

Gujarat's detained 'Bangladeshis' mostly Indian Muslims

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Online Desk : A sweeping operation by Gujarat police targeting suspected 'illegal Bangladeshis' has ignited a firestorm of controversy, as it becomes clear that the majority of those detained are Indian Muslims, not Bangladeshi nationals. The arrests, which began on Saturday morning and continued through Monday night, April 28, 2025, have raised serious questions about profiling, due process, and the human cost of such crackdowns.

A massive operation with missteps : Over three days, Gujarat police detained 6,500 individuals across the state, starting in Ahmedabad and Surat before expanding statewide. State police Director General Vikas Sahay reported on Monday that only 450 detainees have been confirmed as Bangladeshi citizens living illegally, based on document verification. "The interrogation of the rest is underway, and we expect to identify more illegal Bangladeshis," Sahay told PTI. However, the stories emerging from the ground paint a troubling picture of mistaken identities and disrupted lives.

A family torn apart : Sahina Bibi's life was upended when police arrived at her home in Surat at 3 am on Saturday. They demanded Aadhaar cards for her entire family before taking her husband, Sultan Mallick, and two teenage nephews, suspecting them of being Bangladeshi. "They said my husband would return soon, but it's been three days," Sahina told BBC Bangla. Sultan, an embroidery worker in Surat for six years, hails from Lovepur in West Bengal's Birbhum district—a fact proven by his passport and a 1993 land deed obtained by BBC Bangla. Sahina's ordeal highlights the chaos of the operation. "My husband called from a police number, saying they were held in a warehouse. I sent all the documents—passports, land deeds—via WhatsApp, but there's been no contact since," she said. The emotional toll has been severe: her mother-in-law fell ill, and her elder daughter fainted from the stress. Having lived in Gujarat for just a year, Sahina is now struggling to locate her husband. Asif Farooq, state secretary of Parijayi Sramik Oikya Mancha, a migrant workers' organisation, revealed that their helpline received over 100 complaints in two days from families searching for loved ones. He criticized the police for failing to produce detainees like Sultan in court within 24 hours, as legally required. "Why haven't they been presented in court after three days?" Farooq questioned, noting a broader pattern of harassment against Bengali-speaking Muslims in states like Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and Maharashtra. His organization had warned Home Minister Amit Shah of such risks in a letter the previous week, to no avail.

A wedding disrupted : In Ahmedabad, the crackdown disrupted a wedding, leaving families in distress. Farzana, speaking to BBC Gujarati correspondent Tejash Bhoed outside the Ahmedabad Police's Crime Branch office, showed her hennaed hands and a wedding card as proof of the celebration. "The wedding party came from Akola in Maharashtra, but police took them from a relative's house in Chandola, suspecting they were Bangladeshi," she said. Her elder brother and nephew were among those detained, forcing the postponement of the haldi ceremony. "How can the wedding happen without them?" she asked. Zebunnesa, another relative, confirmed that her son and brother-in-law were also taken. "We have all our documents—birth certificates, Aadhaar cards—but we spent the whole day at the Crime Branch without food or water," she said. After submitting their documents, they were released at 10:30 pm on Saturday. Farzana and her family are neither Bangladeshi nor Bengali-speaking—they are Muslims from Gujarat and Maharashtra, underscoring the operation's flawed targeting.

A pattern of profiling : The Gujarat operation has drawn widespread criticism for its apparent profiling of Muslim communities. Many of those arrested, like Sultan Mallick, are Indian citizens with valid documentation, yet they were swept up in a dragnet fuelled by suspicion rather than evidence. The public

humiliation of detainees—some were paraded through streets, as captured in photos by Indian Express—has further fuelled outrage. This isn't an isolated issue. Asif Farooq pointed to a growing trend of Bengali-speaking Muslims from West Bengal being labelled 'Bangladeshi' across India, a practice that has intensified fears of systemic discrimination. The Gujarat arrests, while large in scale, are a symptom of a broader problem that demands urgent attention from authorities.