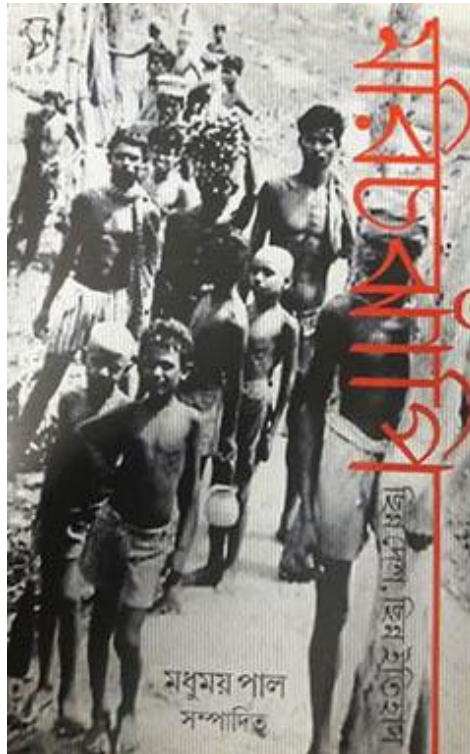


## Marichjhapi Massacre 1979

Forcible eviction of [Bangladeshi](#) refugees and the subsequent death of around thousands by police firing and unknown number due to starvation and disease in [Marichjhapi](#) island of [Sundarban](#), WB



### Background

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After the division of Bengal (during independence in 1947) along communal lines many Hindu Bengalees fled East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The first flow of refugees who are most the upper and middle class got easily settled in West Bengal. But the latter huge flow of poor Hindus (mostly lower caste "*Namasudra*"<sup>[1]</sup>) couldn't be accommodated in Bengal. After initial resistance from the refugees they were forcibly sent to "rocky inhospitable land" of [Dandakaranya](#) (mostly in [Orissa](#) and [Madhya Pradesh](#)).<sup>[2]</sup> Then opposition leader [Jyoti Basu](#) wrote a letter that the refugees can be easily settled in West Bengal. As an opposition the Leftist parties demanded that the Dandakaryna refugees be settled in uninhabited islands of Sundarban.<sup>[3]</sup> When the Left Front came to power in 1977 state minister Ram Chatterjee (of [Marxist Forward Bloc](#)) visited the camps in Dhandakaryna and widely reported to have encouraged them to return to "homeland" West Bengal.<sup>[4]</sup>

### Events

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In 1978 the refugees started to arrive in Bengal in huge numbers. But the Left Front meanwhile changed its policy (after forming government) on refugee settling and considered the refugees as a

burden to the state, as the refugees were not the citizen of West Bengal but India.<sup>[2]</sup> An approximately 150,000 almost all of Dandakaranya refugees arrived (where most of them were deported back).<sup>[3]</sup> In the meanwhile approximately 40,000 refugees went south and camping for few months in Hasnabad settled in Marichjhapi (renamed by them as "*Netaji Nagar*"), a protected place under Reserve Forest Act.<sup>[5]</sup> The government considered that an unauthorized occupation of reserved forest land. The government tried to pursue them to return to their respective place, but with little effect. On 24 January 1979, the Government of West Bengal clamped prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPC around the island of Marichjhapi. The police and the district administration started an economic blockade. Thirty police launches started patrolling the island,<sup>[5]</sup> preventing anyone from providing food or water to the residents of the island. On 31 January, the police opened fire on the settlers of the island when the settlers attacked a police camp with traditional weapons.<sup>[6]</sup> After 15 days [Calcutta High Court](#) ruled that "The supply of drinking water, essential food items and medicines as well as the passage of doctors must be allowed to Marichjhapi".<sup>[7]</sup>

After the failure of economic blockade the government started forcible evacuation in May.<sup>[4]</sup> The media were barred from entering the area on that day. It has been alleged that the police launches dumped the dead bodies in water, while many others drowned while they were trying to flee.<sup>[6]</sup> The survivors were then sent back to Dandakaranya. Some of them were settled in Marichjhapi Colony near Barasat while others rehabilitated themselves in the shanties near railway tracks in [Sealdah](#).<sup>[8]</sup> Some of the survivors resettled themselves in [Hingalganj](#), [Canning](#) and nearby areas.<sup>[9]</sup>

The official deaths due to firing was two but, according to [Hindustan Times](#), there exists different sources which put the total deaths between 50 and 1000.<sup>[10]</sup>

See also[[edit](#)]

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- [1964 East Pakistan genocide](#)
- [Marichjhapi](#)

References[[edit](#)]

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