

Slums to border, caught *Between the Lines*

SREELATHA MENON

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 17

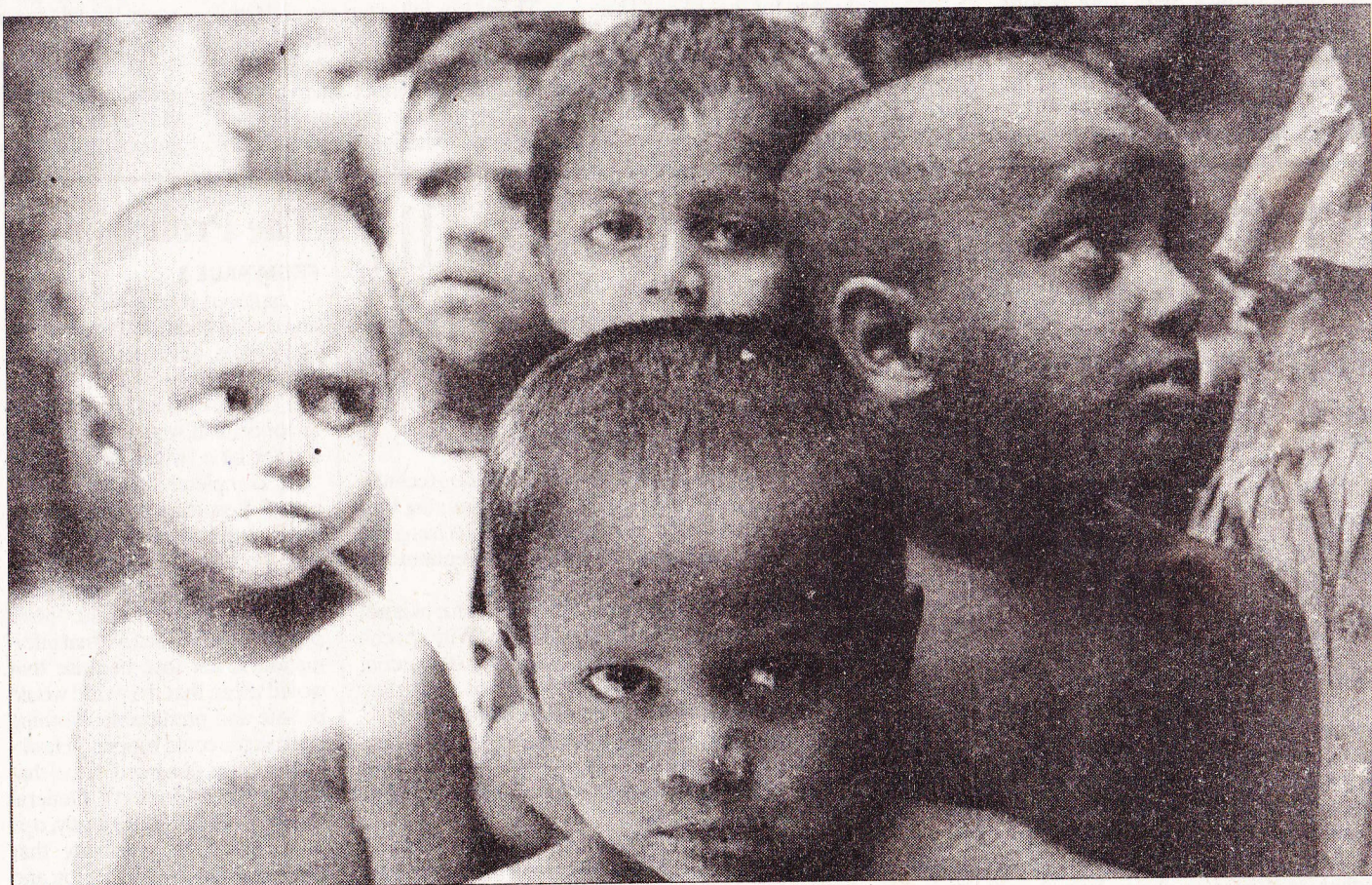
ELEVEN minutes — that's all it takes. And in these 11 minutes, it says it all — the story of people caught 'between the lines'. The pace seems even racier because of the traditional drum beats of the dhak of Bengal.

Made by filmmaker Parvez Imam, *Between the Lines* is a short documentary on people caught between two borders: India and Bangladesh. The people are immigrants from Bangladesh settled in the slums of Delhi, in the Yamuna Pushta, in Mandawli, in any which slum one may think of.

Imam, a doctor who quit the profession for filmmaking, captures the lives of people who were forced to flee Delhi following a drive launched last year to push illegal Bangladeshi immigrants out. The drive witnessed largescale arrests of people identified as Bangladeshi immigrants living illegally in Delhi. Many of these suspected illegal immigrants have been in detention for months. Many others have apparently been 'deported' to Bangladesh, though Bangladesh authorities claim they are unaware of any such deportations. The question then is: Where are these people going? And what is happening to them? This, says Imam, is his theme.

One thing is certain: People caught in this drive belong neither here nor there.

In the documentary, these men and women narrate how they were chased to the borders of Bangladesh and left there. That, however, was not the last of their troubles. At the border, they say they were attacked by the



A still from the film *Between the Lines* made by documentary filmmaker Parvez Imam on the lives of Bangladeshi immigrants.

Bangladeshi border police. And when they ran back, their women were raped by Indian villagers.

In the documentary, the men say it all, their eyes hardened with misery. Imam captures it all on film and calls it a document of the cruel violation of human rights in the name of borderlines and citizenships.

He shows these men and women, their expressions baffled, as they display their voters' cards,

ration cards and other proofs of residence in India.

"Disowned by both sides, for these people, human rights do not exist. Harassment and victimisation are a routine," says Imam.

The film says it more vocally.

There is a particularly poignant tale of a woman whose husband has been 'deported' by the police to Bangladesh. The woman, however, stays back in Delhi's slums not knowing how to find her hus-

band in another country.

Commenting on the documentary, Imam says he does not disagree with those who say that immigrants should not be allowed to stay in the country permanently. "But shouldn't we also remember that these immigrants too are human beings? And that there is a humane, civilised way of handling the issue?" he asks.

Under the banner of F20 Communications, Imam has made

about 30 documentaries on a wide array of topics: from medicine, drug abuse and disability to power reforms in India. Last year, he completed *The Invisible Minority* — a film on the status of the disabled people in the country, which was screened on the national network of Doordarshan.

Presently working for a portal in Bangalore, Imam made these film using borrowed equipment and with help from friends.