Refugee vs Refugee – A New Flashpoint in J&K

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What's the news?

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- Ever since the 2014 Assembly elections forced the PDP and BJP into a coalition in Jammu and Kashmir, tensions have erupted repeatedly over a lot of issues.
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- The latest issues that are deepening the faultlines between Jammu and the Valley are the issuance of identity cards to Hindu refugees from West Pakistan**,** and the settlement of Muslim refugees from Myanmar in the state.
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What are the identity certificates that the J&K govt has been issuing?

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- They have a picture of the holder along with his name and parentage, and certify that he became a refugee from an area now in Pakistan after Partition.
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- The certificate issued, says that the holder was a resident of an area in undivided India (that is now a part of Pakistan), and that he is now living at a particular place in J&K as a refugee from (erstwhile) West Pakistan.
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How many West Pakistan refugees currently live in India?

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- No recent figures are available. The 1951 Census counted 72,95,870 people who had moved to India from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West

Pakistan during Partition.
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- Those who settled elsewhere became Indian citizens domiciled in the respective states, the 5,764 families who had arrived in Jammu from the adjoining areas of Pakistan were treated only as Indian citizens, and not as permanent residents of J&K.
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- The refugees coming to J&K were treated differently from those who settled down elsewhere in accordance with Section 6 of the Constitution of the state.
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How does the issue of govt identity certificates to refugees impact the situation?

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- Demands for permanent resident status to West Pakistan refugees probably started during and after the 1965 and 1971 wars.
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- Many permanent residents were displaced from areas now controlled by Pakistan. And the state govt, in order to settle them elsewhere, took back agricultural land from West Pakistan refugees.
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- The literate among those who lost their lands eyed jobs in the central government, especially in the Army and paramilitary forces.
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- There was no major problem until around 2000, but thereafter, in the context of militancy, all central government recruiting agencies started asking for domicile certificates in order to ascertain their place of residence.
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- Because the refugees were not permanent residents of the state, they faced difficulty in establishing that they lived in areas of the Jammu region.
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- Though the identity certificates being issued to them do not confer upon them the status of permanent residents of J&K, they do give them an official address for the first time since they migrated to the state nearly 7 decades ago.
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So why does this make many politicians in the Valley insecure?

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- Politicians in the Muslim-majority Valley seeing the issuance of identity certificates to West Pakistan refugees, who are overwhelmingly Hindu, as the first step to granting them domicile status as part of a bigger plot to change the state's demographic contours.
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And who are the Rohingyas? How do they fit into these tensions?

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- Rohingyas are a roughly 1-million strong ethnic Muslim community in Myanmar, most of whom are denied citizenship rights as their government considers them to be illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.
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- A sizeable number have fled to India to escape persecution and violence, including nearly 7,000-8,000 in the Jammu region.Many of them carry certificates issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Delhi.
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- The belief that Kashmiri Muslims are taking away a major chunk of the state's resources, leads many in predominantly Hindu Jammu to look at the settlement of new Muslim families with resentment and suspicion.
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- As with the West Pakistan refugees and the Muslim population in Kashmir, settlements of Rohingya Muslims in Jammu city — appear to many Hindus as a conspiracy to change the demography of the region.
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