Fencing Rohingyaas
EDITORIAL: FENCING ROHINGYAS

The former leaders of the Soviet Union, Germany and the United States: Mikhail Gorbachev, Helmut Kohl and George Bush Sr. marked the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in Berlin on November 9, 1999. The three were head of their respective countries in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell. In November 9, 2009 the world will witness the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Though the Berlin Wall was fell twenty years ago, a New Berlin Wall is erected for the Rohingyas of Arakan along the Bangladesh-Burma border, so that the Rohingyas can not get out of the Mayu Frontier District comprising Maungdaw, Buthidaung and part of the Rathedaung Townships between the Kaladan River and the Naf River, the whole Mayu Valley.

Rohingyas are suspicious of fencing along the border that will turn out to be a killing terra firma. The Burmese government might replicate the fencing of Israel around Gaza and the Rohingyas are dreadful cold-blooded torture and murder as the people of Gaza experiencing in their land. The Rohingyas are panic-stricken and think that the Burmese government will systematically tempt to die in starvation in the cage as the Serbs did in Bosnia. It should be mentioned that in 1662, the Arakanese King, Sanda Thudama Raja, kept Shah Shuja’s family members locked up and let them die in starvation. They also think that the fencing may be like Nazi’s holocaust concentration camp where the Rohingyas will be massacred like Nazi did to the Jews.

In 30 October issue of the independent, Md Masum Millah wrote that “Myanmar army turned up in Maungdaw and Alithangyaw to evict Muslim Rohingyas from their ancestral homeland. They forcibly acquired 1000 acres of arable land and distributed among the Buddhists (new settlers). The Rohingyas
are told to go to Bangladesh. Bangladesh has been experiencing regular infiltration of Rohingyas from Myanmar in recent months. They speak of terrors being unleashed on them by Myanmar troops as in 1978 with apparent aim of completely flushing Rohingya Muslims in Arakan who have been living there for centuries. Tensions have arisen particularly over the Myanmar’s planned construction of a 40-kilometer fence along the border, ostensibly to check cross-border smuggling. Recently in October 2008, a standoff between two neighboring countries as Myanmar permitted Daewoo of South Korean to drill for natural gas over disputed area in the Bay of Bengal.”

Rohingyas are forced to work in the barbed wire fencing without payment. Rohingyas are the most persecuted people on earth. Due to continuous persecution, about 1.5 million Rohingyas are in diaspora, living in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Thailand and Malaysia. Those who are still at home are in sub-human condition, jobless, hopeless facing crimes against humanity counting their days in utmost miseries and dismay. They are the worst victims of human right violations, including denial of citizenship rights, severe restrictions on freedom of movement, education, marriage and religion, forced labor, rape, land confiscation, expulsion, destruction of settlements, arbitrary arrest, torture, extrajudicial killing and extortion of money on daily basis. Over sixty new Buddhist villages are built on the lands of Rohingya Muslims to increase Buddhist population. Renovations of mosques are prohibited whereas Buddhist monasteries and pagodas are regularly built even where there is no Buddhist. New Buddhist settlers are more hostile and upper handed to the Rohingyas with the backing of the authorities. Owing to these deliberate actions of the SPDC, today the Rohingyas have increasingly landless, jobless, homeless, and the most deprived section of Burma’s population.

These extreme conditions have forced them to leave their hearths and home for various destinations of the world even risking their lives through turbulent seas and oceans by boats in search of better tomorrow. However Rohingyas are not accepted anywhere in the world. There are significant numbers of Rohingya languishing in the jails of Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Burma, Malaysia and Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka. With fencing of the border by the Military Junta of Burma, the whole Mayu Valley becomes a jail village for the Rohingyas as they can not move east west and north to south or vice versa.

THE BORDER PROBLEM
By S Hussein

The situation along the common border between Bangladesh and Burma has become tense after Burma started to erect barbed wire fence on Burma side of the border. It is known that the fencing will cost the government Burmese Kyat 16 billions to cover more than 350 kilometer long border and is huge money. No one is quite sure why this huge task has been undertaken on urgent basis. Out of all borders with Myanmar, border with Bangladesh is quite safe and peace is prevailed. Borders with India, China and Thailand are unsafe with numerous insurgent groups which are active. The border where Burma is putting up fence actually doesn’t pose any threat and this is a question every one has in mind why such urgency of the fence and which prompted Burmese military to go for this mega project. Burmese military is apprehensive of something which may be coming on their way that may post serious problems for the military. This may come either from Rohingya issue or directly from the Bangladesh government itself. After all, Burma is anticipating something ominous from this border. One may be because of the territorial dispute with Bangladesh and other may any reaction by the Rohingyas living in
A rapid militarization of northern Arakan is going on but in a discreet way and is done keeping in mind that at any time there can be a problem along the border. Burmese army continues battalion installations in Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Kyauktaw and Paletwa (Chin state) where as western command HQ is located in Ann Township far to the east. Only Kyauktaw is directly linked with Ann HQ by road and other locations are inaccessible by road but there are creeks where waterway is usable. As Bangladesh border is not easily reachable from Burma side, troops are needed to mobilize in advance. Whenever the situation becomes volatile, Burmese army has to do the job which is very much arduous. Now it is very much likely that more roads will be constructed in northern Arakan to pave way for rapid transportation and deployment. During the end of last month (October) a cargo ship loaded with full of barbed wire and drums with Asphalt to be used to roads reached Kanyin Chaung (Khayon Khali) port, 3 kms north from Maungdaw, a port developed recently for unloading of materials for fencing. The Asphalt drums are to be used to roads reached Kanyin Chaung (Khayon Khali) port, 3 kms north from Maungdaw, a port developed recently for unloading of materials for fencing. The asphalt drums are in huge quantity and road development may also be huge.

The Military is likely to engage in construction in a sustained way so that rapid deployment is possible. The army will have a long way to go to have good access to the border region. After the showdown in the bay last year, the army is steadily developing military presence along the front line with Bangladesh. At this moment, Burmese army deployments are far less than what is required for an all out war. But the process has started to boost the defense lines and expected to go on. In Buthidaung garrison, some heavy guns and armored personal carriers (APC) are stored and there are about 13 regiments and each one has about 300 troops and lesser. Hanifa Tonki and Khaya Puri Tonki (two mountain tops of Mayu mountain range) are two most strategically important places for heavy gun deployments. No air port or air support facilities are present but speculations are rife but till not confirmed. Only Sittwe (Akyab) airport (civilian) is enlarged and updated for use of military aircraft. Akyab naval base is the nearest one to face any threat from hostile navies. The overall military presence under western Command is about about 50 regiments.

The ongoing barbed wire fence in no way is able to withstand any military assault but it can only prevent human crossings. The Burma side is worried of Muslim insurgent infiltrations but it is unlikely the fence is only for that purpose but it is more likely that they fear the influx of Rohingya community living in Bangladesh any time in future. As the government of Bangladesh has openly mentioned the presence of about half a million Rohingyas in Bangladesh, Burma side has taken it seriously and may be taking precautionary measures from the beginning. The reasons given by Burma side for putting up fence is not practical that they like to stop illegal crossings, smuggling (drug trade) and to prevent crimes. Actually they encourage Rohingya Muslims to leave Arakan forever. The authorities like army, Nasaka, police, local administration and others are heavily engaged in drug trafficking, they are directly engaged in crimes, loot and plunder. The Myanmar authorities do not feel secure as the border is porous and poorly fortified and demarcated. They need to have enough pillars to ascertain the international border so that no dispute will emerge in future. There may be a possibility that since Muslim community is called as Bangali by Burmese government, the land should also be called a Bangali land and Burma will have to relinquish the possession. This hypothesis also acts for construction of the fence. Actually, Rohingya Muslims of Arakan, as long as their presence continues in Arakan, the military regime will not have sound sleep and the majority of Rakhine

Bangladesh and abroad.
Buddhist community has the same feeling.

The Rohingya problem is very much delicate for the military and they are in confused way how to deal the situation. From one side they try to put pressure on Muslims so that they leave Arakan voluntarily and on the other side they fear for the repercussion. But Rakhine community puts constant pressure not to show any leniency towards Rohingyas and to keep ongoing extermination drive. It is inevitable that Burma officials may be closely watching what Bangladesh government is proceeding with Rohingya case as one day Burma will have to accept back all those who left Arakan. If it is the case that fence is to be put up to prevent Rohingya reentry and to guarantee the territorial claim by Burma, it is to be seen how effective the fence is.

THE JUNTA AND MONKS IN BURMA
By Aman Ullah

Two years ago thousands of monks and citizens flooded the streets of Burma protesting against military rule. The courage of the initial protesters spurred over 100,000 more to participate in the largest demonstrations to take place in Burma in 20 years.

Economic desperation was the trigger for the peaceful uprising that would come to be known as, “the Saffron Revolution,” named after the color of monks’ robes. In August 2007, the Burmese junta suddenly decided to lift fuel subsidies. As a result, fuel prices skyrocketed as much as 500% overnight, with food and other commodities’ prices following suit. What didn’t happen was the same rise in income levels, leaving millions of people across the country unable to perform even the most basic functions such as buying food, traveling, and paying for children education.

On August 19th, Buddhist monks overturned their alms bowls, historically considered an act of defiance, and refused to receive alms from the Burmese generals. In other words, they stopped giving these generals Buddha’s blessings. They began to protest in the streets of major cities, and soon they were joined by pro-democracy activists, nuns, and local residents. In a matter of few days, thousands of demonstrators from all walks of life were pouring into the streets across Burma, demanding the political and economic reforms from the military government.

On September 5th, troops broke up a demonstration in Pakokku, a town in central Burma, injuring dozens of monks. Members of the Sangha, the Buddhist clergy union, delivered an ultimatum to the military government to be met by September 17th, demanding an apology. The junta never apologized. On September 22nd, thousands of monks marched in cities across Burma. Ten thousand monks took to the streets in Mandalay alone, the second largest city in Burma. In Rangoon, monks chanting the Metta Sutta, a prayer of kindness and compassion, marched to the home of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to honor the democracy leader. Daw Suu Kyi appeared before the monks and shed tears of gratitude.

Led by monks, the demonstrations multiplied and swelled in size over the next days. On September 24th, crowds filled the streets of more than 25 cities across Burma, with 100,000 peaceful marchers in Rangoon alone. The next day, machine-gun toting soldiers gathered ominously at intersections. Despite the backdrop of 8888 uprising when soldiers beat and gun down student protesters with no reservations, many local and international onlookers were convinced that the Saffron Revolution was different because of the concentration of Buddhist monks in the movement. Because Buddhism is the predominant religion in Burma, the role of monks is held in high reverence. And to touch or assault a monk, let alone kill, is considered one of the gravest sins any man can commit.

On the 26th of September, the landmark Shwedagon Pago-
da was barricaded by troops, and a curfew was imposed by the military dictators. During the night, soldiers raided dozens of monasteries across Burma, beating and killing monks according to eyewitness accounts. Unfazed by the night raids and the rumors of arrest, on the morning of September 27th, 50,000 courageous citizens gathered on the streets of Rangoon to demand freedom from fear. Soldiers opened fire on the crowds, killing at least nine unarmed protesters. One of these was Kenji Nagai, a Japanese journalist, whose murder was caught on video and beamed around the world. With each passing hour, more monks were detained as more soldiers filled the streets. The Burmese junta shut down internet and cell phone service to stifle the flow of information to the outside world. Even so, accounts emerged of a crematorium burning day and night to destroy evidence of military brutality. A Burmese colonel defected after refusing an order to slaughter hundreds of monks.

On October 11th, the UN Security Council issued a statement condemning the brutal actions of the Burmese regime. The US and many EU countries announced tighter sanctions against Burma. Soldiers were deployed heavily on the streets of every city and on the premises of emptied monasteries. With the leaders of the movement, including hundreds of monks, civic activists and local residents detained, large-scale demonstrations ceased. Reports suggest that low-level resistance continued, including small demonstrations and imprisoned monks refusing food from their oppressors. The streets of Burma may have quiet down and the day-to-day hustle and bustle resumes, but the sense of dissatisfaction, alienation, and anger against the ruling junta never fade away.

This is not the first time that the Military Junta brutally suppressed the Buddhist monks. The junta has never hesitated to suppress Buddhist monks who are suspected of being against military rule. Because of the Sangha was so powerful and well-established, Ne Win always seemed the Sangha as a threat to him. Between 1963 and 1967, the Revolutionary Council issued a number of directives restricting the freedom of monks, such as, “Monks who want to travel need a Movement Order from the local military authorities” ‘or, “Anyone who wants to become a monk needs permission to do so from the military”. In April 1964, all Sangha groups were ordered to register with the government. This measure was taken in order to purge the Sangha of ‘political monks’. A directive from 1971 said, “The appointment of an abbot must be countersigned by the local military committee”. All these edicts remain in effect at the present in Burma.

Although the 1974 constitution included several provisions relating to religious freedom, these were subject to limitations and even punishable. Article 153 of the 1974 constitution, for example, says that, “…every citizen shall have the right to freely … profess the religion of his choice. The exercise of this right shall not … be to the detriment of national solidarity and the socialist social order (…)” In order to curtail religions even further, the military government has been enforcing several laws such as the Emergency Provisions Act of 1950, the Unlawful Association Act of 1908 (amended in 1957), the State Protection Act of 1975 (amended in 1991), and the Sangha Law of 1990. Accordingly the Sangha is being watched by the Burmese military intelligence agencies. The Military junta has not only been used the State Protection Act of 1975 against the Muslims and Christians but also against the Sangha. A monk from Maymyo was sentenced to four years under the Unlawful Association Act in 1989 because he was suspected of having had connections with the MSA (Mon Sangha Association, which claimed to desire an independent Mon state, but only in a peaceful way). A monk from Mandalay was sentenced to three years under the Emergency Provisions Act in 1991 because he had written an article about
the Buddhist tenet of non-violence.

In 1990 the Sangha spearheaded a peaceful march in Mandalay commemorating the dead of 1988 and demanding that power be handed over to the elections’ victors. The army opened fire on the demonstrators and killed two monks. In protest, the Sangha imposed a religious boycott against the military and their families. SLORC responded forcefully. The army raided more than 350 monasteries throughout Burma and arrested hundreds of monks, including U Yewata, head of the Mandalay Monks’ Association. A law was laid down banning all Buddhist organizations but the one controlled by the Junta. In addition to the aforementioned laws, the military government enforces the Village Act of 1908 and the Towns Act of 1907, two pre-independence statutes allowing forced labour. Military officials and security forces often compel persons, especially in rural areas, to contribute money, food, or uncompensated labour to state-sponsored projects to build, maintain or renovate Buddhist monasteries and pagodas. The military junta even went so far as to claim that forced labour is considered as ‘a noble act of charity’ in a Buddhist country. This is not only a serious insult to the Buddhist religion but also a gross affront to human dignity. In August 1994, the army used the Village and Towns Acts to raid Buddhist monasteries in Mandalay, thereby relocating hundreds of monks who were forced to work at agricultural projects. Many other monks were forced to disrobe and dredge the moat at Mandalay Palace to the extension of the runway at the local airfield.

The present military regime, the State Peace and Development Council or SPDC, rules the country without a constitution. Directives and decrees form the basis for law. Religious freedom, like all other freedoms in Burma, is subject to military rule. In 1996, a monk from Moulmein was sentenced to two years under SLORC Law No. 5, because he had distributed leaflets about Sammasati (‘Right Mindedness’) without prior permission from the local authorities. However, the judgment did not answer the question as to how Right Mindedness can possibly lead to deterioration of the stability of the state, or to misunderstanding among the people. The military regime continues to imprison monks for efforts to speak and associate freely.

Sayadaw Ahshia Nandabo, a 66-year-old monk from Mudom Township, Moulmein, had built a pagoda on a patch of ground given to the Sangha by a member of parliament of the National League for Democracy. On 6 January 2001, the monk was arrested, and on 19 January he was sentenced to ten years (under which law?) because “no prior permission had been taken from the government for the construction of the pagoda”. A directive from 1972 said that, “no monastery or pagoda may be built, rebuilt, renovated, or maintained without prior permission from the military authorities”, which currently remains in effect. Military personnel often loot, damage, or destroy Buddhist monasteries in ethnic minority regions, thereby arresting or extra-judicially killing the monks. The junta’s crusade is part of their political interests. Although according to the regime there is religious freedom in Burma, the reality is that there is religious discrimination. The junta is suppressing Muslims and Christians in order to disperse them, while it pretends to promote Buddhism. Buddhism is promoted by the military at the expense of other religions to increase SPDC’s nationalism. The generals systematically use propaganda in their attempts to falsely convince the Buddhists that the military regime is representing their interests. Such is the state of Law and Religion in Burma today. Under the cloak of law, Buddhists are suppressed and the Sangha curtailed, as these are among the most active in the struggle for the restoration of democracy and human rights.
Nowadays if one watches Burmese Television programme, he should definitely feel bored looking at quite lengthy similar scenes, like the generals worshiping the Buddha statue, distributing alms to the abbots and monks, participating in opening ceremonies of newly constructed Buddhist pagodas and monasteries etc. It seems that the generals in Burma are very saintly. However, while they are appearing over TV screens as great upholders of Buddhist faith, what they are doing in the backstage against Buddhist religion could be perceived by only few people who have the opportunity to see for themselves and eyes to discern of their misdeeds against the teachings of Buddha. Perhaps they may be copying the style of some old Burmese kings who could be so tyrannical and cruel in accomplishing projects that would signify their pomp and grandeur. One Burmese king was said to have put to sword many rare craftsmen of pagoda building for finding a gap of a hair’s breadth between two bricks of a pagoda. Others would drag thousands of souls to work as slaves in building big pagodas. No doubt the generals’ seeming reverence, for the Buddhist faith is politically motivated. They wanted to pose themselves as good rulers with many Kaung Mu (virtuous deeds) before the majority Burmese masses, which they think, may help them to cling on to power indefinitely.

Whatever motive may be deeds like building Pagodas and giving alms to monks are accepted by the People of Buddhist faith generally as good. However if these seemingly good deeds are carried out with an ulterior motive at the expense of others or by hurting others it can never be approved by any good people. The present military junta’s religious activities in Muslim majority north Arakan is in no way related to the thought of their acceptance by Arakanese people. Undoubtedly the junta has a deep-seated political agenda in Arakan. The military, since its assumption of power, has been pursuing a clear policy towards the Rohingya Muslims: cultural assimilation of Muslims of proper Burma into Burmese Buddhist culture and physical extermination, ethnic cleansing and genocide of Rohingya Muslims.

Although constitution allows freedom of worship and prohibits discrimination on the basis of one’s religious beliefs, military regime’s revulsion and discrimination against the Rohingya Muslims is no secret. Person known as Muslim is barred from attaining high government positions, gaining state scholarship for higher studies abroad, and recruitment in any defence or security services and discriminated even in petty jobs and matters. Many Muslims have been forced to renounce their religion and publicly declare to be Buddhists to retain their government post. A well planned attack against Islamic culture through mass media, public shows, and mockery in the society has been carried out by the junta compelling many Ro-
hingya Muslims to abandon their practice of Islamic culture like growing beard, wearing cap by man and veil by woman.

At times, the military regime spreads rumours against the Muslims that they are covertly planning to subvert Buddhist religion or violating Buddhist girls giving rise to anti-Muslim frenzy and rioting with huge loss of lives, destruction of mosques, Muslim schools and property. Since 1997, after the anti-Muslim rioting in which about 40 mosques were demolished in Mandalay and Rangoon, the junta has restricted Muslims to Perform ‘Qurbani’ sacrificing animals on the day of the festival of feast, citing reasons of possible outbreak of public anger over the slaughter of animals. These kinds of propaganda against the Muslims serve two purposes at a time: - to divert the attention of common masses from other acute and volatile issues and to serve as a warning to the Muslims that their future is not safe unless they abandon their religion and culture.

Late Gen. Ne Win, while on a visit to Akyab, capital of Arakan, was said to be disgusted and furious at the sight of a mosque (Shafi mosque) just at the doorstep of Akyab airport. He ordered then to demolish the mosque. The process of demolishing Muslim mosques and building new Buddhist pagodas in Arakan began since the time of Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) rule. A number of mosques have been demolished either as solitary instances or while uprooting entire villages. The famous Santoli mosque near Arakan Jetty, in Akyab, about 7 mosques of Saakipara, near previous western military command headquarters, the mosque of Buthidaung near the jetty, the Jame mosque of Gwa Township, a number of mosques in Cheduba (Man Aung Island), Kyaukpru, and Sandoway were totally destroyed during BSPP rule. Many other mosques also came under attack. After the take over by the SLORC the 500-year old historic Sandikhan mosque at Mrohaung, the Charkunbaw mosques, 8 mile south of Maungdaw, a number of other mosques in the township of Kyauktaw, Minbya and Ponnagyun had been completely demolished and many more were attacked. In the mean time the military junta has prohibited building of new and repair of old concrete mosques. Many
Buddhist pagodas have been raised either directly on the demolished mosque site or nearby. The new Buddhist pagodas sprouting like mushrooms have its origin in sacrilegious acts. Some of these pagodas are either built on confiscated Muslim land or on the site of demolished mosques and, in certain instances, by money forcibly extorted from the Muslims at bus stations, jetties, offices and sometimes taken as donations on granting certain facilities like allowing someone to go to Rangoon or giving cross border trade permits to import or export certain goods. The question is, are these acts tenable with the teaching of Buddhism. At present vast tracts of Muslim lands, including farmlands, uprooted settlements, dales and mountainous lands, have been confiscated in a rapid speed. One can also see hurried establishment of new Buddhist villages on the confiscated Muslim land. The establishment of new Buddhist villages and erection of the pagodas goes side by side. Under the sign of security measure, new military outposts and cantonments are being established in a massive scale.

This new phenomenon of Buddhization has serious adverse affect on life of Muslims. On the one hand the authorities have been confiscating Muslim lands in such a scale that they have become almost landless. Additionally, the new military build up and the new Buddhist settlements increased the burden of forced labour on Muslims. Added to this, cruel taxation on the produce of the land renders the poor farmers hand to mouth. These Muslims have to face other kind of harassments too. Any cattle, goat, sheep or fowl straying in to the new settler area is seized and released on payment of handsome amount. Even incidence of kidnapping of young cowboys by the newsletters had occurred making the life of the Muslims totally insecure. The authorities have also imposed another kind of unusual and extortionate taxation. Any birth or death or sale of cattle, goats, sheep, or fowls shall have to be reported and a fee to be paid either in the case of new birth or death.

With restriction on the movement, restriction on employment, total lack of security of the life, property, honour and dignity and forcing to work like slaves and facing increasing difficulties to eke-out a meager existence, there is no reason why one should still think to adhere to the country he loves most. Hundreds of Rohingyas are thus leaving daily unnoticed while the authorities have kept the exit open. The military rulers could foresee if this phenomenon continues for some years, they could achieve their target of turning north Arakan into a Buddhist majority area. In view of the above they feel that the landscape of north Arakan should also be adorned with Buddhist religious, cultural and social institutions as hurriedly as possible, so that no outsiders could ever think that it had once been a Muslim dominated area.

**THE PLAGT OF ROHINGYAS**

By Y Arakani

Wide ranging human-rights violations and crime against humanity are committed in Arakan state of Myanmar on Rohingya Muslim community and
especially, the severity of the onslaught is felt in northern Arakan covering all 9 Nasaka administered regions. These regions are comprised of Maungdaw and Buthidaung districts and some of Rathedaung areas where Muslims live. This exclusive area is called northern Rakhine state (NRS). In spite of the general administration under State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), this region is doubly administered by Nasaka under summery regional decrees especially designed to oppress Muslim community so that they choose to leave their ancestral homes. These regionally proclaimed decrees are highly questionable with no legal status whatsoever. These laws are used as yokes for animals to plough land. Every aspect of lives of Muslims is under tight control. Putting all available methods of restrictions to make lives of Muslims miserable is widely practiced. As a result, migration of Muslims from Arakan to nearby country is unabated. Muslims from Arakan are not leaving the land for they are aliens but because of the brutality and victimization unleashed upon them by Myanmar military rulers.

Apart from individual punishments like loot, plunder and extortion, occasional collective punishments are handed down punitively. The recent order of eviction of about 140 Muslim houses of Bakkagona and Etalia village-tracts near Maungdaw is a glaring example. Because of the presence of some miscreants in these villages, the brunt of the crimes committed by them is to be taken by the villagers themselves. The duty to arrest and give punishments to these muggers’ falls on the police and Nasaka security agents, the blame is put on the villagers who are also victims. Last year, the same collective punishment was given to the Muslim villagers of Aamtollia (a village of about 100 houses), just north of Maungdaw. The inhabitants of the uprooted village are never traced back and are rendered as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and some may have ended up as unregistered refugees in Bangladesh. Destruction of Muslim settlements and construction of new Buddhist settlements have become a phenomenon in northern Arakan. Muslim religious edifices like Mosques and Madrasas are left in dilapidated condition whereas new Buddhist monasteries, pagodas and statues are built in abundance under the patronage of Nasaka and local general administration. If the Muslims of the villages to be evicted soon in Bakkagona and Etalia are rendered homeless, soon they will also fall into oblivion. Still they are counting their days and are seeking for mercy from forceful eviction.

Rohingya Muslims especially elite and affordable are always haunted and crippled so that no Muslims can raise any voice against the tyranny. Any Muslim individual or group who engage in any kind of social activity is also seen as an act against the government. Some Muslims consisting of civil society of Maungdaw, who were engaged in some socio-religious welfare activities under the government authorized community welfare oriented Myanmar Muslim Organization were arrested while they were having a meeting in the office. They were doing their job under legal authorization but the office was raided by security on the fabricated ground that some kind of anti-state activities were being held. Without any reason and proof these Muslims were arrested under fictitious charges and handed down long jail terms.

These Muslim elders had not committed any crime and they did not conspire against the state but all blames were put on them deliberately to annihilate them from doing anything good to the community socially, politically or economically. The jailed Muslims like Mir Ahmed (Three diamond jewelry house), Shamsul Anwar (A government school teacher, Maungdaw), Mohammad Yaqoob (Resident of ward-4, Maungdaw), Iqbal, Moulvi Younus, Moulvi Saleh and Dil Mohammad are now languishing in different Myanmar
jails without crime because they are Muslims and engaged in social welfare works. All were given long 8 years in jail and were sent to faraway prisons. No family member is allowed to travel and see the prisoners as travel ban is imposed on Muslim community. First, Mir Ahmed was released on bail from Maungdaw township court but later as he appealed for total released but he was again sent to jail to serve the previous jail term of 8 years. They are all guiltless and never engaged in any kind of anti-state activities.

The chairman of the Muslim Organization, U Than Htun (Mohammad Salim) is purely an ardent social community worker and also was keeping very good relations with the local administration and Nasaka. But the overall conspiracy being hatched against Rohingya community of Arakan by the Military regime abetted by Rakhine Bhuddist zealots could not stop from taking such actions which is very much contrary with justice. Muslim community has tried to appeal higher court in Sittwe (Akyab) and eventually in Yangon (Rangoon) but turned down in discriminative way only to satisfy the whims of the military and racist Rakhines. This is most justifying to demand that these innocent Rohingya Muslim social workers are immediately and unconditionally released and injustice is to be shunned ironically, they were not considered under the recent government amnesty where more than 7000 prisoners were set free.

It is least possible for Rohingya Muslims of Arakan to find any remedial ways against all crimes committed. As Muslims are sidelined from mainstream Burmese society, there is no way out for them as anti-Muslim quarters are most united and bent on committing all crimes. These vulnerable Muslims have no other ways but only to seek International intervention and change the status quo in Arakan. For this reason, Rohingyas of Arakan are eagerly looking forward for a change in administration and emerge a democratically elected government. In this context, Rohingyas wholeheartedly welcome the initiatives taken by the Obama administration of USA for direct engagement with the Military Junta to find out a political solution in Burma. Rohingyas hope this will be a comprehensive solution which will include a solution for the Rohingya community.

THE NATALA SETTLEMENT PROGRAM AND ROHINGYAS IN NORTHERN ARAKAN
By Md. Alam

Northern Arakan (Rakhine) state, Burma is comprised of Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung districts. Out of these three townships, Maungdaw Township is the most densely populated and bordered by Bangladesh. The land area is 570 square miles and population is estimated to be 600,000 and about 80% of the population is Muslims (Rohingyas). The density of population in this town is the highest among the 17 townships of Arakan state and one of the highest populated areas of Burma. Agricultural products do not meet the demand of the population of Maungdaw. This area is hardly suitable for any new settlements as it is already over populated. But the military regime in Burma is continuously bringing Buddhists from other sparsely populated areas for a check and balance of Muslim population. These newly arrivals are called Natala and they are brought under the settlement scheme of the military junta. Now there are about 40 such villages in Maungdaw alone and some more are in Buthidaung. The new population growth created by the military has put a heavy burden on Muslim population. What Muslims belonged yesterday is
belonged by the Natala today. Muslims have to surrender land to the newly arrivals under confiscation plan of the military. By the way thousands of acres of paddy land are to be given away by the Rohingya Muslims which are the only means of survival. In this connection, southern side of Maungdaw namely the village-tracts of Kadirbill, Nurullapara, Bakhguna, Shairapara, Godusara, Hatchurata and other areas are hardest hit.

Now, the Natala villagers have launched a reign of terror in the Muslim villages of loot and plunder. Moreover they are widely engaged in immoral activities leading to the moral degradation of Muslim youths. Being Buddhists, Natala women are engaged in sex business by opening brothels that puts very bad effect on the entire region. Along the Maungdaw- Hatchurata (Alaythangyaw) 12 miles road, Natala opens dens near the Bazaars where alcoholic liquors and drugs are sold and side by side sex business is conducted. Even Rakhines from Maungdaw, Nasaka and police from nearby areas throng to the dens during the night and engage in illegal business activities. At times there are quarrels and other untoward events take place. One of the incidents that happened a few days ago was that 2 Natala men were killed by unknown persons in the area of Nurullapara. Being populated by Muslims, they are directly blamed even though Muslims shun such immoral activities and keep away from those places. The killing must have happened involving Rakhine Buddhists or service personals but Muslims are surely to be blamed as did before only punish to them.

On 27.9.2009, a meeting was held in the office of Maungdaw District Peace and Development Council (DPDC) where both Rohingya Muslims and Rakhines were invited. The chairman of DPDC expressed the hope that peace and tranquility would prevail in the aftermath of the incident and government would try to find out those who were involved in it. But a local Rakhine leader namely U Mra Aung stood in the meeting and asked the authorities to punish Muslims for the incident. He pointed out that as Buddhists are minority, they live in fear and frustration and they need protection from the onslaught of Rohingya Muslim community. This kind of argument is totally unfounded and is an attempt to black list Rohingya Arakanese and put pressure on them to leave the land. He urged the officials for exemplary punishment such as eviction of the villages nearby or drives them out so that Arakanese Rohingya Muslims are to be rendered homeless. For this reason, Muslims are waiting for any backlash that will befall on them.

OVER 51 ARAKANESE ROHINGYA ARRESTED ON BANGLADESH-BURMA BORDER

Tuesday, 20 October 2009

Bandarban, Bangladesh: More than 51 Arakanese Rohingya people were arrested by Bangladeshi Police within the last two days from different areas of Badarban district, according to a source from Bandarban, who declined to be named.

Among those arrested some were unregistered refugees of Kutupalong camp, which is situated near the UNHCR official refugee camp. Some others, who had been taking shelter in the border areas of Bandarban, Alikadam, Naiykonchuri of Chittagong Hill Tracts, were also arrested.

The Bangladeshi police arrested 44 Arakanese Rohingyas from different areas of Bandarban district. Meanwhile, seven others were arrested from the check-post of Gumdum, said a close friend of one of the arrestees. A week ago, the refugees had gone to Bandarban district from the unregistered refugee camp to cut bamboo for their survival, said Kamal from the refugee camp.

Some of the refugees have been identified as Noor Alam (18), son of Nurul Islam, Mo-
A local elder from the border area said that law enforcing agencies had launched a drive to round up Rohingyas, who had escaped from Arakan State and taken shelter in border areas.

A Rohingya person, who is living near the border said, “If we are restricted from movement in Bangladesh, we will face great difficulties to support our family members.”

According to sources from Gumdum, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sent a letter to the Nasaka to hold a flag meeting on October 21, to discuss the border situation.

**NASAKA ARRESTS OLD MAN ON FALSE ALLEGATIONS OF MARRIAGE**

Friday, 09 October 2009

Maungdaw, Arakan State: Burma’s border security force, Nasaka, arrested an old man and demanded money from him on October 7, by alleging that he had married a young girl without permission from the concerned authorities, a friend of the victim said.

The old man has been identified as Sayed Ahmed (68), son of Zani Alam and hails from west Habi village of Bakkagona village tract of Maungdaw Township. The victim was arrested at around 3:00 am, on that day, on allegations that he had married a young girl named Laila Khatun (35), daughter of Abdul Nabi, who hails from Ward No.5 of Maungdaw Town. He was arrested by the Nasaka personnel of Nasaka outpost of Kawliza Bagga village of Bakkagno village tract, under the Nasaka Headquarters of Kawarbill, Maungdaw Township.

The girl had been working in the arrestee’s house as a domestic helper for the last 5 years. The victim was old and his wife had died earlier. However, he has relatives and sons in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) so the authorities know that if the victim is pressurized by any means, money would come in, said a close relative of the victim.

The Nasaka has been using such tactics to get money from Arakanese Rohingya villagers by accusing them, threatening them with arrest and torture, so that they pay money. This method is very successful for the authorities to extort money from Arakanese Rohingyas. So, the concerned authorities frequently use this method against the Arakanese Rohingya people, said a local trader. Actually, the victim did not marry due to his old age and his health is also not good. But, he paid the money to the Nasaka for fear of torture and harassment. The Nasaka will not release the arrestee until they get more money, the trader added.

Later, however, on that day, the arrestee was released after paying Kyat 300,000 to the concerned authorities. There are many cases, in which the Nasaka personnel illegally accuse villagers or youths, who have married without getting permission. The accused are arrested and tortured severely by the autho-
Ities until they get the money from the arrestees. Otherwise, the accused are detained in the Nasaka camps and tortured regularly to extort money and the incident is informed to their relatives so that they can arrange money for the quick release of the victims, said a local elder requesting not to be named.

Regarding this, the arrestees do not get any justice from the concerned higher authorities, so they are compelled to pay money for their release and they have no other option, said a student from the locality.

The ruling military junta has increased human rights violations against the opposition and minority groups across the country, since China and Russia sided with Burma in the UN Security Council, which was held on January 12, 2007, said a schoolteacher on condition of anonymity.

NASAKA DIRECTOR SEIZES 50 ACRES OF LAND FOR SHRIMP PROJECT IN MAUNGDAW
Monday, 05 October 2009

Maungdaw Arakan State: The Nasaka Director of Northern Arakan seized 50 acres of arable land from villagers of Maungdaw Township recently, for his own shrimp project, said one of the land owners.

These lands are from Maung Nama Village of Maungdaw Township and were used for paddy cultivation by villagers earlier. The Nasaka Director seized the lands after he saw the profits being garnered from another nearby shrimp project, the land for which had been earlier seized by the Army Battalion No 233.

Three years ago, the Army Battalion No. 233 had seized about 36 acres of shrimp lands from the local villagers of Maung Nama Village of Maungdaw Township. The authorities again leased it to local villagers for one year on a huge amount of money and so the authorities get net earnings from the project, without any investment. After seizing lands from Rohingya villagers, they again lease it to them for shrimp projects. So it is easy money for the authorities, said a school teacher from the locality, on condition of anonymity.

Realizing this, the Nasaka Director seized 50 acres of land from villagers recently. He then leased it to local villagers by taking money, so the local villagers have been deprived of their crops and have lost their lands as well.

In this way, a lot of arable land is being converted into shrimp projects in Maungdaw Township. Seizing arable land for shrimp projects and ready made shrimp projects from Rohingya people, by the army, Nasaka, Sarapa (Military Intelligence), police, TOC (Tactical Operation Commander), Township PDC members, District PDC members and even clerks of the agriculture department of Maungdaw Township to get smooth earnings, has become a common practice, said a trader from Maungdaw Town.

Meanwhile, the original shrimp project owners are becoming poorer day by day, said a shrimp project owner from the locality.
Maungdaw, Arakan State: Three villagers were arrested by Burma’s border security force (Nasaka) in the second week of last month on the allegation that they renovated a village mosque in Maungdaw Township without permission, said a trader on condition of anonymity.

Renovation or new construction of religious buildings such as---mosque, Madrasa (religious schools) --- etc in northern Arakan are not allowed. Two years ago, the village mosque of Sitarpawrika (Kyaukpyindhu) was renovated by villagers without permission from authorities, the trader added.

Regarding this, two years ago, four villagers were arrested and sentenced to seven years in jail each. They were Molvi Habi Ullah (60), son of Molvi Abdu Shukur, Moni Ullah (45), son of Anu Meah, Issaque (80), and Abdul Hoque (65), son of Islam. They all belong to Shita Porika Village of Maungdaw Township, said a local villager who did not want to be named.

However, last month of the second week, again three villagers were arrested for renovation of the said mosque. They have been identified as Shoffique Ahmed (50), son of Shoffi Ullah, Khobir Ahmed (45), son of Boshir Ahmed and Nurul Islam (45), son of Salim Ullah. They all belong to Sitarpawrika (Kyaukpyindhu) village of Maungdaw Township, the local villager added.

The authorities had filed a case against 27 villagers for renovation of the mosque. Among them seven villagers were arrested and jailed for seven years each, and the rest 20 villagers have been absconding, said a religious leader from the locality. A schoolteacher on condition of anonymity said, “For mosque renovation, seven villagers were jailed and 20 others are absconding to avoid arrest. So, the authorities concerned destroyed the lives of 27 families at a time.”

However, the ruling military junta has declared and boasts that Burma is a country with religious freedom. Actually, there is no country like Burma in the world, in terms of religious persecution, said a businessman from the locality.

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