EDITORIAL: ROHINGYA-RAKHINE UNITY

In Arakan Rohingyas and Rakhines lived side by side for centuries with amity and concord as one family and ruled the country together. Both the communities in Arakan had all along been hand in glove. They shared the sorrow and glad tidings one another and enjoyed the fruits of nationhood for long years. No social, cultural and political function was there without the participation of Rohingya and Rakhine with their laughter transcending the crescendo of the functions. Unfortunately the golden era of Arakan has gone into oblivion.

The British played divide and rule in Arakan with the result that many Rakhine bear hatred against Rohingyas as “Kalas” foreigners. This hatred should no longer be bred in the Union of Burma as it had been brought up in the nursery of British imperialism and continuously used by the Burmese junta. Whatever reasons the Rakhines gave to rationalize their present political view, and whatever justification the Rohingyas have to legitimise their present political struggle, the fact is that Rakhine have been gradually and effectively assimilated in the Burman society in one way traffic while the Rohingyas have been maliciously branded as an aliens and subjected to extermination from Arakan. Although the exodus of Rakhine from Arakan is seldom nowadays, migration of Rakhine to Bengal on many occasions has been noted in the history. Their settlements today could be found mostly in Chittagong Hill Tract, Cox’s Bazar, Barisal and Patuakhali, etc.

Although Arakan lost it sovereignty to the Burmese aggressors, the people of Arakan, being peace-loving people joined the liberation movement of Burma from the British, hoping that justice would be done eventually. In the words of Mr. Sultan Ahmed M.P and Parliamentary Secretary,” the Rohingya Muslims of Arakan merged themselves with Burma in good faith that they would be treated on the same lines as Burmans and will be given equal right.”

The Burmese nationalists, willing to continue their hegemonies, infused the policy of racial hatred among the Rakhines. This has cost us hatred and disunity and it is the result of such con-
spionage that the people of Arakan are being ruled under iron heel by non-locals. In the words of Professor Muhamed Shansul Huq, the then Foreign Minister, “President Ziaur Rahman acted quickly on an urgent request from President Ne Win to shift the then military attaché in Bangladesh Mission in Rangoon. He had contacted leaders of Rakhine with a view to rapprochement between the Rakhine and the Rohingya so that the Muslim of Arakan might live in amity with Rakhine. But, President Ne Win was highly sensitive to such a move but it should prove to be a renewed threat to Rangoon through the unification of the Buddhists and Muslims of Arakan. The policy of Ne Win and successive military governments was to keep the Rohingyas and Rakhines disunited.

Now the Rakhines are on the side of nepotism while the Rohingyas are confined to ruthlessness. In post independent Burma, Rakhine were in better position. The Burma Territorial Force (BTF), mainly Rakhines, during 1948-50 unleashed a reign of terror against the Rohingyas. Their action was as if the continuation of 1942 Rohingya massacre by the Rakhines. During Ne Win’s era the Rakhines had been used as tools to oppress the Rohingyas both politically and racially. Despite their sixty years long humiliating position before the Rakhines, Rohingyas have never taken a chance to go against the Rakhines nor had taken any step to frame the future of Arakan unilaterally. They have been looking forward and welcoming the people from other communities to lunch a movement against the cruel junta in Burma.

In 1967 bulk of the rice produced in Arakan was carried away by the Burmese junta which caused starvation. Rohingyas and Rakhines both attacked the rice carriages at Akyab and the army crushed down and killed both Rohingyas and Rakhines people.

The opposition groups have enough experience and well fathomed the ruling military junta that can do anything for clinging to the power. As a strategy to continue their rule they have been using one group against another to weaken the opposition. During the democratic uprising of Burma, all national and political groups joined together for a common cause. Communal frictions and old grudges were forgotten. In the words of Bertil Lintner: “In Arakan state in the west, where tensions between Rakhines and Rohingyas have long been prevalent, these two religious groups now marched hand in hand chanting anti-government slogans. The yellow banners of Buddhism fluttered besides Islam’s green flag with the crescent moon.”

During the saffron Revolution of September 2007 a sea of monks in their yellow robes surrounded by the Rohingyas and Rakhines staged demonstration through the street of Akyab as it were in Rangoon and other cities surrounded by the people of all ranks and files demonstrated, the impact was “Saffron Revolution”.

Flowing military crack down, the spirit of united movement against the junta is waning down and the junta is again using the Rakhines against the Rohingyas of Arakan. The junta is deliberately using all weapons-racial, religious, political, economics and propaganda to mislead and divide the two sister communities of Arakan.

It is time that the two sister communities should be able to realize how the enemy is using them one against another, amend their wrong attitude and join hands for the restoration of their glorious past. The appreciation of the realities of Arakan must be by all people of Arakan for a peaceful and prosperous Arakan.

BANGLADESH RAISES ROHINGYA ISSUE IN BALI

Dhaka (Mizima) - Bangladesh has urged the Burmese junta to take back 28,000 remaining Rohingya, a Muslim minority, to their homeland.

Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Dr Dipu Moni, during a regional meeting in Bali on Thursday, called for a multilateral approach to solve the problem Rohingya people, who have in great number influx into Bangladesh.

“Bangladesh with its limited resources had done more than enough for the refugees from Myanmar over the last three decades. Myanmar [Burma] must now take back its own people,” Dr. Moni said.

The foreign minister was ad-
dressing the 3rd Regional Ministerial Conference on “People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crimes” in Bali, Indonesia, a message received in the capital, Dhaka on Thursday said.

Bangladesh’s foreign minister strongly refuted the claim of Burmese Deputy Minister for Home Affairs and Chief of Police that Rohingya are not an ethnic entity of his country.

“The Rohingya are living in Myanmar [Burma] for centuries and many Rohingya even held high posts in the government of Myanmar [Burma],” Dr. Moni said.

“previous repatriation of quite a few hundred thousand Rohingya and acceptance of the list of further 28,000 Rohingya proved that they are very much part of the population of Myanmar [Burma],” she added.

She said Rohingya, who are predominantly Muslim residing in northern Arakan state in Western Burma, had national radio programmes in their language in Burma. And just dropping names from population list would not make them anything other than an ethnic entity of Burma, the foreign minister noted.

Dr. Dipu Moni said as a manifestation of friendship and good-neighbourly gesture, Bangladesh has always extended assistance to Burma for the early repatriation of Rohingya to their home country.

The delegates attending the meeting from other countries agreed with Bangladesh’s foreign minister and called upon the Burmese delegation to improve the state of affairs and develop basic facilities and resources in Arakan state of Burma.

About 41 member countries, 19 observer countries and 13 international organizations took part in the two-day conference, a press statement said.

Bangladesh’s foreign minister also raised the Rohingya issue in a bilateral meeting with her Indonesian counterpart Dr. N. Hassan Wirajuda.

“Both of them opined that Myanmar [Burma] should immediately take measures for repatriation of Rohingya without further delay and necessary steps should be taken so that Rohingya did not flee Myanmar [Burma],” the statement added.

Dr Dipu Moni also held a bilateral meeting with Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith, who expressed his utmost happiness that Bangladesh had returned to democracy.

Stephen Smith observed that there was still ample scope to enhance bilateral relations further. He also agreed that without citing any excuse, Myanmar should immediately act for repatriation of the Rohingya refugees.
ROHINGYAS: THE PEOPLE WITHOUT NATIONALITY?
By Aman Ullah

Nationality is a fundamental human right that facilitates the ability to exercise other human rights. The right to nationality without arbitrary deprivation is now recognized as a basic human right under international law. According to Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “everyone has the right to a nationality,” and “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality.” While issues of nationality are primarily within each state’s jurisdiction, a state’s laws must be in accord with general principles of international law. Nationality, according to the International Court of Justice, is “a legal bond having as its basis a social fact of attachment, a genuine connection of existence, interests and sentiments.” The court first articulated criteria for defining an individual’s nationality in the pivotal Nottebohm Case, which gives, “preference to the real and effective nationality, that which accord[s] with the facts, that based on stronger factual ties between the person concerned and one of these States whose nationality is involved. “A ‘genuine and effective link,’ as the “real and effective nationality” has been termed, is determined by considering factors laid out in Nottebohm, including the “habitual residence of the individual concerned but also the centre of interests, his family ties, his participation in family life, attachment shown by him for a given country and inculcated in his children, etc.”

Nearly all Rohingyas or their parents and at least four generations were born in Arakan, Burma, have resided there, and have family there, all factors that establish a genuine and effective link to Burma. They are living in Arakan, Burma generation after generation for centuries after centuries and their arrival in Arakan has predated the arrival of many other peoples and races now residing in Arakan and other parts of Burma.

They are a group of people who believe that they are similar; because of this similarity, they believe that their fates are intertwined. That is they have a common identity and a belief in a shared future through collective action. They have acted together in the past, they are acting together in the present, and they will act together in the future. As a collective agent, they are participants in a common venture. Through common action, they want to create a common future, where their people can live out their distinctive life-ways in freedom, safety and dignity. As a nation they are jointly committed to create a space for people like them.

Under any canons of international law and human civilization the Rohingyas are much more than a national minority. They are a nation with a population of 3.5 million (both home and abroad), having a supporting history, separate culture, civilization, language and literature, historically settled territory and reasonable size of population and area. They share a public culture different from the public culture of those around them. They are determined not only to preserve and develop their public culture, but also to transmit to future generations as the basis of their continued existence as people, in accordance with their own cultural pattern, social institution and legal system. By history, by tradition, by culture and civilization, the Rohingyas are as much citizens of Burma as anyone else in the Country. They are equal in every way with other communities of the country.

The Rohingyas are indigenous peoples characterized by objective criteria, such as historical continuity, and subjective factors including self-identification, which need to define an indigenous people, and entitled to have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Being indigenous peoples, they have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, economic, social and cultural characteristics, as well as their legal systems, while retaining their rights to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of State. Not only have they had the right to a nationality but also the rights to their lands, territories and resources, which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spirituals traditions, histories and philosophies.

Thus, during the colonial rule the British recognized the separate identity of the Rohingyas and declared north Arakan as the Muslim Region. Again there are instances that Prime Minis-
Under the article 3 of Aung San-Atlee Treaty (1947) and the First Schedule to the Burma Independence Act, 1947, the Rohingyas are the citizens of the Union of Burma. They are also one of the indigenous races of Burma under section (I) (II) and (III) of the Constitution of the Union of Burma of 24 September 1947, effected 4 January 1948. Being one of the indigenous communities of Burma, the Rohingyas were enfranchised in all the national elections of Burma: -during the later colonial period (1935-1948), during the democratic period (1948-1962), during the BSPP regime (1974-1988) and 1990 multi-party general election held by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In their exercise of franchise, the Rohingyas elected their representatives to the Legislative Assembly, to the Constituent Assembly, to the Parliament, to the People’s Assembly and People’s Councils of different levels.

Their representatives were appointed as cabinet ministers and parliamentary secretaries. As the sons of soil, they had their own political, cultural, social organizations. As an indigenous people of the Burma, they had their programme in their own language in the official Burma Broadcasting Services (BSS). Being one of the Burma’s racial groups, they participated in the official “Union Day” celebration in Burma’s capital, Rangoon, every year. To satisfy part of their demand, the government granted them limited local autonomy and declared establishment of Mayu Frontier Administration (MFA) in early 60s, a special frontier district to be ruled directly by the central government.

In spite of that the Rohingyas are the worst victims of human rights violations in Burma. They were displaced. Their identity was polluted. Their population was diluted. Their right to nationality was arbitrarily deprived. Since 1948, expelling the Rohingyas from their ancestral land and properties has become almost a recurring phenomenon. About 1.5 million uprooted Rohingyas have taken shelters in many countries of the world since the anti-Muslim pogrom of 1942 in Arakan.

An autocrat or military junta has ruled Burma since 1962 led by General Ne Win. Under this military regime the Rohingyas were labeled illegal immigrants or Bangladeshi nationals. In 1974 the regime had taken a 20 year hidden plan to wipe the Rohingyas off the soil of Arakan and launched an anti-Rohingya military operation in the name of checking illegal immigrant in 1978. About 300,000 Rohingyas had sought refuge across the border in southern Bangladesh amidst widespread reports of army brutality, rape and murder.

The ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), a new name for State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), in 1988 had taken another Rohingya extermination plan, as continuation of BSPP’s 20 year plan, with the following 11 points road map:

1. The Muslims (Rohingyas) are not being provided with citizenship cards by branding them as insurgents.
2. To decrease the population growth of the Rohingyas by gradual imposition of restrictions on their marriages and by application of all possible methods of oppression and suppression against them.
3. To strive for the increase in Buddhist population to be more than the number of Muslim population by way of establishing Natala villages from different townships and from Proper Burma.
4. To allow their temporary movement from village to village and township to township only with Form 4 (which is required by the foreign nationals for travel), and to totally ban them travelling to Sittwe, the capital of Arakan State.
5. To forbid higher studies (university education) to the Rohingyas.
6. No Muslim is to be appointed in government services.
7. To ban their ownership of lands, shops and buildings, and any such properties under their existing ownership must be confiscated for distribution among the Buddhists. All their economic activities must be stopped.
8. To ban construction, renovation, repair and roofing of the mosques, Islamic religious schools and dwelling houses of the Rohingyas.
9. To try secretly to convert the Muslims into Buddhism.
10. Whenever there is a case between Rakhine and Muslim the court shall give verdict in favour of Rakhine; when the case is between Muslim themselves the court shall favour the rich against the poor Muslim so that the latter leaves the country with frustration.
11. Mass killing of the Muslim is to be avoided in order to invite the attention of the Muslim countries.

In accordance with this roadmap the SPDC/SLORC regime turned on eradicating the Rohingyas by way of destroying everything that is Muslim’s or Islamic in the whole of the country. They have been planned and systematic efforts by SPDC to make demographic changes in Arakan with increasing new Buddhist settlements and pagodas in the whole of predominately Rohingya zone of North Arakan, so that it looks like a Buddhist land. The Buddhist settlers have gradually marginalized and elbowed the age-old Rohingya villages out of their homes under the state patronage.

In the direct outcome of this plan, in 1991-1992 about 250,000 Rohingya have to cross the border into Bangladesh. Although many of these refugees have since then been repatriated to Burma, there are still just under 20,000 refugees living in two camps in southern Bangladesh. Since 1995, new arrivals have been denied camp access. There are an estimated 100,000-200,000 Rohingya living illegally outside without access to protection or humanitarian assistance.

After the 1991-92 outflow of Rohingya, the SPDC changed its strategy and engineered a new tactic of slowly and steadily pushing the Rohingyas from their homeland, using all sorts of physical abuse and economic obstacles. The SPDC has declared Rohingya as non-nationals rendering them stateless. They have become the worst victims of systematic, persistent and widespread human rights violations in Burma, including denial of citizenship rights, severe restrictions on freedom of movement, education, marriage and religion, forced labour, rape, land confiscation, arbitrary arrests, torture, extra judicial killings and extortion on daily basis.

The restrictions on freedom of movement, marriage and education have dashed any future hope of development for the Rohingya, including forming families, all while they live in subhuman conditions amidst abject poverty. Humiliating restrictions on movement—even on travel from place to place within the same locality—have affected all normal activities in all fields, crippling the Rohingya socially, economically and educationally. The recent State Department report confirms that the “Rohingya experienced severe legal, economic, and social discrimination.”

Campaigns of terror, crimes against humanity and extermination have been perpetrated against the Rohingyas in a systematic and planned way. Today, this group is increasingly jobless, homeless, without land of their own and the most illiterate section of Burma’s population. They became such a people as Gabi Popescu, MSF medical coordinator in Bangladesh, once said in an interview “People fear that they will be punished for marrying without permission, for having children without permission, for travelling without permission, for having left without permission, for doing anything without permission, and permission costs money, something that the Rohingya have little of—partly due to numerous other discriminatory measures imposed upon them.”

These crimes against humanity which are arguably ‘slow-burning genocide’ have forced the Rohingyas to leave their homes for various destinations in search of peace, safe shelter, and protection. About 200,000 Rohingyas live in Bangladesh, where about 28,000 live in camps and have been granted refugee status. Many more brave the seas in search of a better life, often traveling to Thailand on their way to Malaysia. Thousands of Rohingyas have fled in recent months on boats sailing for Thailand and Malaysia, and hundreds are missing, feared drowned. Their situation has reached a critical stage over the last two months, as the Thai military have forcibly expelled approximately 1,000 Rohingyas arriving in southwest Thailand by boat, while the Indian and Indonesian authorities have rescued hundreds of them.
According to Anwar Ibrahim, former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, ‘Today, we witness once again the unfolding of the consequences of the oppression of men by men. Oppressed peoples have the misfortune of being arbitrarily isolated from their own societies and rendered into minorities by a stroke of the pen in the hands of their erstwhile political overlords, the military junta. The Muslims of Rohingya are stark reminders of this unfortunate twist of historical fate. With their plight ignored and their pleas for help falling on deaf ears, the Rohingya Muslims brave the high seas in search of a new tomorrow. The doors of Myanmar, their own homeland, are shut on them, the harbours are closed and their women are raped.'

They are not tolerated and are systematically excluded and rendered ‘stateless’ in their own homeland because of their religious belief and ethnicity. They were not among the so-called 135 ethnic nationalities of the country, recorded by the illegal junta; with an ulterior motive or make them “stateless”. They are not only denied their nationality but also their citizenships rights. The Rohingyas are now people without a country dying alive and facing ‘slow-burning genocide’.

The Burmese invaded Arakan in 1406. Min Saw Mwan, the king of Arakan fled the country, taking refuge at Gaur, the capital of the Sultan of Bengal. The Arakanese king remained there for twenty-four years. In 1430 the Sultan of Bengal restored him to the throne of Arakan as his tributary. He turned away from what were Buddhist and familiar to what was Muslim. In so doing he loomed from the medieval to the modern, from the fragile fairyland of the Glass Palace Chronicle to the robust extravaganza of the Thousand Nights and one Night.

Jalaluddin Mohammed Shah restored him in 1430 A.D. and Mrauk-U was built. It is noteworthy that one of the Nasir-ud-din’s coins was recently found near the site of that city. It is a unique document in the history of Arakan. When the Muslims entered Bengal in 1203; they introduced the inscriptional type of coinage and in that tradition the coinage of Mrauk-U were subsequently modeled. In this way Arakan became definitely oriented towards the Muslim states. Contact with a modern civilization resulted in a renaissance. The country’s great age began.

Shin Arahan would have found himself as much out of place at the court of Gaur as St.Bernard in the University of Cordova. To avoid such a sensation and snatch advantage from change, the Arakanese had to forsake a fashion in ideas, which had fallen behind in the march of the world’s thought, and bring themselves up to date. It took the Arakanese a hundred years

---

**THE MUSLIM COINS OF ARAKAN**

By AFK Jilani

Coins are considered to be the most perfect, authentic and informative source of history. There is no doubt about the facts that the coin reveals, and no one can challenge it as untrue. Thus, the value of the coins, as evidence of history, surpasses all the other sources. They are beyond doubt the primary and the most important sources for the study of history and culture.

The coins found in Arakan belong to Wesali are Hindu and those of Mrauk-U are of Muslim. Coinage of Muslim era is of an inscriptive nature. Save for a few exceptions, it contains not a portrait or a figure but the name of the king title, date and faith. The coin’s artistic merit depends upon the calligraphy; and as everyone is aware who has studied the Persian script as a mural decoration this can give a remarkably balanced and vital impression of art.

According to M.S.Collis, Mr.Htoon Aung Gyaw, Barrister-at-law and certain other private collectors of Akyab have in their possession over a hundred coins found in Arakan. When recently arranged by Mr.San Shwe Bu, many of them were seen to be duplicates, but sixteen belonging to the Maruk-U dynasty (1430 to 1784 A.D.) were distinct specimens, bearing the dates and titles of fifteen different kings of that line. Moreover there were a few coins belonging to the Wesali dynasty (788 to 951 A.D.).
to learn that doctrine from the Muslims.

In 1531 Minbin Zabauk Shah ascended the throne. With him the Arakanese graduated in their Islamic studies and the Arakanese Empire was founded. In Mr. Htoon Aung Kyaw's collection's one is of Minbin's coins. It presents a succinct commentary on the sudden rise of Arakan to importance in the Bay of Bengal. On one side of it is inscribed the word “Minbin” in the Burmese character. On the reverse in Nagari is his Muslim title, Zabauk Shah. So Arakan had turned into Sultanate.

For a short period during the reign of Razagri Salim Shah Arakan extended from Dacca and the Sundrbans to Moulmein, a coast strip of a thousand miles in length and varying from 150 to 20 miles in breadth. Copying the imperial Court of Delhi, its kings adopted the title of Padshah. At this moment Arakan was of its highest destiny.

The coins of Sultans were inscribed with a precise inscription in useful and sufficient Persian lettering. With Akbar and his successors the scrip becomes a fine art. Imperially cursive, whirling under the eye, it has a living beauty. M.S.Collis and San Shwe Bu possessed a coin of Razagri Salim Shah. On the obverse is his title in Burmese, on the reverse in Persian and Nagari. The style is essentially that of the Sultanates, and it is an evidence of advancement in Arakan.

One of the coins of Sultan Ali Shah (Thatasa-1525 C.E) found recently at Mrauk-U, inscribed in Persian, it reads; “There is no God but Allah, Mohammed the Messenger of Allah. May Allah perpetuate his kingdom”. The reverse side, also inscribed in Persian, reads as; “Sultan Ali Shah, father of the victorious. May Allah perpetuate his kingdom.” A coin of Razagri/Salim Shah (1593-1612) also found in the collection of Chittagong University museum. Dr. A. Karim remarks that the coin of Salim Shah is very interesting and its throws light on Arakan relations with Bengal.

Another Muslim coin of Arakan which was minted during 1430 A.D.-1530 A.D. with a mural decoration of mosque and Persian inscription of fine art is invaluable in the cultural history of Arakan and its civilization. The reverse side of the coin is an inspirational nature. It contains faith (kalma- the profession of faith in Islam) and the names of Islam’s four Khalifas- Abu Bakar (R.A), Umar (R.A), Osman (R.A) and Ali (R.A) carefully recorded with artistic merit.

Of the last seven kings of Arakan all have coins except number 42 and 46 who both ruled but a few weeks. The coins themselves exhibit little variation, which remained in the Muslim tradition. On the other hand, the Burmese never had a coin of their own when it was in vogue in Arakan. It is, therefore, clearly known that Muslims and Rakhine of Arakan were much ahead culturally and economically as well as in ruling the state more superior in style and governance than the Burmese of that era.

After the occupation of Arakan, king Bodaw's first act was to strike a medallion in the style of the Mrauk-U coinage. Having no tradition of minting coins, he had no model of his own. He simply copied the Muslim design. The legend reads-“The kingdom of the Master of Amarapura and
of many white elephants.” This is the numismatic document to
the fall of Mrauk-U. It was the
last coin struck in Arakan. The
first time in its long history that
Arakan had lost a home govern-
ment of its own.

What is more important is that
Manrique who had witnessed
the coronation of the king Thiri
Thudamma Salim Shah II, used
the Muslim name Salim Shah
only, he did not use the Magh
name of the king. So there is no
doubt that the Arakanese kings
took the Muslim names deliber-
ately, purposely and not only
one king but all reigning for
more than two hundred years
used the Muslim names and ins-
scribed the same in the coins.
So A.P. Phayre is wrong when
he says that the Arakanese
kings made “barbarous imita-
tions” and adopted “fanciful
designations.”

“In striking the coins the policy
of inscribing Islamic creed (Kal-
ima) and the Muslim names of
their kings in Persian charac-
ter was followed, and because
in the court of the Arakanese
kings Muslim ministers were
appointed, modern Arakanese
Rohingya Muslims believe for
certain that those Arakanese
kings were Muslims” written
by a writer. Another writer says
that the Arakanese kings con-
sidered it glorious for them to
inscribe Muslim names and
Muslim creed (Kalima) in their
coins along with their Magh
names. There is no evidence
that they were not Muslims.
We can call them Rohingyas, as
they were the kings of Rohang!

Press Release:
ARNO Welcomes the Statement of
Bangladesh Foreign Minister
Friday, 24 April 2009

The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) wel-
comes Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni’s State-
ment at Bali Process strongly refuting Burmese Deputy Min-
ister’s stand on the origin of the Rohingyas. She stressed
the need for a multilateral approach by the region to solve
the Rohingya problem.

Rebutting the statement of Burmese ruling military’s Dep-
uty Foreign Minister, Dr. Dipu Moni said, “Rohingyas were
one of the many races that make up Burma’s total popula-
tion. Rohingyas have been in Burma for centuries and many
of them have even held high posts in the Burmese govern-
ment. Previous repatriation of quite a few hundred thou-
sand Rohingyas and acceptance of the list of further 28,000
Rohingyas proved that they were very much part of the pop-
ulation of Burma. Rohingyas, who are predominantly Mus-
lim residing in northern Arakan state in western Burma,
had national radio programmes in their language in Burma.
Just by excluding from any list will not make them anything
other than an ethnic entity of Myanmar”.

The ARNO with the Rohingya people feels encouraged by
the positive stand of the Government of Bangladesh. Being
an immediate neighbour bearing the brunt of the Rohingya
problem, we hope the Bangladesh Government will endeav-
our for a permanent solution of the Rohingya problem.

The Rohingya have a long history and have grown with dist-
inct ethnic characteristics in Arakan from peoples of dif-
ferent ethnical background over the past several centuries.
They have a long history, a separate language, distinct cul-
ture and heritage; above all the 3 million Rohingyas form
a homogenous group. They are peace-loving and peaceful-
living. Yet they are not tolerated in the country because of
their religion and ethnicity.

For more information please contact:
Nurul Islam: +44-7947854652
AFK Jilani: + 880-1720 657 589
E-mail: info@rohingya.org
www.rohingya.org
Neeti Gobeshona Kendro, the research organization for human rights and good governance, formed a human chain on April 21, 2009 in front of the Foreign Ministry, protesting against repression of Rohingyas in Myanmar and demanding a solution to the problem. After the human chain programme, they submitted a memorandum to the Foreign Ministry.

Mahbubul Huq Ripon, Director and Founder Trustee of Neeti Gobeshona Kendro, spoke at the human chain gathering. He said that the Rohingyas have been living in the Arakan state for hundreds of years now, but were subject to ethnic discrimination by the government of Myanmar. They take shelter in neighbouring Bangladesh. Under UNHCR supervision, they remain as refugees here. He called for a permanent solution to the problem.

It was said that the Bangladesh government should make a regional and multilateral effort to repatriate the Rohingya refugees to their homeland through UNHCR.

Police tried to prevent the human chain from forming and misbehaved with the participants.

Source: PROBE NEWS MAGAZINE
THE BARBED WIRE FENCE
By SU Ahamed

The border between Bangladesh and Burma (Myanmar) has become tense after the Burmese military started unilateral fencing without giving any prior information to its counterpart Bangladesh. First of all, Burmese military has shown its intransigent nature even while dealing with a sovereign state like Bangladesh. Bangladesh has always been showing gesture of friendly relations with particularly its neighbors and Burma is no exception. This is a kind of rogue diplomatic behavior of Military regime of Burma (SPDC). Normally, any undertakings along the common border have to be done after mutual agreement between the concerned nations. As a result Bangladesh had to move diplomatically to ascertain what is going on along the border by pressing for meeting on this issue. It is clear that the Burmese military has put up immense pressure on Bangladesh by putting fence along the common border with total disregard of diplomatic norms. It is sure that the fencing is a sinister design to fulfill its ambitions.

The abrupt move to put up a fence has come up to the mind of SPDC while the regime is widely criticized for engendering Rohingya refugee problem and after much international outcry to address the situation. The recent plight of the Rohingya boat people in which hundreds of them perished in the bay of Bangal had caused serious concern among international community including human-right groups. It is an established fact that the root cause of this tragic incident is Burma’s ruthless treatments on the Rohingya population of Arakan. This is a man made crisis and is fully politically motivated. A political solution is needed to be found. Unless Rohingyas regain the lost status of citizenship, there is no chance of solving the problem. The entire gamut of problem lies within the question of nationality. There are widespread economic problems because of the political disparity among the nationalities of Arakan (Burma) where only the Rohingyas fall victims.

The Burmese military regime (SPDC) is reluctant to accept the Rohingya exodus as an important issue and rejects any kind of claim of mistreatment of Muslims in Arakan. They claim that it is not a political issue and those who left are economic migrants. They deny of any kind of human rights violations against Rohingyas like restriction on trade and travel, marriage, education, practice of religion and all other sectors which effect livelihood of every Muslim. But today it has become clear to everyone that gross human rights violations are perpetrated in Arakan against Rohingyas. The recently concluded ASEAN and BALI process meetings have highlighted the seriousness and urgent nature of the Rohingya issue which has to be tackled by Burma as well as regional and international community.

The Burmese military regime’s plan to put up the fence along the border is not a solution of the problem at all. It definitely deteriorates the real situation on the ground and fuel mistrust not only between the two countries but also fear among the local Muslim population. Naturally, Bangladesh side apprehends it as a kind of military tactical maneuvering and local Rohingya Muslims see it as encirclement which will affect lives of every Muslim. But SPDC is most likely to use the fence in another way. Though the military insists on curbing illegal crossings, drug smugglings and the actual motive is to establish the fact that there remained imminent danger of infiltration of Bangali population from Bangladesh as did in last centuries as the military always claims. The military is heavily involved in propaganda campaign that this kind of fence should have put up long before to bar any Bangali from illegal entry into Arakan and eventually in to Burma. They argue that today’s Rohingya problem would not have come up if such fence would have put up by any previous governments of Burma. East Bangal (now Bangladesh) is a very small land in size with huge population and there was and still every chance of illegal migration into Arakan. The military men who are working on this fencing project are specially told of Bangali infiltration during British Burma period and it continued till today and to end this problem once and for all, the fence is imperative.

But actually the military regime is keeping
closed eyes on flow of Rohingya Muslims out of Arakan. Only recently they are compelled to admit that a sizeable Muslim population lives in Arakan and what the military brands that they are Bangalis and not Rohingyas. The military tried utmost to distance itself from this Rohingya boat people issue and pass the buck on Bangladesh and eventually the truth was established and responsibility was to be taken by the military itself. ASEAN leaders and other international organizations now have clear concept of the real problems faced by the Rohingyas in Arakan. In an unavoidable circumstance, the SPDC acknowledged that there are some problems in northern Arakan but these are not political but economic. In a bid to hide the real nature of religious and ethnic persecution, the regime is trying to give the shade of the problem as non-political. So, SPDC has launched some kind of socio-economic uplift programs involving money from Rohingya community who are apparently living in Rangoon. Rohingya Muslim entrepreneurs living in Rangoon are told by the military to come forward for the regional development in northern Arakan by providing cash money to the Maungdaw and Buthidaung township administrations. In early April, 2009, a 6-member Rohingya businessman was brought to Maungdaw by home ministry of SPDC and stayed for 5 days and met with the local SPDC administration and provided fund for development of the area where Muslims are predominant. During the trip the deputy-home minister Maj-General Phone Swe mentioned the indigenous Rohingya Muslims as Bangalis. It is clear that SPDC rejects the ethnic identity of Rohingyas and call them as Bangalis to deprive them of ethnic and indigenous status which was enjoyed before military rule was introduced in 1962.

Because of the immense international pressure being put, the military regime of Burma is trying to improve the image abroad by taking steps for regional developments. But Muslims of Arakan are skeptical of the intention of SPDC that it has not come up out of genuine desire to end the plight of the suffering community. While taking initiatives to improve the living conditions of the population of northern Arakan apparently by using fund raised from the same oppressed community, SPDC is spending huge amount of money in erecting fence along the border. Bangladesh-Burma has a border of about 176 miles and putting up of barbed wire fence with concrete pillars in a gigantic project where hundreds of millions of Kyats will have to be invested. In stead of taking up of such kind of militarily preventive measures only shows the ill intent of the military, emphasis should be given in creating conducive atmosphere where Muslims get fair treatment and livelihood be eased for them. All restriction applied on the lives of Muslims should immediately remove so that every one becomes free and independent in pursuing trade, education, religious activities, marriage and all other mundane affairs.

Initially, the erection of the controversial fence along the common border started from the southern part where river Naaf, a 30 miles long waterway dividing the two countries. The eastern side of the river is Burmese side where predominant inhabitants are Rohingya Muslims. The southernmost of the border starts from Hatchurata village (Alay Thangyaw) where river Naaf starts and ends at Taungpro 30 miles to the north. All along the river bank there are full of shrimp culturing dams which are vital economic supporting ventures owned by native Rohingyas. Because of the abrupt construction of fence, a catastrophic effect has fallen on Muslim economy. Almost all shrimp culturing dams with full of shrimps are randomly cut open of the embankment and water flushed out along with all shrimps and fish to utter frustration of the owners. By the way, about 10000 to 15000 acres of shrimp dams are estimated to have affected insurmountable loss of money by Rohingyas. Besides dam owners, there are others who took dams as lease on yearly basis. There are a lot of dams confiscated by military and other departments which are taken as lease by Muslims. A number of shrimp breeders took huge advance money in Taka from Bangladeshi shrimp traders to invest in the dams. The money is to be paid by selling the products of it. Now serious questions have arisen as how money should be paid by the lessee either to the military, government departments or Bangladeshi counterparts. Because of the fence, a big financial problem has created with no ways found to solve it. Even in some parts of the border, the civilian dressed military
men who are engaged in the construction work and local Muslims clashed after the dams are destroyed and dried up. For this reason so many Muslims have to go into hiding for fear of retribution. From one side their economic survival is at stake and they are pushed to ultimate loan defaulters and are completely rendered helpless.

The Burmese military has undertaken this huge task without taking into consideration of the economic impact of the regional Rohingya population. It is only implemented to show the world that they are trying to control the illegal cross border movements. On the other hand, it indirectly implies that the military is trying to stop infiltration of Bangalis from the other side of the border. But on the ground the situation is totally opposite and continuous flow of Rohingyas from Arakan into Bangladesh is seen everyday even in front of the very eyes of border security Nasaka forces. Bangladesh government has categorically expressed it that the country is faced with huge Rohingya infiltration and Burma should take back its citizens. Instead of trying to solve the refugee problem, SPDC is bent on putting fence along the border which will not help solve the refugee problem. Only recently when the Rohingya refugee problem has assumed regional dimension involving more countries, the Burmese military under immense pressure reluctantly agreed to cooperate with international community to solve it. It is encouraging to note that Indonesia, the leading ASEAN nation has firmly decided to solve the problem in cooperation with those countries directly concerned with Rohingya migration. As envisaged, a strong committee is to be formed by the regional countries and pursue the matter thoroughly and find out the root cause of the problem and solve it politically. It is hoped that Indonesia will come forward and lead the committee where Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Malaysia are also to be involved. On the other hand, UNHCR is a crucial partner in this process and needs to be involved as the organization has detailed information and practical field experience of the Rohingya problem. UNHCR is indispensable in solving the issue and should work with the regional countries in unison. Furthermore, countries like Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Pakistan should also be brought in to the process as there are huge Rohingya communities living in those countries. The proposed committee should be comprised of countries from ASEAN, South Asia and Middle East as the regions are directly affected with Rohingya migration. United States of America (USA), Canada, Australia and E.U countries should come forward and give impetus to this process to solve the problem once and for all. Only to bring Rohingya refugees to be resettled in third countries will not solve the problem and it is a temporary solution and perhaps indirectly supports Rohingya ethnic cleansing by Burmese military back home. So, more emphasis should be given to solve it at first hand so that all Rohingyas should go back to their native land. In fact, Rohingyas belong to Arakan and it is best for them to live in the ancestral homeland.

As a matter of fact, Bangladesh needs to play at the fore front and a practical policy should be adopted to counter Burmese sinister designs. Rohingyas are much encouraged to note that Dr. Dipu Moni, the Foreign Minister categorically rejected Burmese claim that Rohingyas are not citizens of Burma (Myanmar). The reasons given by the Minister are quite reasonable and there are no ways that Rohingyas are to be called aliens. A firm and strong policy of Bangladesh with regards to the Rohingya issue is of prime important to solve it comprehensively. Putting Fence along the border is totally an unwarranted measure and it is a kind of intimidation to the Rohingya community as well as unfriendly act towards Bangladesh that in no way it helps solve Rohingya issue and further mistrust is to be created between the two countries. It is what Burmese military calls internal affair and no one should interfere in it and what every one apprehends it as a ploy to divert attention from the core issue and to solve it while sitting together.

It is the hope of the beleaguered Rohingya community that the momentum of solving the crisis is to be kept and should not let the Burmese military shrug off its responsibility of solving the problem as history has shown that the military regime (SPDC)
used delay tactics and always distanced itself from taking any concrete steps in dealing the issue. The real motive is that, by lingering this issue, these ostracized Rohingya Muslims will discreetly disappear from the soil of Arakan in due course of time and one day the whole land will be transformed into a pure Buddhist one.

ROHINGYA LEADER PASSED AWAY

A Rohingya leader Master Sultan Ahmed passed away due to old age in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on April 15, in the morning, at the age of 80. He hails from Shiddapara (kayandan) village, Maungdaw, Arakan State of Burma.

The whole Rohingya community, inside and abroad, is deeply shocked at the death of Master Sultan Ahmed. His contribution for the cause of Rohingya will remain in the glorious Chapter of Rohingya history.

He passed high school level education from Maungdaw High School. He was the headmaster of primary school and the president of All Burma Teachers Association of Maungdaw Branch. He is a social worker, community leader and also a founder member and first Chairman of Rohingya Independence Force (RIF). It was formed in 1964 after the military junta of General Ne Win seized power in 1962 from the democratically elected government of U Nu.

In 1986, he left for Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) from Arakan, Burma, there he worked in a “Bur- mese Scrutiny Committee” and also participated various social development programs in KSA for the Rohingya community. He was moreover a football player.

Many Rohingya people visited the residence of the deceased in the Holy city of Mekkah to pay their last respect to the late Master sultan.

He left behind his sons, daughters, host of relatives and whole Rohingya community to mourn his death. The Namaz-e-janaja of Master Sultan was held in Holy Mekkah city.

It is very strange that his wife Nur Naher Begum also passed away in Mekkah the day before his death, 14th April 09 at the age of (70), due to old age. Within two days, the old couple has gone for eternal peace.

We members of the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) mourn and pray for the salvation of the departed souls and conveyed sympathy to members of the bereaved family. We ARNO would like to request the Rohingya people all over the world to pray for the departed soul of both Late Master Sultan Ahamed and his wife.
IC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu appealed to the OIC Member States to accord greater importance to Muslim minority issues in non-Member States through their bilateral relations with these countries to help these minorities preserve their rights and interests. The Secretary General was addressing on April 18, 2009, the 2nd Meeting of the Governmental Group of Experts on the Situation of Muslim Minorities in non-OIC Member States held at the headquarters of the OIC General Secretariat in Jeddah.

The Secretary General stated in his speech before the representatives of Muslim minorities and of the Member States that since he took over as OIC Secretary General, he devoted a great deal of his time and energy to build closer relations between Muslim minorities outside non-OIC Member States on the one hand, and the OIC Member States on the other. He pointed out that Muslim minorities constitute one third of the total number of Muslims across the world, representing an estimated half a billion people. Ihsanoglu spoke about the various initiatives he undertook to resolve the issues besetting Muslim minorities in the Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand, Western Thrace in Greece, and the Caucasus region as well as other regions of the world.

He continued by affirming that the elaborate reports which he has submitted to the Islamic meetings at the summit and ministerial levels prominently incorporate Muslim minority issues. He explained that he has dispatched special envoys to a number of countries hosting Muslim minorities over the past years in order to get a first-hand information of the conditions of Muslims, interact with them, and identify their needs. The OIC, he added, is also involved in the peace efforts underway in both the Philippines and Thailand.

Dear Reader,

We hope “ARAKAN” with its new look and rich content will be able to keep you informed about Arakan and Rohingyas.

We welcome you to be part of this magazine by providing us with your valuable writings, comments, information and suggestions.

If you are an artist, please do send us your cartoons.

Would you like to advertise or support this magazine, please contact us at:

info_arno@yahoo.com
info@rohingya.org

Please get an online version of the magazine at:

www.rohingya.org