemes of satellite towns for the rehabilitation of displaced persons against the rehabilitation tax grant and loans from the federal government. Subsequently, they revised their policy and argued that the real problem was the rehabilitation of refugees on agricultural and non-agricultural basis.⁴⁷For their cultivation and proper water supply and sanitation, Rs. 50 per family and minimum Rs. 200 for maintenance grant had been planned by the state.⁴⁸

The government initially introduced the said plan for six thousand, one hundred and ten families in ten districts during financial year1949-50. The amount of Rs. 3184000/- had been reserved for building houses and for purchasing cattle, agricultural implements and seeds. Moreover, free grants were given to the refugees for maintenance of their lands from 4 month to 6 month after their settlement in respective places. To make sure the facilities for them, several ring wells and tube wells were dug, availability of all seeds for cultivators was made possible by the government with the assistance of central government.⁴⁹The details of rehabilitation of refugees on agricultural lands, in addition to the details of the land, have been given in the following table.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Second Independence Anniversary Serial*, Press Information Department, Government of Pakistan Karachi, 15, 1948-49. National Archive of London, 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 2-3.

⁴⁷ The Meeting of Pakistan East Bengal Refugee Council, 24 December, 1950, File, No, 201-CF-58, NDC, Islamabad.

⁴⁸ Ibid.,

⁴⁹ Ibid.,

Table, C: The Number of Agricultural Families Rehabilitated in East Bengal

Name of the Districts in Bengal	Rehabilitation of Agricultural Families	Land in Acres
Dinajpur	1200 agricultural families	36000
Jessore	600 agricultural Muslims families	1800
Rangpur	330 agricultural Muslims families	2000
Khustia	5000 agricultural Muslims families	2500
Rajshahi	6000 agricultural Muslims families	1800
Chittagong Hill Tracts	4000 agricultural Muslims families	-----
Mymensingh	2000 agricultural Muslims families	-----
Sylhet	130 agricultural Muslims families	750
Bogra	1000 agricultural Muslims families	-----
Pabna	250 agricultural Muslims families	-----

Source: *The Meeting of Pakistan East Bengal Refugee Council, 24 December, 1950, File, No, 201-CF-58, NDC, Islamabad.*

The federal government was vigilant about the fair distribution of the agricultural land and devised policy to take action against corruption cases. It was noted by the local officials that bribe had been demanded by some union presidents on the allotment of land. Some official asked refugees to give Rs150 to Rs200 for confirmation of their allotment. If a person did not have money to pay them, they accepted jewellery also. Some secretary level officials in Bengal, who had close association with the Muslim League, had successfully allotted alluvial land to their names. Yusuf Ali was one of the officials who were involved in allotting lands to refugees for cultivation; they would pay Rs. 4/- perbigha to the State and demanded Rs. 25/ per bigha from the cultivators. These types of practices were common in East Bengal.⁵⁰Whereas the government was responsible for the fair rehabilitation in the province and should have provided check and balance on all schemes. The unfair rehabilitation of these displaced persons has called into question government's performance.⁵¹

Besides rehabilitation of agricultural refugees, provincial government also launched a scheme for non-agricultural refugees with the help of grants and loans from the federal government. It was planned to settle 3000 non-agricultural refugee families in Dinajpur. A free grant of Rs. 84 per family and Rs. 900 loan

⁵⁰ 1(1) - PMS/50, Government of Pakistan (GOP), , 26 March, 1948, Prime Minister Secretariat (PMS), NDC, Islamabad

⁵¹Ibid.,

per family was given. Apart from this Rs 50/ per family was allotted as a maintenance grant. East Bengal government proposed to rehabilitate 1150 non-agricultural families in the districts of Dinajpur, Tippera, Rajshahi, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Pabna⁵²

Table, D: The Number of Rehabilitation of Non Agriculturist Refugees in East Bengal

Name of the Cities in Bengal	Rehabilitation of Non-Agricultural Families	Free Grant per Family	Loan for per family
Dinajpur	300 Families	Rs. 84	Rs. 900/stall
Tippera	250 Families	Rs. 50	Rs.350
Rajshahi	450 Families	Rs. 100	Rs. 70
Chittagong Hill Tracts	50 Families	Rs. Rs,50	Rs.350
Pabna	100 Families	Rs. 100	Rs. 40 ⁵³

Source;*The Meeting of Pakistan East Bengal Refugee Council, 24 December, 1950, File, No, 201-CF-58, NDC, Islamabad.*

The Pakistan East Bengal Refugee Council took major decisions in its first meeting to rehabilitate the displaced persons. Non-agricultural families, which did not have their cultivation background, were issued loans to start their own small-scale business to feed their families. Moreover, loans were given to them for temporary stall-building in different cities to save their selves from heavy rain and storms.

In view of rehabilitation and settlement of refugees, it was very important to establish more industries in the province which would give employment to the refugees. A cotton mill with 50,000 spindles and 500 looms was constructed near Narayananj and expected to become operational in 1953.⁵⁴ The Federal Government of Pakistan, with the collaboration of US, planned to establish a structural steel fabrication plant to meet the requirement of jute mill, paper mills and hydroelectric projects in East Wing. The U.S government proposed to start two schemes with amount of \$ 1068700 and \$ 321600 for construction of fully equipped workshop in Chittagong.⁵⁵ Moreover, Industries Development Cooperation had planned to install eight industrial units with the help of private capital.⁵⁶ Apart from this scheme, a jute spinning wheel scheme was announced to

⁵²File, No, 278-CF-50, NDC, Islamabad. *Decision in 1st Meeting of the Pakistan East Bengal Council, Statement of payment and Loans had been decided by the Federal Government.*

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “East Bengal on threshold of development” *Pakistan Affairs*, V-25, Washington, D C , August 1952.

⁵⁵ File, No, 278-CF-50, NDC, Islamabad. *Decision in 1st Meeting of the Pakistan East Bengal Council.*

⁵⁶ “East Bengal on threshold of development,” *Pakistan Affairs*, V-25, Washington, D C , August 1952.

uplift the state of refugees and made them earnable by spinning jute thread.⁵⁷ There was a great demand in the market of east and west parts of Pakistan for jute thread. A man or woman working on jute-spinning wheel for eight hours could produce one *seer* to be eight *annas* per seer the net price is Rs, 2 -8. Even children with some basic training could earn for their families. It had double benefits of filling up a real need in Pakistan economy and giving means of livelihood to the destitute refugees for whom it would be difficult otherwise to rehabilitate them. So eight thousand jute spinning wheel were required which was not possible for the provincial government without the help of federal government to meet the demand.⁵⁸

The Federal Cabinet report regarding East Bengal rehabilitation Scheme revealed that refugee economic rehabilitation had not properly been done by the provincial government, although the federal government provided sufficient funds for this purpose. They did not provide solid house bricks for construction, water supply and other essentials of life. Infact, bamboo huts were constructed which did not solve their problems on permanent basis. So the Refugee and Rehabilitation Minister personally visited Eastern wing and submitted his report to the government which showed pathetic picture of refugees in East Bengal. Moreover, a satellite town at Saidpur District which was approved in 1954 had not started till 1957.⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, provincial government was not serious at all. As compared to this, West Bengal in India did well and gave priority to rehabilitation of displaced persons. So much so, Indian government moved its central minister of rehabilitation, joint secretary and some other officials to Calcutta. Federal Government of Pakistan neither implemented same policies like those of India nor paid equal attention after allotting funds to the provincial government.⁶⁰ The government also remained reluctant to move and set up a branch office of the Rehabilitation Ministry there, which might be helpful to undertake the work.

c. Emergency Health and Education Schemes

Refugees came to East Bengal with the hope of better lives in the future but soon faced hardships as enough basic facilities were not available for them. Most of the refugees were living in open-air camps, where basic health facilities were not available. The government devised policies to provide basic health facilities to poor refugees and an elaborate scheme was drawn up and implemented to ensure health care for its people. A well-equipped dispensary for every two union with four emergency beds was established which was directly controlled by the provincial government.⁶¹ Besides, three hundred health centres and four hundred and fourteen health dispensaries were established by the State.

⁵⁷ File, No, 278-CF-50, NDC, Islamabad, Decision in 1st Meeting of the Pakistan East Bengal Council.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*.

⁵⁹ Meeting of the Cabinet, Ministry of Rehabilitation of Refugee, on the Issue of East Bengal Rehabilitation under direct Central Government, 10 May, 1958, File, No, 201-CF-58, NDC, Islamabad.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*.

⁶¹ *Second Independence Anniversary Serial*, Press Information Department, Government of Pakistan Karachi, 15, 1948-49. National Archive of London, 2-3.

Federal government took services of World Health Organization (WHO) to cope with the issue of malaria in East Bengal. Two experts of WHO were appointed to conduct a campaign in Mymensingh, East Bengal on the pattern of its operation in Italy. It conducted field experiments in the area of Mymensingh. The government-sanctioned Rs.78,000 in her first instance and later on Rs. 150,000 had been distributed throughout the province to provide health facilities to fight malaria.⁶²

Moreover, anti-tuberculosis treatment facility was also provided with few beds for the masses under the supervision of the governor as a patron and provincial health minister as president of the scheme. The provincial government had taken one more useful step against the prevention of blindness in the province. A capital worth Rs. 16,000 had been allocated for the mobile ambulance service which could treat 500 patients per month. A blind relief camp for the refugees and for rest of the people was established in premises of Dhaka Medical College under the supervision of renowned doctor, T. Ahmed, Principal of Dhaka Medical College.⁶³

Conclusion

Hence, apart from the early challenges, lack of national resources and the massive movement of refugees in Punjab, the federal government not only addressed the refugees' problems in East Bengal but also financially supported the provincial government to meet the crisis. The federal government also asked the provincial government to provide details of homeless people and their movement across the border that would help to negotiate with the Indian State. Even the federal government was ready to take all possible measures to secure minority rights and also emphasized the Indian government to take the same steps in West Bengal for the Muslims. Several inter-dominion discussions took place between the two States, in which Pakistani officials showed willingness to cooperate on all issues to minimize sufferings of the people. In a nutshell, the federal government of Pakistan despite all challenges was well aware of the refugee problem. The Prime Minister himself took this issue in the Federal Cabinet and asked the concerned Ministers to start rehabilitation work in East Bengal and considered it equal to the West Pakistan. The schemes for rehabilitation of agricultural and non-agricultural refugees were the outcome of the initial plans of the state to facilitate and lessen the burden of provincial government.

⁶² Ibid, 4.

⁶³ Ibid, 4-5.