THE ETHNIC ROHINGYA MINORITY ARE TRAPPED BETWEEN SEVERE REPRESSSION IN BURMA AND ABUSE IN THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES. THE ETHNIC ROHINGYA MINORITY OF BURMA IS ONE OF THE MOST PERSECUTED GROUP IN THE WORLD.

REPORTS:

REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL
No Change in Burma and in Human Rights Situation of Rohingya

Through a fake general election held in November 10, 2010, a civilianized military dictatorship has now come to rule Burma amidst general disappointment. Opposing its legitimacy, the international community forecast more atrocious crimes and human rights violations are to continue in Burma. Evidently crimes against humanity of various kinds are perpetrated in the ethnic areas, especially creating a terrible situation in the Rohingya homeland of northern Arakan.

No changes have been sensed in the treatment of the Rohingya people by the authorities. The oppressive system of the Nasaka border security force and other repressive functionaries is still in place, with their acts of violence being committed in manifold with out let or hindrance. The Nasaka sector commanders are acting like uncrown kings. Even its ordinary soldiers have amassed monies and properties beyond mind's eye, mainly through planned extortion of the Rohingya people under false and imaginary charges. Crimes against humanity of rape, murder, looting and destruction are a regular phenomenon all over North Arakan. It is a mockery of the new regime to claim any improvement in the human rights situation in North Arakan, where the Nasaka, army, police and government servants are not answerable to the law and constitution for their acts against the Rohingyas. Some of the Nasaka forces openly say, “We do not treat you as cruel as we are instructed to do. We are ordered to create hellish atmosphere to starve you, to humiliate you and drive you out of the country.” The psychology of inducing terror is the other parts of the Nasaka plan against the Rohingya in order to force them flee their homeland.

Nasaka is largely believed as a gang of monsters specially created to ethnically cleanse the Rohingyas from Arakan. They interfere with anything even with the judiciary. Cases can not be decided without reference to the Chief of the Nasaka violating the norms of the judiciary.

Nowadays the officials of the judiciary department express their displeasure particularly over the Nasaka’s undue interference in the judicial proceedings.
In this connection, mention may be made of the concocted case farmed against the Rohingya villagers of Kamonseik in Maundaw Township where, for the purpose of extortion, the Nasaka blatantly accused the innocent villagers of having link with insurgents/Taliban. After massive extortion, the Nasaka Director confessed that such allegation was unsubstantiated. Thus the actions of Nasaka become a daily teashop gossip in North Arakan, among the public servants as well as common people, as tales of woe upon woe. Many believe that there would be no breathing space for them until the Nasaka apparatus is dismantled. Naturally the people want the independence of judiciary and improvement in their human right situation.

It was Gen. Ne Win who first introduced dictatorship since 1962 military take over in Burma. He suspended the Constitution, Habeas Corpus and similar writs. Contrary to the four essential qualities of judges that the Socrates described – “to hear courteously to answer wisely, to consider soberly, and to decide impartially” – the judges in Burma have to decide according to the order of authorities.

Burma is notorious for its obscure and unjust laws and for the arbitrary manner in which they are applied. In its attempts to lend itself legitimacy and to keep the democratic opposition under control, the junta makes use of a multitude of laws, orders and decrees, many of which are new and of which the legality is dubious, often being in conflict with both international and national law. Laws used most often to deal with political opponents and other critics include the Emergency Provisions Act, the State protection Law, the Unlawful Associations Act and the public Order Act.

Following the wave of arrests of May 1996, the junta also passed a law that makes drafting a new constitution illegal to anyone but the National convention. The aim is to disallow NLD to draft a constitution though NLD has 382 law makers. This law makes voicing one’s political opinion in public punishable by 20 years in prison. It is illegal to criticize the military. Detainees are denied to fair trial. There is no independent judiciary and a complete lack of government accountability.

Thus Aung San Suu Kyi said that no “meaningful change” has taken place since Burma’s elections in 20 years. The army hierarchy retains a firm grip on power. "Until political prisoners have been released, and until we are all allowed to take part in the political process in the country, I do not think we can call it real change," Suu Kyi told DW-TV. She also said that by giving Burma the chair of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2014, would not help democracy in Burma in any way. ##

Burma and China plan to build a railroad together that will link China’s landlocked Yunnan Province to a deep-sea port being built in Burma’s Arakan state. The state-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported on Thursday that the project will start with a 126-km rail link between Muse, on the Sino-Burmese border, and Lashio in Burma’s northeastern Shan State.

That first phase is expected to be built in three years. The completed railroad will extend to a port that China is building in Burma’s Kyaukphyu town in northwestern Arakan. The China National Petroleum Corporation already is building a 770-km pipeline from Arakan to Yunnan. The newspaper said the memorandum of understanding was signed on Wednesday in the capital Naypyidaw. Published on Friday, Apr. 29, 2011, Irrawaddy on Line ##

Burma and Bangladesh have agreed to improve bilateral relations and mutual cooperation, including military collaboration, said a report by the Narinjara news agency. Burma’s Air Force Chief Lt-Gen Myat Hein met with Bangladeshi President Zillur Rahman on May 5 while in the country for a six-day visit. Narinjara said it was the first time a high-ranking Burmese official has visited Bangladesh since a maritime dispute broke out in 2008. Myat Hein said he would like Burmese forces to undergo training in Bangladesh in the future.

Also Talks are going on with neighbouring Myanmar to import gas for meeting the growing demand, Bangladesh PM’s adviser Dr. Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury said on May 5. He also indicated that the much talked about proposal of tri-nation - Myanmar - Bangladesh -India - gas pipeline project might be revived. ##
Introduction
The Rohingya ethnic minority of Burma are trapped between severe repression in their homeland and abuse in neighboring countries. Bangladesh has hosted hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas fleeing persecution for more than three decades, but at least 200,000 Rohingya refugees have no legal rights there. They live in squalor, receive very limited aid and are subject to arrest, extortion and detention. Unregistered refugee women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual and physical attacks. The international community must urge the Bangladeshi government to register undocumented refugees and improve protection for all vulnerable Rohingyas. Donor governments must also work to restart and increase resettlement of refugees to a third country and increase assistance for communities hosting refugees.

Background
The Rohingya ethnic minority of Burma is one of the most persecuted groups in the world. Stripped of their citizenship by the Burmese government in 1982 and forced to flee through violent military campaigns and sustained persecution, over one million Rohingyas now live in exile in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Inside Burma, approximately 800,000 Rohingyas live in three townships in Northern Rakhine State, a densely populated region and the poorest part of an already impoverished country. Rohingya children are three times more likely to die before their fifth birthday than other children in Burma and malnutrition rates frequently exceed emergency levels. The World Food Program reported that the food security in the region has worsened over the past two years, with two-thirds of the population hungry. 

Violent Burmese military campaigns have been waged against the Rohingya leading to mass influxes into eastern Bangladesh in 1978 and 1991-1992, the vast majority of whom were forcibly repatriated. Today, only 28,000 are recognized as refugees.

For Rohingyas, the lists also include a tally of livestock, and are checked by the NaSaKa on a regular basis. If a resident is not present during a family list check, their name is struck off and the resident is not allowed to return unless an exorbitant tax is paid. Rohingyas in Bangladesh told Refugees International (RI) that even if they could survive in their homeland, they could not sleep at night due to the deep-seated fear of arrest and abuse by the NaSaKa.

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as refugees with the Government of Bangladesh and live in Kutupalong and Nayapara camps. Registered refugees receive basic health services, primary education and food rations but about 5,000 of the camp residents were not properly registered and are barred from receiving food rations. At least 200,000 Rohingyas, which include new arrivals and those who had returned after being repatriated, live in unofficial refugee settlements and local villages, mainly in Cox's Bazar district. The Government only allows the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and NGOs to work with refugees living in the official camps and even lifesaving activities targeting unregistered refugees are not authorized.

Develop a Refugee Policy Based on Tolerance

The central government has conducted a review of its policy on Rohingya refugees in the past year, but the cabinet has repeatedly delayed its finalization. Pending this finalization, the Government of Bangladesh has increased restrictions on aid agencies and centralized all decision-making pertaining to both the registered and unregistered refugees at the Dhaka-level, significantly delaying aid operations. Despite reports of global acute malnutrition rates of 30% in Kutupalong makeshift camp, which is double the emergency threshold, the Government has denied permits for aid agencies to assist unregistered refugees and host communities. Shelters are falling apart and are unlikely to resist the upcoming monsoons. In the official camps, government officials abruptly halted refugee resettlement and have closed all income-generating activities including small shops and tailoring, stating that skills were provided to only help refugees upon their return to Burma.

Enhancing the protection and self-sufficiency of all refugees would improve Bangladesh’s internal security and rule of law, in addition to its record on refugee rights. Keeping hundreds of thousands of people undocumented limits adequate government oversight of activities on its territory and creates an environment permissive to criminality, including trafficking, corruption and exploitation.

Furthermore, a new comprehensive aid package for Cox’s Bazar, would help the district meet the Millennium Development Goals, which is unlikely to occur on its current track. Providing refugees with the right to work would reduce tensions over job competition, stabilize local wages and ensure that Bangladesh workers are not put at a disadvantage.

Register the Unprotected

The Government of Bangladesh should work closely with UNHCR to establish a system to register vulnerable and undocumented refugees in order to provide urgent humanitarian aid protection against arrest and deportation and ensure access to justice. There are an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 unregistered Rohingyas living in Bangladesh. While some Rohingyas have been able to gain legal status or integrate into local communities, which share the same language, customs and religion, a significant number have no documentation and are subject to arrest, detention and a litany of abuses, including rape, starvation and indefinite detention and no recourse to justice when they suffer physical or sexual assaults.

Refugees are often arrested while collecting firewood in the nearby national forest or while working. If they are unable to pay a bribe or obtain a guarantee from a Bangladesh national for their immediate release, refugees are often charged with illegal entry and sent to jail. Refugees told RI that a bribe between $110 to $400 is required for release, forcing...
many families into heavy debt. One man interviewed by RI for his family to pay a $300 bribe. Over 300 Rohingyas are estimated to be in severely overcrowded conditions in Cox’s Bazar jail, which houses about 3,000 prisoners in a space meant for 800. Fifty-eight Rohingyas in jail have completed their sentence, some more than a decade ago, but they have no family or relatives to pay a bribe and the Burmese authorities refuse to allow them back in Burma, leaving them in indefinite detention.

The 2008 national elections have exacerbated the vulnerability of unregistered Rohingyas. During the voter registration drive, thousands of undocumented Rohingyas were evicted from the villages where they had been living, often for more than a decade. They were driven to the precarious hill-sides surrounding the Kutupalong official camp where they set up crude shelters and have since been struggling to survive. In 2009 and 2010, the government launched brutal crackdowns on Rohingyas in Bandarban and Cox’s Bazar districts and the population of the Kutupalong makeshift camp peaked from 4,000 in 2008 to over 34,000 refugees in early 2010 - outnumbering those in the official camp. UNCHR was denied access and no aid agencies were officially permitted to provide assistance. Refugees feared leaving the camps to find jobs or food due to the intense campaign of arrests and violence, resulting in alarming malnutrition rates. The upcoming roll-out of national ID cards may exacerbate the exclusion of unregistered refugees by further depriving them of access to jobs and services, making the registration of all refugees even more urgent. Since the voter registration drive, unregistered Rohingya children can no longer attend government schools due to requirements to show documentation of both parents and children. Contrary to its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Bangladesh does not register Rohingya children born on its territory unless both parents can prove Bangladeshi nationality. This perpetuates Rohingyas’ statelessness and lack of identity. Aid agencies also report increasing pressure from local authorities to ensure that aid beneficiaries present identification to access nutrition programs and micro-credit schemes. Job opportunities could also become restricted to ID card holders.

Increase Security for Women and Girls in the Camps

Without any legal rights for unregistered refugee women, a climate of fear and impunity pervades the unofficial settlements reinforced by the lack of accountability and oversight. Since last year’s crackdown, reports of sexual violence against unregistered refugees have increased, yet services remain at a bare minimum.

The registration of refugees should guarantee access to justice and humanitarian assistance, so that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) can be adequately prevented and addressed. Despite existing obstacles to addressing SGBV in Bangladesh, UNHCR has been able to make progress with registered refugees by raising awareness, increasing women’s leadership roles and supporting legal cases. Nonetheless, UNHCR staff say their efforts are “only the tip of the iceberg” given the scale of abuses. For unregistered refugees, these crimes remain invisible yet the deep mental and social trauma on survivors and their communities remain untreated. Sexual violence, early and forced marriages and domestic violence are endemic in both the host and refugee communities, but the stressful living conditions and the lack of access to the police or justice system and stressful living conditions Cont. P. 7
From P. 6 for refugee women increase the risk of abuses. There are a high number of widows and women-headed households among Rohingya communities – estimated as high as 44% in Kutupalong makeshift camp – due to frequent arrests and work migration of male family members. Without a breadwinner, many women are forced to engage in begging and sex work and children are sometimes trafficked for domestic work in order to survive. Women are often reluctant to report sexual violence and need permission from their husband and local leaders to seek healthcare in the conservative, male dominated society, which also severely limits the ability to provide much-needed support and raise awareness.

Donor governments and UNHCR should work with local authorities to increase refugee participation in the security patrols, organize protection for women collecting firewood and water and improve the safety of latrine areas to prevent sexual violence against women. Residents from Kutupalong and Leda unofficial sites told RI that there is no security and women are frequently attacked and raped when they go to latrines or to the forest to collect firewood. Kutupalong makeshift camp has no formal security arrangement. Leda site is patrolled by local Bangladeshi volunteers and border forces organized by an NGO, but they do little to protect refugees against a network of powerful locals. One refugee woman said, “We never feel safe. The villagers come in whenever they want and they do whatever they want.” RI was told that refugees are routinely charged by locals at the gate for leaving the camp and are often robbed when they return.

Government restrictions on aid projects targeting unregistered refugees and host communities should be immediately lifted to reduce local resentment of refugees. In 2008, RI noted tensions between the impoverished local communities and the refugees in Leda over scarce water and fuel resources and now the situation is spiraling downward. During RI’s March visit, no water was available for one week because of threats by a powerful local against those responsible for trucking it in. Primarily women and children were forced to collect water from wells in nearby villages but faced regular attacks, including rape, from locals. Three women interviewed by RI were attacked by a village with a stick that morning and their families had to go without water. One woman said, “Anywhere is better for us. Even the fire, the sea or desert. It’s better even to kill us,” a sentiment echoed by other refugees.

To mitigate SGBV against registered refugee women, UNHCR should urge the Government to switch to individual ration cards, as the current system disadvantages women. The current family-based ration cards are usually in the name and control of the male head of household, making it difficult for women to separate from abusive husbands without losing their ration. Furthermore, UNHCR should urgently address its frequent fuel pipeline breaks, which place refugees, particularly women and girls, in danger of arrests, rapes and attacks as they are forced to collect firewood outside the camp. Expansion of sustainable sources, like biogas, and improved budget planning by UNHCR would help avoid the cuts to fuel rations.

Increase Aid for Communities Hosting Refugees

Communities hosting refugees are long overdue for increased development aid. Cox’s Bazar, bordering Burma and hosting the bulk of refugees, is one of the poorest districts in Bangladesh and is in economic decline, at an annual rate of 3%.

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With restrictions to livelihood activities and frequent sharing of rations with unregistered refugees in the makeshift camp, traditional coping mechanisms have already been degraded.

In February, 2011 the Government of Bangladesh refused to accept large-scale resettlement of 28,000 registered refugees from the official camps and this should move forward. First and foremost, the Government must lift its hold on resettlement processing imposed in October 2010 in order for resettlement countries to seriously consider the request. The U.S. government launched a successful resettlement program for more than 90,000 Burmese refugees from Thailand and Malaysia, but less than 100 Rohingyas have been resettled from Bangladesh. The U.S. government should work with other resettlement countries – such as Canada, the UK, Australia, Sweden and Norway – to accept more Rohingya refugees, while finding durable solutions with Bangladesh for those who do not want or are unable to resettle.

In addition, the Government of Bangladesh and UNHCR should expand secondary education programs, as previously agreed, to provide opportunities and hope for the large number of children in the camp. UNICEF only focuses on primary education programs, as previously agreed, to provide opportunities and hope for the large number of children in the camp. UNHCR should be funded to bring in a new partner, strengthen the education program and expand secondary education opportunities.

Policy Recommendations

- Key donor governments, particularly Australia, Canada, the U.S. and the UK, should work with the Bangladeshi government and UNHCR to register undocumented Rohingya refugees in order to strengthen protection and humanitarian assistance and reduce sexual and gender-based violence.
- Key donor governments should develop a large-scale, needs-based assistance program to assist impoverished local communities hosting Rohingya refugees.
- The U.S. government, together with other recipient countries should initiate large-scale resettlement programs for registered Rohingya refugees.
- Donor governments should rapidly mobilize $2 million to meet the World Food Program’s funding gap to ensure the provision of full food rations in the official refugee camps this year.
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Lynn Yoshikawa and Melanie Teff assessed the plight of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh in March 2011. Source

REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL

Daw Suu Kyi Receives Award from Feminist Majority Foundation

Burmese opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi delivered a video address to an awards ceremony hosted by the US-based Feminist Majority Foundation at the Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles on April 26, 2011.

Daw Suu Kyi was one of four winners of the group’s Global Women’s Rights Award, which honors those who work tirelessly for the rights of women. The other recipients were Haitian feminist Yolette Jeanty, American journalist Renee Montagne, who has reported extensively on the situation of women in Afghanistan, and Sunita Viswanath, the founder of Women for Afghan Women. Published on Friday, Apr 29, 2011, Irrawaddy on Line. ##

From P. 7 The socio-economic indicators of local residents are well below the national averages and only marginally better than refugees. These factors led five UN agencies to develop the Joint initiative for Cox’s Bazar, a two-year, $33 million development plan to strengthen education, health, livelihood and governance programs, but it failed to gain the Government’s approval. Government officials said that the improving conditions in Bangladesh would create pull factors for Rohingyas in Burma and instead, the program should be implemented in other poor districts.

While the rejection of the Joint Initiative is deeply disappointing for both aid agencies and local Bangladeshi donors, governments should continue to leverage their aid efforts and increase aid to Cox’s Bazar. They should urge the Government of Bangladesh to ensure national programs operate on a non-discriminatory basis and allow joint projects for both unregistered refugees and host communities. Such joint programs were promoted in the past year on a small-scale and have reduced tensions with locals. If expanded, these initiatives could help Cox’s Bazar indicators catch up with the rest of the country to meet the Millennium Development Goals. One villager said, “We are poor and they are poor. It’s better if NGOs help us all.” Such a program would also recognize the generosity of impoverished host communities over the past three decades.

Improve Conditions in the Official Refugee Camps

In order to better support Rohingyas in the two official refugee camps, donor governments should increase funding for food and expand resettlement and education programs. First, donor governments must immediately mobilize $2 million for the World Food Program (WFP) to avoid a humanitarian crisis. The U.S. and Canadian governments have already contributed cash and in-kind aid but without additional funds, the food pipeline could break in May. The funding gap has forced WFP to cut rations, which no longer meet the daily nutritional needs. The current global acute malnutrition rate of 14.6% in the official camps is almost at the emergency threshold - just months before the beginning of situation is serious.
In the March 2011 issue of ARAKAN, we have given accounts of the Muslim Prime ministers, Defence ministers and ministers of Arakan in 16th – 17th centuries. They were not only the ministers; some of them were Prime ministers, army commanders, judges and some were saints and religious priests. They had vast influence in the country and court of the kings of Arakan. The Arakanese king reposed great confidence in them. The ministers and high officers were learned men, who patronised learning and Muslim poets and writers. The poets wrote in Bengali, a good number of their poems have been discovered. Their writings prove that those who assembled in the court of the kings of Arakan were all Bengali speaking people, or in other words many of them entered into Arakan from the neighbouring country of Bengal. Chittagong is adjacent to Arakan, and for some time Chittagong was under the Arakanese kings. So it may be presumed that most of the Bengali speaking people of Arakan went there from Chittagong. They could not forget their own language and that is why Bengali language and literature prospered in Arakan. This is the secret of the culture of Bengali language and literature in Arakan, where the Arakanese had their own language, but their language and literature did not develop. In this chapter we propose to give an account of the poets and their writings: the poets were not only Bengalees, but so far as known, they were mostly from Chittagong.

Abdul Karim Sahitya-Vishared should be given credit for collecting hundreds of pathis from different part of Chittagong. He also collected Bengali manuscripts written by Bengali poets living in Arakan. He and Dr. Muhammad Enamul Huq together wrote a book entitled Arakan Rajsabhaya Bangala Sahitya giving accounts of their books and the subject matter discussed in those books. They thought that the poets adorned the court of the Arakanese kings, and so their book was entitled Bengali literature in Arakanese court. But actually it was not so, some of poets were in the service of the government, but they were patronised by the Muslim ministers and the poets adorned the court of the minister. There were also some poets, who live in Arakan, but was neither in the government service nor did they receive patronage from the ministers.


POET DAULAT QAZI OR QAZI DAULAT

The earliest known Muslim poet in Arakan was Poet Daulat Qazi or Qazi Daulat. He was probably holding the post of Qazi, or a judge but he wrote his book by order of Lashkar Wazir Ashraf Khan. The poet also refers to the name of the reigning king of Arakan Thiri Thudamma. His book was entitled Satimaina Lor Chandrani. The poet says as follows about how he was influenced to write the book:1

“Sriyut Ashraf Khan was a great minister, he was like a full moon…….sitting in the assembly, he expressed his willingness to hear tales. There were many stories in Arabic and Persian, Gujarati, Gohari and Teth (Gohari and Teth were local languages used in Gohar area bordering West Bengal). He was willing to hear the story of Lorak and Mai-nar Bharati (Satimaina Lor Chandrani)…….The poet Sadhan told the story in Teth Go- hari, but these languages are not understood by many people. So wanted that the book should be composed in Panchali, Qazi Daulat felt the intention of the minister and composed Mainar Bharati in Bengali.” (Translation of the Text)

Satimaina was a ballad composed and sung by local bards in Bhojpur area bordering ancient and medieval Bengal. There were such other ballads, which were very popular and entered into East Bengal including Chittagong, and crossed over to Arakan. Two famous compositions were Mulla Daud’s Chandain and Sadhan’s Mainasat. When these ballads were sung in the court of Lashkar Wazir Ashraf Khan, he took interest in the poem and asked Qazi Daulat to write the book in Bengali. So Qazi Daulat’s work was a translation but it was a free translation and thus the poetic talent of the poet was maintained.

The story in brief was as follows: Lor, the king of Gohari married a beautiful princess name Maina or Mainabati. They were living a happy life, when once a yogi showed Lor a picture of another very beautiful lady Chandrani, the princess of Mohari. Chandrani was also married, but her husband was a short fellow and an impotent person, Lor went to Mohari, and began meeting Chandrani in private, but when their illicit connection was known, Chandrani’s husband fought against Lor. but was killed. Lor then married Chandrani. In the meantime, in his own kingdom at Gohari, his first wife Maina was living in anguish and sorrow due to his separation, and another person named Saton tried to win over Maina, thereafter all lived in happiness.

Qazi Daulat could not complete his work Saimaina Lor Chandrani; before completion he died and later Alaol completed the work at the request of another Muslim minister Srimanta Sulaiman about 1659 A.D. i.e. about 20 years after the death of Qazi Daulat.

2. Ibid., pp. 13-14.

POET SHAH ALAOL

The poet Shah Alaol was the most prominent of all the poets of Roshang, in fact he was one of the
From P. 9 greatest Bengali poets of the 17th century, some scholars say that he was Rabinranath Thakur of the 17th century.

From his own testimony, it is known that he was the son of a minister of Majlis Qutb of Fathabad in Bengal. He along with his father was going by boat, on the way they were met by Firingi pirates. Both the parties fought for some time, the father died a martyr, but the son, i.e. Alaol was made a captive and was taken to Roshang. Probably he was sold to the king of Arakan. First he was appointed a horseman in the army. While he was passing his days like this, he chanced to come across the Muslim ministers and high officials of the kingdom. Alaol was a learned man, he knew various languages, Bengali, Arabic, Persian, Hindi and Sanskrit and he was acquainted with famous literary works of those languages. He was also well-versed in vocal and instrumental music. When the ministers and other high officers came to know of his various qualities, they appointed him to teach their children and in this way he became well known to the learned and court circle. He was invited to attend the assemblies in the houses of ministers including the Prime Ministers. Magan Thakur, a leading Muslim of Roshang, who was minister and later Prime Minister under several kings took interest in him and patronised him in various ways. After Magan’s death, other ministers and Prime Ministers also patronised him. In this way, Shah Alaol was in the limelight of Arakan social and literary circle for thirty years as a leading figure in the kingdom of Arakan.

With the patronage received from the ministers, Alaol wrote six books (1) Padmavati (2) Saiful Badiuja- mal (3) Haft Paikar (or Sapta Paikar) (4) Thufa (5) Sikandarnama and (6) Last part of Satimaina Lor Chandrani. It may be mentioned that all these were poetical Bengali translations of books of the same name in other languages and written by great and renowned poets. But the translation was not literal but free, and Alaol maintained his poetical talents in all these books throughout. At times he became free from the text and his knowledge in various subjects have been very appropriately exposed. Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah writes in his praise as follows:3 “Alaol’s name stands very high among Bengali poets in the medieval period. He was a good scholar in Sanskrit, Bengali, Arabic, Persian and Hindi languages. In fact it may be said in great confidence that there was no poet in those days who was equal to this Muslim poet.” (Translation of the Text)

Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen also praises him in the following words: 4 “In the Padmavati, there is mark of profound scholarship of Alaol. The poet examined the nature of ‘magan’ ‘ragan’ etc. eight ‘mahaghanas’. He discussed in details the quarrels and separation of ten conditions of eight heroines like Khandita, Bashakshajja and Kalhan- tarita; he discussed the truths about Ayurvedic medical science; he discussed the good and evil of timing of journeys like ‘Lagnacharya’ of astronomical science; he explained ‘Yoginitranta’; he explained the abstruse rites followed in the Hindu marriages like an old Hindu married woman (whose husband is alive); he has supplied a correct list of praises and hymns uttered by Purohits. Besides he inserted Sanskrit and verses at the head of chapters like the Pandits of tools (Sanskrit and vernacular schools).” (Translation of the Text)

Abdul Karim Sahitya Visharad discovered his manuscripts, brought the poet and his books from oblivion into the limelight of history by writing more than fifty articles in various Bengali journals. Before him some of Alaol’s books were published from Battala in Calcutta but these were not scientifically edited and so are not dependable for scholarly discussion. Abdul Karim Sahitya Visharad also edited the famous Padmavati of Alaol and Alaol was his most favorite poet. So his evaluation of Alaol is worth quoting: 5 “The great poet Alaol was genius in the Muslim society of Bengal. Apart from Daulat Qazi, the author of Satimaina, no second man like him in scholarship was born in this society.

3. Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah: Bangla Sahityer Katha, 2nd part, Dhaka 1371 B.S., p. 133.

HISTORY

PADMAVATI

The first book written by Shah Alaol was the Padmavati. It was originally written by Malik Muhammad Jaisi in Hindi, he started writing the book in 923 A.H./ 1520 A.D and he completed it in 1540 A.D in the reign of Sher Shah. Jaisi probably died in 1542 A.D. i.e. two years after completing the book. The story centred round Raja Ratna Sen of Chitore, the famous beautiful lady Padmini, the princess of Ceylon and King Alauddin Khalji of Delhi. Raja Ratna Sen was leading a happy life with his queen Nagmati, but one day he heard about the beauty of Padmini. The king went to Ceylon with his retinue in the guise of a Yogi, on the way he underwent inhuman sufferings, but at the end he was able to marry Padmini and lived there happily.

Nagmati, on the other hand, was passing her days in grief at Chitore in the absence of the king Ratna Sen. Ratna Sen later came back to his capital and lived with the two queens, Nagmati and Padmini. Ratna Sen once turned out one of his courtiers Raghav Cheetan from his Court, the later went to Dehli, met Sultan Alauddin Khalji, and related to him the story of the beauty of Padmini. The Sultan attacked Chitore to Padmmini, but in the meantime king Ratna Sen had died and the two queens, Nagmati and Padmini gave their life in the pyre of their husband, Alauddin came back without achieving anything. This is in short the story of Padmavati. We have said above that Shah Alaol composed the poem Padmavati by order of Prime Minister Magan Thakur of Arakan in 1651 A.D.

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SAIFUL MULK BADIOIJAMAL

After completing the composition of Padmavati, Prime Minister Magan Thakur ordered Alaol to write Saiful Mulk Badioijamal. Shah Alaol began writing this book, before completing it Magan Thakur died and so the composition of the book was left incomplete. After about a decade Sayyid Musa, another Prime Minister of Roshang requested Alaol to complete the book and the poet did so. This is a legendary tale in which there is love story of man and fairy. The story is found in the Arabic Nights, Alaol probably got the story from a Persian book. Saiful Mulk was the son of king Sifuan of Egypt and Badioijamal was the princess of Shapal, king of the fairy land Iran-Bostan. The prince along with his friend Sayyid, the son of Wazir, went to the fairyland and after great hardship met the lady of his love and ultimately married. His friend Sayyid also married the princess of Sarandeep. Alaol completed composing Saiful Mulk Badioijamal during 1669 – 70 A.D.

HAFT PAIKAR (OR SAPT PAIKAR)

This is the third book written by Shah Alaol. The book was originally written in Persian by the great Persian poet Nizami Ganjabi. There are seven stories, which have found place in this book. King Numan of Ajam had a son named Bahram, according to the advice of the astrologers, the king sent his son to live in Yemen. An artist named Samna built for the prince seven towers in the palace; each tower was of different type and colour. In his absence the king died and the Wazir occupied the throne. The prince however returned and defeating the Wazir got back his throne. Thereafter he conquered seven neighbouring kingdoms and married seven princesses of those kingdoms. He allowed each of the princesses to live in each of the seven towers he had built earlier. When Bahram went to live with the princesses in the tower, he asked each of them to tell a story to please him. In this way seven princesses related seven stories which pleased the king, the seven stories from the subject matter of the book Haft Paikar. The story began on Saturday and ended on Friday, the first story that of Saturday is the longest.

The stories are all interesting and pleasing. Needless to say, the stories were all educative and full of moral principles. The chief aim of the stories was to please the people. The book was written in 1660 A.D.

TUHFA (OR TUHAFAT-UN-NASAIH)

The book was originally written in Persian by Shaikh Yusuf Gada in 795 A.H. / 1392-93 A.D. It is a book on religious principles, and contains also advice and admonition that are helpful to lead a religious life of the Muslims. In those days books were not easily available, printing was not known, learners and teachers had to copy books for them. Shaikh Yusuf Gada had a son named Abul Fath. Shaikh Yusuf wrote this book to serve as a guide to his son. So the book is not properly a Fiqh. It contains religious principles on the basis of Fiqh and general moral principles that help regulating an honest and religious life. Alaol, in the preface, gives the subject matter of the book in the following words:

“(Yusuf Gada) had a son named Abul Fath, the book Thufa was written for him, whoever reads the book will be benefited. There are forty-five Bab (chapters) written on Shariat, Tariqat, Haqiqat, Tauhid, and Iman according to Islamic religion. In Arabic door is called Bab, and without door one cannot enter the house. The book Thufa is the house of Shariat, which has forty-five doors. The book deals with religious and worldly matters like eating, drinking, cohabiting, and washing, auspicious matters on houses, works by which to go to heaven or hell etc. It also deals with Namaz, Roza, Zakat, Faraz (obligatory), Nafal (optional), Wazu (ablution), Tayammum (purification by dust), and all kinds of bath. It also deals with questions to be asked in the grave, acts for removing the Sin, and moral principles. These are not told out of imagination, they are found in the Furqan (Quran) and traditions of the Prophet, in books on Fiqh like Hidayat, Kafiya etc. Yusuf Gada composed the book in Persian verse on the basis of Arabic books.” (Translation of the Text)

The life of Muslim from birth to grave is regulated by Shariat or Islamic law and the sources of Islamic law are the Quran, the Hadis and Sunnat of the Prophet, Irm and Quays. Muslims jurists have jurists have explained these sources from time to time for the benefit of the Muslims. Apart from obligatory baths etc. matters like passing urine and going to the privy, purification there of, greetings among Muslim brethren, going to one’s house and taking proper permission from the owners before entering, all these are guided by Shariat or Islamic law. The subjects have been discussed in forty-five Bab or chapters and these chapters are as follows: (1) Tawhid (oneness of Allah), (2) Iman (belief in Allah and his Prophet, Angels, divine Book, life in the next world, Taqdir, and day of Judgement), (3) Question-Answer in the grave, (4) Knowledge, (5) Injunctions of Shariat about Wazu, Ghusal, going to the privy and purification thereof, (6) Ibadat, performing namaz, (7) Payment of Zakat, (8) Fasting in the month of Ramazan, Shab-I-Qadr, (9) Musafir or wayfarers, and how to go, when to go, the auspicious days for travelling. In this chapter Hajj and Ziarat of Madina have also been discussed. (10) Recitation of the Quran and dowa, (11) Qasr, i.e. to offer Qa sr prayer, this is applied to Musafir, (12) Marriage, (13) Cohabitation of husband and wife, (14) Eating, (15) Drinking, (16) Wearing dresses, (17) Sleeping, (18) Trading, (19) Darveshi, (20) Good behaviour, (21) Debt, (22) How to sit in majlis or assembly, (23) Scandal mongering, (24) Namaz, (25) Gaza Namaz, (26) Patience, (27) Tauba or repentance, (28) Miserliness, (29) Doing good deeds, (30) Charity, (31) Order, ordering to do good and prohibiting from doing bad things, (32) Good voice, (33) Games, (34) Hunting, (35) What to do when first moon is sighted, (36) Old age, to remain engaged in prayers in old age (after forty years), (37) Morning, (38) Shahid, i.e. martyrdom, (39) Forty type of good works, (40) Acquisition of wealth, (41) Heaven, (42) Hell, (43) Sunnat, (words and deeds of the Prophet), (44) Murder, (45) Various prescriptions.

The subject matters discussed above give an idea of the book. It is not a literary work. It does not discuss love affairs, nor does the book deal with legendary tales. Such books were rarely written in Bengali in the medieval period, in fact, this is the first book of its type. Later, however, a few more such books dealing with religious subjects were written, such as Nasrullah
a son, while Abdul Karim had a daughter, but unfortunately Abdul Karim lost his wealth and became poor. Abdul Nabi forgot his promise and prepared to get his son married elsewhere. Later it so happened that their promise was fulfilled and Abdul Nabi’s son married Abdul Karim’s daughter.

QURAISHI MAGAN AND HIS BOOK CHANDRAVATI

Quraishi Magan’s forefather came from Arabia to Gaur and from there one member of the family moved towards the east, came to Chittagong and ultimately moved to Arakan. Quraishi Magan wrote a book entitled Chandravati. Dr. Enamul Huq discovered a manuscript of which pages both at the beginning and end were lost. So his antecedents and his identity can not be ascertained. Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad and Dr. Enamul Huq thought that the poet Quraishi Magan was the same person as Magan Thakur, the Prime Minister of Arakan and the patron of the poet Alaol. But nowadays scholars hold a different opinion. They say that Quraishi Magan was a different person, he had no connection with Magan Thakur, the Prime Minister Quraishi Magan probably wrote his book while he was living in Arakan.

ABDUL KARIM KHONDKAR

The poet Abdul Karim Khondkar was born in Arakan, and his forefathers were engaged in state services of Roshang. The poet writes about his genealogy as follows:

“Now hear how this Kitab (Dulla Majlis) became a Puthi (i.e. rendered in to Bengali verse). I will tell you something about it. In the town of Roshang, there is a beautiful and heavenly village named Bandar. In that place many Qazis, Mufits, teachers and students, Faqir and darvesh live.”

POET MARDAN NURUDDIN

Mordan wrote his book in Kanchi a place in Roshang. Abdul Karim Sahitya-Visharad discovered a manuscript of his book of which some pages both at the beginning and end were lost. In the available pages the title of the book is not found, in one place the word Nasira is found and so Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad and Dr. Enamul Huq write that the name of the book was Nasirnama, the book deals with Nasib or luck. So it is also believed that the name of the book was Nasibnama. The poet refers to the king Thiri Thudamma, who reigned from 1622 to 1638 A.D. So the book must have been written in between these two dates. Poet Mordan was therefore a contemporary of Qazi Daulat. In the colophon the poet’s name is Mordan Nuruddin and the name of his Pir was Sayyid Ibrahim.

The poet praises the town of Kanchi saying that in that town there were living the Muslims, the Brahmins and the Kayasthas. Among the Muslims there were Alims or learned men who were busy with the Kitab and Quran, i.e. they were busy in religious pursuits. The Brahmins were also learned Pandits and they were busy with their books or Kavyas. The Kayasthas were also there busy in their respective works. Kanchi was probably the name of a township within the kingdom of Roshang.

The subject matter of the book is fate, whatever is in fate will happen, God does not help the proud people and pride hastens their fall. The story is as follows: Abdul Nabi and Abdul Karim, two friends were engaged in business. The agreement was that if one had a son and another had a daughter they would get them married and vice versa. Abdul Nabi had

SIKANDARNAMA

Sikandarnama was originally written by Nizami Ganjavi in Persian that the book was very popular to the scholarly world. Alaol composed it in Bengali by order of Nabaraj Majlis, the Prime Minister of Sri Chandra Sudharma, the Arakanese king. The book was very difficult to comprehend, it is presumed that the great Persian poet Nizami used words of five languages, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Pahlavi (Old Persian) and Nasrani (Armenian).

Sikandarnama contains the heroic exploits of Sikandar or Alexander. He was the son of King Philip of Macedonia; after the father’s death Sikandar ascended the throne, his tutor or friend Aristotle was made his minister. Alexander became famous by conquering various countries; he even came to India, and defeated Porus of the Panjab. But his chief opponent was Darius of the Persia, by defeating him Alexander conquered the kingdom. He is said to be the same as Sikandar Zulqarnain of the Holy Quran. It is a big volume and among Alaol’s books Sikandarnama was next to Padmavati in terms of popularity. Fortunately a standard text of the book has now been published by the Bangla Academy under the editorship of Dr. Ahmad Sharif.

As stated above Alaol completed the writing of this book in 1672 A.D. This was probably the last book written by him. The famous Alexander port in Arakan. Quraishi Magan’s forefather moved towards the east, came to Chittagong and ultimately moved to Arakan. Quraishi Magan wrote a book entitled Chandravati. Dr. Enamul Huq discovered a manuscript of which pages both at the beginning and end were lost. So his antecedents and his identity can not be ascertained. Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad and Dr. Enamul Huq thought that the poet Quraishi Magan was the same person as Magan Thakur, the Prime Minister of Arakan and the patron of the poet Alaol. But nowadays scholars hold a different opinion. They say that Quraishi Magan was a different person, he had no connection with Magan Thakur, the Prime Minister Quraishi Magan probably wrote his book while he was living in Arakan.

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The government does not want any assistance from the community, but that the Bangladesh government has rejected the proposal because of the steady flow of Rohingyas out of Arakan state. Lewa says “they [Bangladesh government] think it would create a pull factor” to Cox’s Bazaar. The UN project was supposed to be a done by UNICEF, the World Food Programme, UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

The Rohingyas have fled Burma in recent decades because of alleged discrimination by the government. The situation has become so bad that Refugees International claimed in a recent report that they are “one of the most persecuted minorities in the world.” The majority of Rohingyas in Bangladesh live in makeshift camps, and largely as a result of Bangladesh policy, receive little international assistance. Lewa says the recent refusal of UN aid is not a new phenomenon. Only 26,000 are officially registered whilst unregistered refugees are thought to number as many as 500,000.

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries on earth, as well as being one of the most impoverished. Lewa confirms that the area where the majority of Rohingyas seek asylum, Teknaf, is “identified as one of the poorest [areas] in the whole of Bangladesh.” The Bangladeshi government official further told the Express that “Instead of helping cut poverty in the region, the UN project would only increase tension between the Rohingyas and the locals. No doubt, it will infuriate the local people.”

But Phil Robertson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch’s Asia division, alleges that “the intention I believe is to make Bangladesh an inhospitable spot for the Rohingyas to reside”. He continues that the Bangladeshi government tolerates hostile “highway robbery” against the Rohingyas, against whom “they have declared open season.” The Burmese government recently appointed a new ambassador to Bangladesh, U Hla Win. He reportedly told Bangladeshi President M. Zillur Rahman that the Burmese government wanted to resolve the Rohingya issue through dialogue and discussion.

Lowa told DVB however that the situation was “deteriorating further”. She alleges that instances...
Rohingya Citizenship Issue Briefly Surfaces at the Burmese Military's New National Assembly Session: Generals Without the Uniform Send the Same Old Message

By Our Reporter, 25 May 2011

Maungdaw, Arakan State: An Arakan State civil servant told The Irrawaddy that in recent reshuffle, MP Hla Han’s Immigration Ministry has been moved over to Col. Hein Linn, the minister of Security and Border Affairs in the Arakan State government which was originally combined with the Religious Affairs Ministry. Now, Hla Han will remain as state minister of Religious Affairs of Arakan State.

On March, 21, 2011, Zakir Ahmed (U Aung Zaw Win), a member of National Parliament of the USDP raised question on the Temporary Identification Cards of the Rohingya voters in Northern Rakhine (Arakan) State. He asked whether the National Scrutiny Cards (known as Pink Cards for the citizens) would be considered for the Rohingya citizens of Burma.

Former Home Minister of the Junta, General Maung Oo (now in the Parliament) responded to the call by the Rohingya parliamentarian that sent shock waves to the entire Rohingya community. Referring to the citizenship law of 1948 and 1982 (devised by the military), the General told the parliament that residents who wish to “apply” can do so - apply is his key word. Then he added another twist that was people with ancestries living in the only citizens. The military picks and chooses the time frame to exclude Rohingyas whose little strip of northern Arakan (Rakhine State) unfortunately fell on the Burma side of the border when the colonial British arbitrarily established boundaries between Burma and then East Pakistan.

Knowing the motive of the military, analysts suggest that the military’s SPDC rushed with the Rohingyas citizenship issue by using their Rohingya parliamentarian. As expected, the hard-liner General Maung Oo set the stage for future handling of the issue by the incoming home minister and former police chief, General Khin Yi. The Burmese Military establishment obviously takes the Rohingyas issue seriously due to the long-standing suspicion on the Rohingyas ethnic minorities for several decades.

Revoking the citizenship of Rohingyas was done so effectively with serious pre-demon by the former dictator General Ne Win that it has affected the Rohingyas by generations. The NRC (National Registration Card) confiscation campaign began in 1960s relatively quietly as a very secretive operation in its early phase. The traps for Rohingyas yielded the TICs (Temporary Identification Card), also notoriously known as “The White Cards”. The white card is nothing more than a chip - insert in animals in the wild used by game wardens.

Currently, only the Rakhine state parliament is extended with a ministry of Immigration and Religious affairs to deal with the pending issues of “nationality” targeting at Rohingyas ethnic minority. General Maung Oo hinted that some kinds of cards may be issued to some of the TIC white-card holders, but there is a catch. The military-led government will hand that responsibility of deciding the type of card to the Rakhine State Parliament - an institution which is almost entirely made up of ethnic Rakhine members who have been historically the driving force behind Rohingyas ethnic cleansing campaign in Burma. The deeply rooted historic term Rohingyas is so poisonous for ethnic Rakhine and the Burmese military that there is likely to be an uphill battle for Rohingyas in retaining its own identity in this upcoming process. The Burmese military and its Rakhine brethren love the term Bengali for Rohingyas, and there is a looming disaster that the Rohingyas population could easily be railroaded to the term “Bengali” to self-describe in the highly speculated new magic card class, category, and the colour.

Maungdaw Authority Again Stops the Construction of Religious Building

03 May 2011, Kaladan News

Maungdaw, Arakan State: The concerned authorities of Maungdaw Religious Council stopped the construction work of Maungdaw Central Juma (Big) Mosque yesterday, according to a devotee from Maungdaw.

“The Religious Council personnel and police officers from the Maungdaw police station went to the mosque and ordered no more work to be done with the construction.” “You have only a verbal order from an authority, not a written order. What you have done is too much. Please stop the work,” said an official from the religious council. ‘We want the authority concerned with this mosque to come to our office.’

“The order was issued from Union Administration Head Officer U Aung Kyaw Htun to our office to check the construction work and to summon the concerned authorities of the mosque to the Religious Council office.” However, the work of construction is carried out by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) where the party received permission for construction work. The Religious Council of Maungdaw had stopped the work in March, and this is second time, it is stopped again, said an elder from Maungdaw.

“The Regional Development Association (RDA) with People’s Parliament member U Aung Zaw Win (USDP) is taking responsibility for the construction work of the mosque. The construction work includes building a toilet and a prayers washroom, which the devotees need for the praying process.”

From P. 13 of Forced labour and arbitrary arrests by the Burmese border security force, known as Nasaka, are increasing. Relations between the two countries appear be warmer than they have been for a number of years, with Bangladesh’s Daily Star newspaper reporting that the country would be Burmese President Thein Sein’s first port of call since taking office in March. Bangladesh has already played host to Burma’s air force chief, Lt General Myat Hein, who arrived on the 23 April in what was the first high-level official visit of a Burmese official to the country since 2008. #
By Our Reporter, 07 May 2011

Maungdaw, Arakan State: A young girl was gang-raped by members of Burma’s border security force (Nasaka) in her house at about 2 a.m. on April 29, said a close relative of the victim on condition of anonymity.

The victim was identified as Sokina Begum (not her real name), 18, the daughter of Ahmed (Name change), who hails from Thayegon Dan Village of Maungdaw Township. On that day, at about 2 a.m., a group of Nasaka numbering three from Tun Chaung Village Nasaka out-post camp went to the said village on patrol and entered the house of Ahmed after breaking the door to search for his son over the allegation that his son had crossed the Burma-Bangladesh border illegally.

A villager from the locality said, “The son of Ahmed has not crossed the Burma-Bangladesh border. If the Nasaka wants the victim, he will be summoned to the camp. It is not necessary to come to his house at night and rape his sister.”

At the time, the son was not present there, so the Nasaka officers failed to arrest him. In the guise of searching for the son of Ahmed, the Nasaka personnel looked everywhere in the house with bad intentions. At last, Ahmed and his wife were fastened with a rope to a pillar by the Nasaka personnel who then gang-raped their virgin daughter in the house before leaving, said another close relative of the victim.

“The next day, the parents of the victim went to the village chairman and complained about the rape of their daughter by the Nasaka. But the Chairman said, “it is not a concern of mine.” As the parents were discouraged by the chairman, they did not dare to go to the Nasaka camp to complain to the higher officials because of fear of harassment by the Nasaka.”

Burma’s border security force’s untimely entering at villagers’ houses at night in Maungdaw Township is unendurable for the villagers, said a village elder from the locality. After entering the houses, the Nasaka pretends to search for some things before leaving the houses, but sometimes they want to attack women and girls if they get the opportunity. At night, if the house owner does not open the door, the Nasaka enters the house after breaking the door and harassing the owner.

However, earlier, Nasaka Director Lt. Col. Aung Gyi ordered the villagers not to open their door at night to anybody. But the Nasaka personnel break the order, said a youth. Often, pretty or young girls are raped in front of family members.

Rapes are reported to occur more frequently when men (husband, son, or father) are absent from their homes. Sexual violence is being used by the regime as an integral part of its strategy to crush the ethnic peoples, and establish control over their lands and resources, said a schoolteacher from Maungdaw town. ##

Source : Kaladan News

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Rohingya Girl Gang-raped by Nasaka of Maungdaw-South

Kurt Achin, New Delhi, May 19, 2011

Hundreds of men belonging to Burma’s minority Rohingya ethnic group continue to languish in stateless limbo in an Indian jail, after being rescued at sea more than two years ago.

The waiting came to a welcome end for 18 Rohingya boat people Thursday, as they crossed from India’s West Bengal state into Bangladesh. More than 200 other Rohingyas, though, remain in a prison on Indias Andaman and Nicobar Islands, in a waiting process that has stretched from months to years.

Rohingyas are a Muslim minority with historical roots in Burma. However, that nation stripped them of citizenship in 1982, and Rohingyas say they are systematically and violently oppressed by Burmese security forces.

More than 200,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh, where some have spent decades in camps while being denied both immigration rights and formal refugee status. Increasingly desperate Rohingyas have attempted dangerous illegal boat journeys to southern Thailand and Malaysia in hopes of finding work and shelter.

India rescued more than 400 Rohingyas at sea in late 2008, after they said the Thai military removed the engine from their boat and towed them out to the ocean, abandoning them without provisions. With the exception of the 18 who left India Friday, they all have languished ever since in an Indian prison facility.

Getting Bangladesh to provide the necessary paper work for their return, the Rohingyas say, often can be a matter of paying police there a bribe, which many say they simply cannot afford. Recently VOA managed to arrange a phone conversation with several Rohingya prisoners inside the Indian prison in Port Blair. They are unnamed, and their voices are masked, for their protection. One prisoner said desperate conditions drove him to where he is today.

Speaking to VOA from Bangladesh, Rohingya community leader Salim Ullah said Bangladesh leaders are reluctant to grant the group refugee status. Salim said Bangladesh has its own serious problems with population growth and poverty. The plight of the several hundred Rohingyas in Indian custody mirrors the much broader Rohingya problem. They are a massive displaced population with neither a state, nor an available mechanism, for seeking asylum.

International aid organizations say unless the international community steps up to initiate resettlement programs for the Rohingya population, hundreds of thousands of them will continue to live in squalor and be vulnerable to abuse and human trafficking. ##

The rescue Rohingya boat people by the Indian coastguards in the Andaman islands.
Maungdaw, Arakan State. The Burmese Border Security Force, known as Nasaka, stepped up extortion, atrocities, and rape in Rohingya villages since the Military’s General Election in late 2010. The most recent event took place in Kamaung Seik (Fakira Bazaar) of Maungdaw North, where several villagers have reportedly fled to Bangladesh seeking shelters.

Recently an Nasaka collaborator informed to the Nasaka Headquarters that a group of insurgents had entered from the hill-tracks of Bangladesh and held a meeting with locals in the house of a man named Jaffar. As a result, the Nasaka Director Lt. Col. Aung Gyi ordered Commander Major San Win Khine of Nasaka Area No. 2 to send Nasaka personnel to arrest the “insurgents”.

The commander, accompanied by a group of Nasaka personnel to the village, surrounded Jaffar’s house, but a subsequent search yielded no results. The angry Nasaka commander brought the Jaffar and Saber families, including women and children, to the camp and reportedly conducted physical abuse. However, the following day, one of the representatives of UNHCR went to the camp and had them released by saying that the incident was not related to the women. The Nasaka officer denied the allegation that his forces committed the rape of several women.

Some of the abuses of Rohingya villagers were fueled by the party rivalries stemming from the last election. The Regional Development Association (RDA) Chariman and USDP party aides jointly moved against the supporters of NDPD party and implicated them as insurgents. The arrests of villagers have climbed to 35 and counting. All the detainees have been brought to Nasaka Areas 3, 5, and 6 and tortured to get confessional statements that the authorities needed. Their beards were shaved, they forced to walk on the rivets, and they were ironed on the backside.

At present, every day Nasaka go to the village tract and arrest innocent villagers with allegation that they have connection to the so-called insurgents. According to credible witnesses, the Nasaka forces have been planting false evidence inside the properties of the suspects, and then demanding large sums of money or arresting those who do not comply with their demands. This is causing many villagers to flee across the border to Bangladesh along with their families for fear of arrest, torture, and rape. These are the primary causes of steady flow of refugees to Bangladesh in small numbers seeking shelters in the unofficial camps.

“The Nasaka forces have seized the properties of the fleeing families, including all their belongings sold them at the market”, said a resident of Walladon Village. Recently, 20 detainees were produced in Maungdaw Court first, followed by a second group of seven, all charged with section 17(1). However, the court ruled that they were not guilty as charged based on the investigation of several witnesses, according to a local businessman.

Kamaung Seik (Fakira Bazaar) Village Tract has seven villages and 1,700 houses. The incident happened in one village, and the Nasaka forces reportedly have arrested villagers from all seven neighbouring villages. Ironically, the Nasaka forces have been much more brazen after the Military’s election. Further increases in atrocities and inhumane treatments of Rohingya men, women, and children in Northern Arakan State is highly likely as the power continues to shift from military to provincial assembly. ##

Source: Kaladan Press