BANGLADESH PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA CALLS ON BURMAESE PRESIDENT U THEIN SEIN IN NAY PYI TAW

BURMA’S OPPOSITION LEADER DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI MET THAI PRIME MINISTER YINGLUCK SHINAWATRA ON DEC. 20, 2011 IN HER FIRST EVER AUDIENCE WITH A HEAD OF STATE FROM THE REGION, IN RANGOON.
RESTORE CITIZENSHIP AND ETHNIC RIGHTS OF ROHINGYA

Though changes are taking place in Burma, the plight of the Rohingya people remains unchanged, and they have been facing continuous discrimination on religious, as well as racial grounds. Rohingyas are peace-living, yet they are not tolerated in Burma for being Muslims and for their South-Asian appearance in contrast to Southeast Asians. The Thein Sein government has created impossible situation for peaceful living of the Rohingyas in their ancestral homeland of Arakan. Grave human rights violations that amount to crimes against humanity have been perpetrated against them on daily basis. Instead of living hungry and deprived in sub-human condition in Arakan -- with no human rights and basic freedoms -- they prefer to choose perilous voyages by rackety boats across seas and oceans despite the fact that hundreds of boat people have had drowned over the years and become fish feed of hungry sharks. This is one of the greatest human tragedies in 21st century.

Due to the negligence of the government, Arakan remains as a backward and the poorest state of Burma. Dr. Abid Bahar is right to say that one can hear its name only in reference to exporting Rohingya refugees to the surrounding countries and its leaders like Aye Kyaw becoming well-known for openly preaching xenophobia. No measures taking yet to take them to the ICC.

They are united, active, capable, energetic, and available only to bark against Rohingyas, trying very very hard in vain to finish them, losing every thing to their masters. To get back or to enjoy all valuable resources like gas, oil, sea-foods, wood, etc all the people of Arakan must be united in diversity, they need to recognize and respect each other as human beings and work together without discrimination.

Rohingyas cautiously appreciate the efforts of Bangladesh Government since 1971 to resolve the Rohingya refugee problems through peaceful bilateral negotiations. But, until now, there is no substantial headway due to Burmese Government’s intransigence and policies of extermination, exclusion and discrimination against the Rohingya people. On the contrary, the Rohingya problems become a hot-button issue and a regional problem having international dimensions. Thus the Rohingya problem merits an immediate regional and international solution.

It is worth-mentioning that the rejection of Rohingya’s citizenship rights and ethnic rights by the Burmese Government is the main contributing factor to the growth of the refugee problems. Unless the core elements of the Rohingya problem -- including institutionalized ‘systematic racism’, persecution and discrimination against them -- are adequately addressed, the refugee problems will recur again and again and Bangladesh, being an immediate neighbouring country, shall have to bear the brunt of these unwanted problems of Burma.

The Rohingya people have a long history in Arakan. Being an integral part of the Burma citizenry, they had exercised the right of franchise in all public elections held in Burma during the later colonial period (1935-1948), democratic period (1948-1962), Ne Win’s BSPP
EDITORIAL

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FROM P. 2 period (1974-1988), SLORC’s 1990 and SPDC’s 2010 elections, including its constitutional referendum held in 2008. Accordingly they have had voted their representatives to all levels of political institutions, including the parliament. Yet, they are ridiculously denied citizenship and are thus rendered stateless in their own homeland. Due to large-scale persecution against them, an estimated 1.5 million Rohingya are living in Diasporas in various countries of the world.

In order to get a permanent solution for the Rohingya, the “Rohingya” should be recognized as one of the many ethnic nationalities of the Union of Burma/Myanmar. Their citizenship and ethnic rights should be guaranteed on a par with other ethnic nationalities of the country. Having dimension in the perspective of internationalism, the Rohingya problem, a problem of political, ethnic and religious persecution, is to be resolved with multilateral co-operation and assistance. The Burma Citizenship Law of 1982, which was enacted by former dictator U Ne Win in violation of the customary international law, should be repealed. Repatriation and rehabilitation of Rohingya refugees in their original places in Arakan by returning to them all their moveable and immovable properties that have been confiscated from time to time; allowing ‘right of return’ to all Rohingya diasporas, including their children born as stateless; and develop basic facilities with international co-operation and resources. Political and democratic process in Burma should be ‘all-inclusive’ and Rohingya should be a part of it. ##

COVER STORY

BANGLADESH - BURMA TO HOMOGENISE THEIR RELATIONSHIP NOW

By M.A. ALAM

IT is time for Bangladesh to homogenize relationship with Burma since they have taken new political and democratic process in Burma. The relation between Bangladesh and Burma officially began on January 13, 1972, the date on which Burma recognized Bangladesh as a sovereign state. However, the relation between these two close neighbours has never been smooth and has undergone frequent ups and downs over the last 40 years on a few issues. Both countries have not been able to build a pragmatic relationship with each other despite having a lot of potentials. Burma being closed to the outside world for more than 50 years shows few distinct patterns of behaviour in developing effective bilateral relations with Bangladesh. These are: Burma capitalised Bangladesh’s geographical vulnerability, being remained under the umbrella of China was reluctant to count her small neighbour, being always stubborn in their attitude and behavior to towards India and China. As such Bangladesh was discouraged and lost interest to charter a course to bring Burma into a negotiation table for developing meaningful relation with her. On the contrary, India and China have taken the full advantage of Burma’s isolation and developed a deep relationship with her.

The issues that dominated their relations are the influx of Rohingya refugees, demarcation of land and maritime boundary, illegal drug trafficking and alleged cross border movement of insurgents. The relation deteriorated severely in 1991 when Burma armed forces launched a surprised attack and ransacked the then Bangladesh Rifle’s border outpost at Rejupara in Cox’s Bazar district. Burmese forces killed three members of Bangladesh Rifles and looted their arms and ammunition. However, a major regional conflict was averted because of exercising restraints by Bangladesh. Before the border incident, Bangladesh had been burdened with the Rohingya refugee problems since 1978. Over 300,000, Rohingyas were forced to cross the border and came to Bangladesh, following Operation ‘Nagamin’ (Dragon King Operation) lunched by the Burmese army.

During 1991-92, the second wave of over 250,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution. Bangladesh with the help of the international community tried to resolve that issue through diplomatic channel but due to Burma’s stubborn attitude the refugee problem could not be fully resolved.

The demarcation of maritime boundary was another issue that created a conflict of interest between these two states. The second round of tension erupted when Burma hired South Korea’s Daewoo International Corporation to carry out the exploration in the Bay of Bengal, 90 KM South West of Bangladesh in November 2008.

Diplomatic initiative to solve the problem ended without any result. Being upset with the attitude of Burma, Bangladesh submitted the case to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in 2009. After a series of hearing in September 2011 the court planned to convey a ruling in March 2012.

In this backdrop, the Bangladesh Prime Minister has visited Burma in an effort to build a relationship that will be beneficial for the people of both the countries. She has visited Myanmar immediately after the visit of US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and at a moment when there are talks within the international community about Burma looking for a change. The changes were evident when the former

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General Thein Sein, after coming to power in March this year, halted the Chinese-funded $3.6 billion Myitsone dam project in the state of Kachin respecting the demand of the people of that region. Burma government has released more than 6,000 political prisoners and enacted laws allowing for protests and rallies; indicating commitment for democratic reforms.

ROHINGYA REFUGEES REPATRIATION

After Verification

During the visit, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh raised the issue of Burmese refugees living in Nayapara and Kutupalong camp and the huge number of undocumented Burmese nationals living in Bangladesh and stated that early resolution of these issues will help strengthen the bilateral relations to a great extent. The president of Burma expressed his desire to cooperate with Bangladesh in resolving the issue.

Burma has agreed to take back Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh after verification by its authorities. Burmese President U Thein Sein gave the assurance to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during official talks at the President's Office in Nay Pyi Taw on 6 December 2011.

Some 28,000 Burmese refugees have been staying in camps in Cox's Bazar for a long period of time. During the official talks, Hasina said the presence of the refugees has been creating social, financial and environmental challenges to Bangladesh.

The Burmese president assured the Bangladesh premier of Burma's readiness for an early resumption of the repatriation process of the already cleared list of refugees under the aegis of the UNHCR. “We would take back all Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh after verifying them and as per agreed criterion between the two countries,” he said. A working group could also be established to resolve the issue permanently, Hasina told the Burmese president.

Bangladesh has expressed its willingness to import energy from Burma and requested the president to import readymade garments, pharmaceutical products, knitwears, jute and jute goods, ceramics etc. from Bangladesh at competitive price and mentioned that Bangladesh was keen to organize a “Single Country Trade Fair” in Rangoon early next year.

The two heads of governments stressed upon the establishment of direct banking arrangement under ACU (Asian Clearing Union) so that LCs can be opened directly between the two countries. They wished to launch direct air flight between Dhaka/Chittagong and Rangoon and non-conventional vessels between the designated commercial routes of the two countries. The two leaders also emphasised on the increase of border trade. There are reports that in 2010-11 Bangladesh’s exports to Burma stood at $9.65 million and imports from Burma at $175.7 million.

Let us point out a misperception that is prevailing among some of the Burmese nationals about Bangladesh. Many in Burma are misinformed and have a feeling that nothing can be gained from Bangladesh, which is evident to a comment posted by Maug Kyaw Nu, a former political prisoner. He wrote, “There are refugees along the Burma’s bordering countries like Bangladesh, India, China and Thailand. These Refugees are neglected there. Every neighbour is engaged to hunt or loot Burma's natural resources and wealth. They do not hesitate to hug the military generals for their benefit, which is a big shame for our neighbour leaders. Now the Bangladesh prime minister lands in Naypyitaw to hug Thien Sein to gain some resources and economic benefits. Instead of solving the refugees’ long lasting problem, she is very busy to gain more wealth from Burma.”

The people of Burma must be informed that they have the potential to win more from Bangladesh as we have a big market and an increasing middle-class society. Moreover, Bangladesh planned deep-sea port at Sonadia will be a regional hub and will be of tremendous importance to Burma and other Asian nations. Burma having natural resources like abundance of farm lands, woods, gas and hydro power has the potential to be a candid economic friend. A newly elected Chairman of Asean should be well aware that the solution to Rohingya refugee problem will give an additional mileage to enhance its human rights image to international community, which the General Thein Sein government is urgently seeking. It is a matter to be seen how Bangladesh bureaucracy and diplomats capitalise such urgent needs of Burma.

AGREEMENT/MOU

Finally, Burma and Bangladesh signed the following Agreement/Memorandum of Understanding:

1) Agreement on the establishment of a Joint Commission for bilateral cooperation between the government of the Republic of the Union of Burma (Myanmar) and the government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.

2) Memorandum of Understanding on establishment of Joint Business Council (JBC) between the Republic of the Union of Burma Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) and the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

A foundation for a potential beginning has been laid by both the leaders; it is the bureaucracy to do its job to take the relationship to a new height. Later, Hasina laid the foundation stone of Bangladesh chancery in the newly created diplomatic zone of Nay Pyi Taw. She also met Bangladeshi community members living in Burma. The prime minister also exchanged views with the members of Bangladesh business delegation at hotel Yadamar Theindha.

JOINT STATEMENT OF BURMA AND BANGLADESH

Both Bangladesh and Burma should emphasise not only on connectivity through land, sea and air but should also increase people to people contact through various cultural exchanges, sports, educations, trade fairs, and other mutually beneficial activities. Therefore, both countries should homogenize their relationship for the common good of the people of this region.

Bangladesh and Burma are going to enter into a new phase in bilateral relations for the mutual benefit of their peoples and collective prosperity of the region,” said a joint statement made available in Dhaka on 7 December 2011. Sources: The Daily Star & Kaladan Press #
Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra offered Daw Aung San Suu Kyi her support in a coming by-election during a historic meeting with the democracy icon in Burma, a Thai official said on 21 December 2011 (Wednesday).

In Suu Kyi’s first-ever meeting with the leader of a foreign country, the pair’s half-hour talk in Rangoon on Tuesday was held in a “good atmosphere,” said Titima Chaisang, chief Thai government spokeswoman.

“Aung San Suu Kyi told Prime Minister Yingluck that she hopes to win in the by-election and Yingluck offered her support and her hope that Aung San Suu Kyi will win,” she said.

No polling date has been set for the election, which will see Suu Kyi run for office for the first time. She was under house arrest when her NLD party won a 1990 poll, but the military regime did not allow it to take power.

Yingluck first traveled to Burma’s capital, Naypyidaw, on 19 December 2011 for a two-day summit of Greater Mekong country leaders, where she said the talks “progressed well.” She then traveled to Rangoon to meet Suu Kyi at the Thai ambassador’s residence.

The Thai leader then visited Shwedagon pagoda, the country’s most revered Buddhist shrine, before her departure home. On 21 December 2011 in Bangkok, Yingluck expressed support for neighboring Burma’s “path of national reconciliation.” “We have seen the good intentions of Burma’s government to open up and to embark on democratic development,” she told reporters, according to AFP, AP News Agencies.

Since the 1988 military coup in Burma, the Thai and Burmese governments have had an up-and-down relationship of necessity. Now, with Burma becoming more open and the Thaksin Shinawatra clan reasserting power in Thailand, their mutual economic and political interests may lead to a period of increased interaction. But generations-old grudges and prejudices still remain.

The recent visits to Burma by ex-Thai Prime Minister Thaksin and his sister, current Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, served to highlight both the internal dynamics within Thailand and Burma and the status of the current relationship between the two countries.

Burma’s reserve of natural resources may currently be the biggest area of mutual interest between the neighboring countries, and the deals announced while Yingluck and her energy minister were in Burma included the grant of two Burmese oil-field concessions to Thailand.

Thailand has few domestic energy supplies and benefits greatly by having a source of natural gas sitting literally next door. As one Thai scholar recently put it, Burma is “Thailand’s energy lifeline.”

Thai-based exiled Burmese were repeatedly harassed and at one point in 2004, US Senator John McCain sent a letter to Thaksin citing “credible, first-hand reports” that Bangkok had taken steps to curtail the activities of democracy activists in border areas. “As a friend of Thailand, I write to express my deep concern over recent actions by Thai authorities along your border with Burma,” McCain wrote.

Over two million Burmese live and work in Thailand, which proves to be both a benefit and a detriment for both countries. Most believe the migrant workers are a necessary ingredient to the Thai economy because they are willing to perform menial tasks for low pay that many Thais are unwilling to take on. This has also helped reduce the number of people living in poverty inside Burma during the long period of extreme economic mismanagement by the previous Burmese regime. But many of the workers leave struggling families behind in Burma and are undocumented, exploited and still impoverished in Thailand.

In addition, tens of thousands of refugees from Burmese conflict zones have fled to the Thai side of the border and now live in refugee camps. This has led to both a strain on the Thai government and tension between the two countries. In the past, the Burmese regime accused Thailand of harboring dissidents and rebels to stage attacks on Burma, and in return the Thais accused Burma of flooding its kingdom with speed pills and heroine.

In addition, Yingluck’s meeting with Suu Kyi may have been short on substance, but it was still a symbolically important acknowledgement of the Burmese people’s desire for democracy. The Thai prime minister said that she backed both Burma’s democracy movement and Suu Kyi’s decision to compete in the coming by-elections.

In any event, it appears that self-interest will drive Thailand and Burma towards better relations for the foreseeable future, even though the leaders of both countries may remain suspicious and disrespectful of their counterparts. They say that politics makes strange bedfellows. ##
Burma, why is then expelling the thousands of other displaced people from provided shelter to hundreds and pushing them back to sea? Thailand has asylum seeker as refugee. Also, it has now to reduce the influx, the government has activities along the Burma-Bangladesh from being an economic burden, the annual increase in their numbers. Apart Bangladesh is now concerned about the Rohingyas for nearly three decades, however, after providing shelter to the Rakhine state. This drove out nearly known as Naga Min, or Dragon King, later the ethnic cleansing campaign Emergency Immigration Act of 1978 and every possible way to push them out. The successive governments have attempted and lived in exile, mainly in Bangladesh.

Why is the Rohingya crisis not a new phenomenon, and it has now grabbed the attention of the international media for all the wrong reasons. The Rohingyas, in large numbers, are now trying to escape to Malaysia via the sea route through Thailand, but are being denied entry by Thai authorities and forcibly pushed back. Earlier this year around 91 persons believed to be Rohingyas were rescued near Andaman Island by the Indian Navy and around 129 by the Indonesian Navy in Aceh. The Rohingyas have been sheltered by Bangladesh for nearly three decades.

What is the reason for their escape to Malaysia? Why is Thailand forcibly pushing them back to sea? Thailand has provided shelter to hundreds and thousands of other displaced people from Burma, why is then expelling the Rohingyas?

Why are the Rohingyas escaping to Malaysia?

Rohingyas fled repression in Burma and lived in exile, mainly in Bangladesh. Since Burma’s independence in 1948, its successive governments have attempted every possible way to push them out. The Emergency Immigration Act of 1978 and later the ethnic cleansing campaign known as Naga Min, or Dragon King, prosecuted illegal entrants, primarily in Rakhine state. This drove out nearly 200,000 Rohingyas from Myanmar.

However, after providing shelter to the Rohingyas for nearly three decades, Bangladesh is now concerned about the annual increase in their numbers. Apart from being an economic burden, the Rohingyas’ involvement in insurgent activities along the Burma-Bangladesh border is feared by the government. Hence to reduce the influx, the government has declared that it will no more consider any asylum seeker as refugee. Also, it has now denied permits for aid agencies to assist unregistered refugees. Anti-Rohingya communities in Bangladesh have also pressurized the government to repatriate the Rohingyas. Due to the denial of protection, assistance, and fear of repatriation, the Rohingyas are now escaping to Malaysia through the sea route. Malaysia is seen as the best destination because of the religion factor. Also, the Malaysian government’s permit to access the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has attracted asylum seekers.

Rohingyas: A threat to and burden for Thailand

This trend has become major concern for Thailand, as most of these migrants/refugees escaping are landing in Thailand. It is not for the first time that Thailand has pushed them back. In 2008 and 2009, the Thai authorities were condemned by the international community for pushing the Rohingyas into international waters without any assistance or protection.

The Thai authorities are apprehensive of the influx and suspect that the Rohingyas are assisting the Muslim-led insurgency in southern Thailand, which has intensified in recent times. Furthermore, nearly 1 million other migrants from Bangladesh and Burma are estimated to already be in Thailand. The exceeding numbers of illegal migrants will add to the economic burden and pose a threat to Thai national security. Unlike the other migrants in Thailand who play a major role contributing to the Thai economy (http://bit.ly/vI6ygJ), the Rohingyas are only a liability and burden; they cannot get a work permit in Thailand as this requires a Thai work permit in Thailand as this requires a Thai work permit which is not available to them. Moreover, the Rohingyas have not registered with the UNHCR for resettlement or repatriation.

Myanmar’s denial of citizenship to Rohingyas

The primary problem and responsibility should lie with Burma. Rohingyas are primarily a Muslim ethnic group from the northern part of Arakan province (Rakhine State) of Myanmar. The term ‘Rohingya’ is derived from the Chittagonian dialect (Bengali language), in which the Rakhaine or Arakanese people are called ‘Rohangya’.

In this context Burma should consider them a national ethnic group. But, they are denied citizenship and not recognized among the 135 national ethnic groups under the 1982 Citizenship Law, leaving them stateless and as illegal immigrants in their own country. Even under the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Burma which was passed in 2008 it is stated that ‘Citizenship, naturalization and revocation of citizenship shall be as prescribed by law’. Their condition has not improved even today: approximately 800,000 Rohingyas living in Northern Arakan state and Rangoon are effectively stateless and are subjected to discrimination and exploitation.

Most of the countries are hesitant to host the Rohingyas because they are denied citizenship in Myanmar and because of this, reaching an understanding with the Burmese government on their resettlement or repatriation is difficult. For instance, earlier in December 2011 an agreement was reached at a meeting between President Thein Sein and Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to repatriate Burmese refugees. But the Burmese government made it clear that only those refugees who met the key criteria under Burma citizenship law would be taken back, leaving the Rohingyas out in the cold.

Thailand has earlier attempted to repatriate refugees to Burma (Myanmar-http://bit.ly/s00Vak) but mostly only the Karen and Karenni ethnic groups. The increasing number of Rohingyas will be a serious issue, first, owing to the difficulties in cooperating with Burmese government, and second, because of identification. In Thailand’s nine refugee shelters, most of the refugees belong to the Karen and Karenni ethnic groups of Burma and only 10-12 per cent is Muslim. As the Rohingyas are not able to register themselves in Thailand, there are no official records on their numbers, because of which resettlement or repatriation becomes impossible.

The plight of the Rohingyas and the growing concern over their influx is not only confined to Burma, Bangladesh and Thailand. Other regional powers like India, Indonesia and Malaysia must also engage themselves considering its security implications. The forcible push-backs are a major threat to the maritime as well as border security of these countries. Left with no other option, the Rohingyas are vulnerable to being recruited by sea pirates and involved in arms and drug smuggling.

Sources: December 31, 2011, EUROASIA
Arakan, the deprived cousin of Burma (Myanmar), has long been neglected. Its antique works of art vandalized or incompetently renovated by the present Buddhist clergy. Despite the early years of the Christian era, despite rumours of demonic cannibals, its fertile plains attracted Hindu colonists. At the inauguration of the Chandra maharaja (s), its inhabitants derided the grandeur of Amaravati, the celestial city of Swargar, Indra’s paradise, claiming their capital was more superior. It was a confident kingdom in which Brahmanism, Mahayana Buddhism and local cults flourished. The court language was Sanskrit. Today, evidence of the Brahmanic presence has been almost eradicated by the present Rakhhaing people, determined to present a land ‘untainted’ by any other religion except Theravada Buddhism – when in fact that is far from the case. — Noel F. Singer

INTRODUCTION

This account originally appeared as an article "Sculptures from Vaishali, Arakan", in Arts of Asia, July-August 2007, vol. 38, no. 4. The project initially began in 1999 and by 2006, reams of information had been gathered, threatening to turn the article into a book. As space in any magazine is at a premium, this meant that much of the data had to be grudgingly jettisoned and the text ruthlessly edited. Nevertheless, I was determined to retrieve the valuable data and reweave the scattered strands into a book as I felt it was too significant to waste. Many of the photographs not included in the article were also too valuable to be consigned to oblivion.

Obviously, since the article was published, I have received more pertinent information which necessitated several changes in the present text. My interest in ancient Arakan had been simmering since the late 1950s, when I lived in Myanmar, but was unable to visit the ‘legendary’ sites of Mahamuni and Vaishali.

In those days, it involved an unpleasant sea voyage, and once there, transport was practically non-existent. Many of the locations, too, were in the hands of rebel groups and extremely dangerous. A virulent form of malaria was rampant — and still is — so intending travellers beware. Medication, insect repellent and a mosquito net are a must. One cannot be too careful about the food either, even in the best hotels.

Over forty years later, and now living in the United Kingdom, I finally achieved my wish. Disappointingly, during each of my two visits, I came away with almost all my long-held illusions shattered, saddened at the terrible neglect, and the vandalism being perpetrated on ancient religious arte-facts by ignorant and misguided men, in particular the Buddhist clergy. There was also extreme poverty in the outlying areas. The total lack of interest from the locals was depressing. Then again, one cannot blame these simple rural folk, as finding the means to fill hungry bellies is far more important than expending energy on the preservation of mouldy old ruins and ancient arte-facts. During my travels in the countryside, it was most distressing to see such abject poverty.

This account of Vaishali does not pretend to be a scholarly work, and despite my lack of academic qualifications, I have tried to tell what is to me a fascinating story which was probably replicated in various parts of ancient Southeast Asia which came under the influence of the Hindu colonists.

The early history of Arakan from 200 to the 900 CE is far from complete and still shrouded in what appears to be an impenetrable haze. Not only have insufficient archaeological investigations been undertaken, it has also been weighed down and sabotaged by inaccurate information by native chroniclers of a later age.

Some foreign writers, too, have either slavishly repeated these fantasies, presented their own interpretations, refuted the findings of others, or else, ignored this early period altogether. For example, ancient Arakan of the Chandras was omitted by George Coedes in his celebrated The Indianized States of Southeast Asia.

A number of readers may find it surprising that I have not given due weight to indigenous accounts of a later date quoted in this work. This is a deliberate omission on my part owing to their unreliability, permeated as they are with borrowed historical episodes and myths from Buddhist and Hindu India. Although these native sources are claimed to be 'ancient', they probably date from a time after the 14th century.

Above all, they had a tendency to fabricate, obsessed with a need to present a realm infused with Buddhist piety of the Theravada School when in fact it was a Mahayana version, together with Brahmanism, which predominated. As things stand, an immense amount of research and scientific excavation, unhampered by religious bigotry and political propaganda urgently needs to be accomplished.

One occasionally hears of this or that foreign institution planning excavations and conservation, but nothing constructive appears to have materialized in Arakan. Judging by the articles in the Burma Historical Commission Journal, attention seems to be focused on Myanmar proper. This present work is based on the unique lithic inscription of circa 729 commissioned by Ananda Chandra, ruler of Vaishali, together with other epigraphic evidence and iconographic. At this point in time, these are the only contemporary historical materials available for this early period. One can but hope that before long a fuller picture will emerge when other relevant inscriptions have been excavated.

BACKGROUND HISTORY *

The elongated coastal strip of Arakan (Rakhaing) is situated on the western part of Burma (Myanmar) proper and extends for almost 360 miles. At its widest it is roughly 100 miles, while at its narrowest it is only about 25 miles. On the west is the Bay of Bengal, the region now called Bangladesh is to the north, and on the east are the high Yoma mountains. Man tended to congregate in the fertile river valleys.

What may conceivably be the earliest representation of this ancient land can be seen in a map based on the findings of the Greek scholar Eratosthenes (circa 276-194 BCE), the Chief Librarian of the Great Library at Alexandria. In it, Hindoi or Indo (India) and Taprobane (Sri Lanka) are indicated. Included are the Ganga (Bhagerathi) River and its Delta, together with part of the curving coastal strip of Arakan. The Yoma range which separate this region from the country now called Myanmar, is depicted as well. Unfortunately, Arakan is represented as a blank space with no identifiable habitation sites. A chart by Strabo (c. 63/64 BCE-24 CE) which appears to have been based on the above, is almost identical for this region.

*All dates not designated BCE are of the Christian Era. Comments in square brackets are by the author version, only two cities are named, Sada on the coast.
FROM P. 7 However, in a later map derived from those of Claudius Ptolemaeus (Ptolemy: flourished 127-145 CE, another inhabitant of Alexandria), the coastline of Arakan has been updated considerably, and the mountain barrier illustrated in detail. Of par-ticular interest is the inclusion of the premier port city of Sada together with another, also on the coast, called Berabonna. The river "Sados Flu" [thought to be the present Kaladan] is shown. Another map, also based on Ptolemy's researches and published in 1695, identified the Yoma mountain chain as the "Meandrus Mons". In this and Triglyphon, situ-ated further inland and to the north.

An additional chart entitled "Geographiae Antiquae" and dated 1818, depicted Sada and Berabonna, together with Triglyphon which had now been relocated to the coast; several versions based on Ptolemy are known to exist. In those remote days, it is possible that it was in Bharatavarsa ("The Realm of the Sons of Bharata") (a fabled Indian ruler) that the earliest name by which Arakan was known was first recorded, and where it achieved notoriety as "Kala Mukha" (Land of the) Black Faces.1

The Mahaniddesa (circa 200 CE) noted that the Ramayana (The Adventures of Rama: circa 500 BCE) and the Mahabharata (The Great [battle of the] Bharatas: circa 400 BCE) identified it by that appellation, and described its denizens as cannibals, presumably negritos.2 Not surprisingly, the Hindus called them rakshasa (demons) as they be-lieved them to be the offspring of men and rakshasis (shape-changing female demons) who through their magical powers could meta-morphose themselves into delectable maidens.3

The legend of the rakshasa filtered down the centuries, for the present-day Arakanese, anxious to find some explanation for the name of the country." Sir Arthur Phayre says that the latter was designated as Rakkha-pura by the Buddhist missionaries from India; but I should like to hear how far back in antiquity this name can be traced. It appears in the Mahamavasa [of Sri Lanka] under the form Rakkhanga at so late a date as A.D. 1592; and in the Ain-i-Akbari at about the same period under the form Arkung.5

Luce, quoting Ptolemy [who in turn was citing Pompomius Mela (circa 43) on the location of ancient Arakan, said: "Descending the coast south-eastwards from the mouth of the Ganges, he names first the Airrhaidoi [with the port of Barakoura] [this was presumably in the Chittagong region]; then the country of Arygus ["Silver Land"] i.e. Arakan [with the towns of] Samba, Sada, Berabonna and Temala [which Gereni mbelieved was Cape Negrais]; then a Cape; then the can nibals of Besynga [thought to be in the region of the mouth of the Irrawaddy River] in the Sarabak Gulf [most likely the Gulf of Martaban].6

These areas were allegedly inhabited by other savage tribes, such as the Beseidai or Tiladai who lived between India and China, therefore somewhere in present day Myanmar. However, Luce, when quoting Ptolemy, offered conflicting descriptions. While on one occasion he defined the people as "big" of stature and "broad and hairy and broad-faced, white-skinned", further on they are described as "stunted.7 The Periplus had originally depicted them as 'pygmies'.

Nevertheless, according to Luce: "Both Chinese and Greek sources agree in placing, at the beginning of our era, undersized and white-skinned peoples in Burma, and the existence of early trade-routes between China and India."8

HOW RELIABLE IS THE ANECDOTE CONCERNING THE CANNIBALS?

Regarding these man-eating savages, was Ptolemy simply repeating the scare stories of them geographers before him, and the sensational traveller's tales which were liable to circulate in ports of the world? After all, it is a well known fact that humans have a tendency to fabricate, either from sheer ignorance or pure malice.

Revealingly, a location map in Moore's recent work pinpoints numerous fortified habitation sites from possibly before 100 CE in the very areas supposedly being terrorized by Ptolemy's cannibals.9

The cold archaeological and scientific facts are these. Cave paintings and stone implements said to be over 5,000 years old have been discovered in the Badalin ("Shining-as-Mercury") Caves in the Shan States. Older still are the mysterious hunter-gatherers of a prehistoric period called "Anyathian", from the relatively modern Myanmar word ah-nyar-tha, meaning a male from the upper part of the country.

Recent excavations have uncovered hitherto unknown finds from loca-tions which have been identified as the Neolithic, 'Bronze Age' and the 'Iron Age'. The Nyaungyan burial site, in particular, has revealed what appear to be unique 'mother goddess' figures crafted out of thin sheets of bronze; the identification of these symbols is still ongoing. Grave goods include decorative ornaments for coffins, polished stone imple-ments, large perforated stone discs de-signed for the wrists and chest, glass rings, pottery and bronze artefacts.10

Almost similar examples from these periods have also been reported in Thailand.11

It is doubtful if cannibalism was practiced amongst these people who were certainly not wild savages. Carbon-dated evidence has revealed that by circa 200 BCE, the Pyu (Piao or Tircul), possibly one of the earliest civilized ethnic groups, were already established within their small city-states in central Myanmar.

One must presume that the civilized and the uncivilized existed within their own territories, with raids and counter raids being undertaken as the centuries passed. It would appear that the more primitive tribes were finally pushed further back into the wilderness, for the Pyu and the Mon, each in their own kingdoms, soon came to dominate the land. But that is another story.

THE FIRST WAVE OF HINDU COLONISTS

To return to what was occurring at the time in ancient Arakan. In India of the 1st century CE, fuelled by their need for com-merce, gold and silver, the initial wave of Hindu colonists undertaking their samudra yatra (sea voyages) across the Purva Samudra (Bay of Bengal) began in earnest.12

These extraordinarily courageous travellers, composed of merchants, adven-turers, artisans, Brahmana, members of the ruling elite and, one must assume, some of their fearless women folk, braved the terrifying and cramped conditions at sea to seek out strange new worlds such as the fabled Survanabhumi and Suvarnadvipa, which reputedly contained unimaginable wealth. Once at their destination, the pioneers founded settlements and overcame the hostility of the local inhabitants.

Some of their elite married into the families of local tribal chiefs and in time, by their superior knowledge and skills, came to rule over them. It was surprising to learn that even before that early date, many of the coastal areas and shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean and the Straits of Malacca were infested by pirates who either killed all on board or sold them into slavery. This meant that for the prudent ship... Cont. P. 9
owners and merchants, precautionary measures had to be taken, and a contingent of archers and spearmen hired to accompany these voyages.13

By the 3rd century, the coastal regions of Kala Mukha had been settled, the colonists dominating and coexisting warily with the aboriginal tribes. The Lords of the Solar and Lunar dynasties from far off Bharatavarsha had indeed arrived.

In the major habitation sites, Sanskrit was the written language for the ruling classes, and religious beliefs were those current at the time on the subcontinent. Dr. Emil Forchhammer, a Swiss Professor of Pali at Rangoon College, and Superintendent of the newly founded Archaeological Survey [1881] described this fertile region [which was, and is still infested with the deadly malaria mosquito (Culiciidae)].

"The earliest dawn of the history of Arakan reveals the base of the hills, which divide the lower course of the Kaladan and Lemro rivers, inhabited by sojourners from India, governed by chiefs who claim relationship with the rulers of Kapilavastu. Their subjects are divided into the four castes of the older Hindu communities; the kings and priests study the three Vedas; the rivers, hills, and cities bear names of Aryan origin; and the titles assumed by the king and queen regent suggest connection with the Solar and Lunar dynasties of India."14

ARGYRE, THE SILVER LAND

Ptolemy, quoting Pomponius Mela, had identified this part of Eastern India as Argyre (Silver Land) as he had been told that it contained numerous silver mines. Its capital was Sada. But since this metal is not found in the region, later scholars found his description perplexing, neither could the city of Sada be identified.

Majumdar, too, could not agree with this location for Argyre and felt that "we might look upon the island of Java as corresponding to Argyre, and there are several facts which speak in favour of this supposition."15

Fortunately, in 1978 the mystery was partly explained by Mitchiner, who said that the reason it bore the epithet Silver Country was that its government acted as a mediator for the export of bullion which originated in Nanzhao (Yunnan) and an area of Myanmar which is now believed to be located in the present Bawzaing area of the Shan States16 [the Bawzaing mines are another location]. This immense stretch of country in the Shan States was variously under the control of the Pyu kingdoms of Vishnupura (City of Vishnu), Hanlin, and the Varman and Vikrama dynasties of Sri Kshetra, named after the holy city of Puri in Kalinga, and sacred to Vaishnavites.

According to Mitchiner, the silver was taken down the Temalos (Irrawaddy River) to Temala, thought to be near present-day Syriam (Thanlyin), across the river from Rangoon (Yangon); it was later to become part of the Mon kingdom of Ramannadesa.

From Temala, the bullion from Nanzhao was shipped to agents in the eastern kingdoms and to Sada in the Silver Land from where it was dis-patched to India and beyond. This precious metal attracted the attention of the Romans, for it is known that sometime during the 2nd century CE, a small expedition sailed across the Apara Samudra (Arabian Sea) and the Bay of Bengal, and managed to travel to Nanzhao by way of the Irrawaddy River — an incredible and obviously dangerous undertaking. As to the identity of the capital of Argyre, Ptolemy was told that the Sanskritic name of the ruling dynasty was Chandra, which his informants, using the Prakrit parallel, pronounced Chada. Linguistic difficulties meant that Ptolemy's rendition became Sada, which he also used for the capital.17

Interestingly, the Mahaniddesa also referred to the city as Sada, and said that it was a premier port of call for shipping from Palur in the Ganjam district of Kalinga (Udra or Orissa) and Tamralipti (Tamluk), on the Hugli River, about thirty miles southwest of modern Kolkata.18

Gerini, quoting from Ptolemy, said that Sada was identified:

"as the terminus of the sea-passage across the Gangetic Gulf (Bay of Bengal) from Palura [in Kalinga], effected in a direct line from west to east, and covering a distance of 13,000 stadia. It was, therefore, the first port touched at in his time by ships proceeding from India to the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal. Some ships, however, took a more northerly route, and touched at the riverine port of Antibole on the Dhakka or Old Ganges River, before making out for Sada and the Gulf of Martaban."19

However, Gerini did not agree with Ptolemy's identification and location of Sada, and was of the opinion that the city was sited at the present port town of Sandoway (Thanlyin), on the Irrawaddy River, about thirty miles upriver from Sada. But since this metal is not found in the region, later scholars found his description perplexing, neither could the city of Sada be identified.

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The large sea going vessels from India, known as mahanavah, were heading east to the other Southeast Asian kingdoms, in particular to Survanabhumi ("Land of Gold"); claimed to be Lower Myanmar and Malay-sia), and to Suvarnadvipa ("Isle of Gold"), which Majumdar identifies as Sumatra, together with some of the islands in the region. Several interpretations of the exact location of these fabled lands are current. Another name for this region was the legendary Chryse, known to Pomonius Mela, Pliny the Elder and other of an earlier period, and which is now accepted as covering a large swathe of Southeast Asia.

THE SECOND PERIOD OF INDIANISATION

The second phase of the Indianisation of Arakan occurred from about the 4th to the 6th centuries, by which time the kingdom of the colonists had been well established. One must also assume that by then, the earlier name of "Sada", for its capital, had been replaced by "Vaishali".

As a port city, Vaishali was in contact with the Pyu kingdoms across the mountains in the east, and with the small Mon city states in Ramannadesa. Collins, who in 1925 quoted his source in good faith, said that the archaeologist, San Shwe Bu, had provided him with a translation from an old manuscript called "The True Chronicle of the Great Image" [the Mahamuni bronze which was located at the earlier capital of Dhanayavati].

"The Chandra kings were upholders of Buddhism, guarding and glorifying the Mahamuni [sic] shrine; their territory extended as far north as Chittagong" [then known as Chatigrama], "The conclusion to be drawn from this MS is that Weasali [Vaishali] was an easterly Hindu kingdom of Bengal, following the Mahayanist form of Buddhism and that both government and people were Indian as the Mongolian influx had not yet occurred." 20

THE UNCERTAINTY OVER THE DATE FOR THE FOUNDING OF VAISHALI

Even though the capital of the Chandras is now accepted as Vaishali, there is as yet no coeval epigraphic evidence confirming it, neither is the term by which they identified their kingdom known. Western scholars have based their identification on the word "Waythali" (Vaishali), a corrupt later version in use by the present Rakhain and the Myanmar peoples who are incapable of pronouncing the character "v".

If it was indeed Vaishali, Dr. Johnston,
As Sada was mentioned in the Sanskrit inscription (circa 729) of Ananda Chandra, Maharaja of Vaishali, felt that the region had come under the control of the descendants of the Licchavi ruling family from Vaishali, Bihar, when they fled from the ascendancy of the Imperial Gualpas (circa 300-467).21 & 22

Johnston’s theory is plausible, as the time scale corresponds with the second surge of Hindu migration into Southeast Asia, and the creation of the new Vaishali, when the Licchavi, under Dven Chandra (circa 370-425) estab-lished a Chandra vamsa (Lunar dynasty); previously the Licchavi claimed to be of the Sun/a vamsa (Solar dynasty). However, at the present time, different opinions are current amongst schol-ars as to the identity of the city which Dven Chandra inaugurated. While some believe that it was the older Dhanayavati (meaning “rich as a source for food grains” because of the fertility of the earth), about sixteen miles to the north others are of the opinion that it was Vaishali. If we assume that it was the latter, at the location (Latitude 20° 40’ 05” North, Longitude 93° 90’ East) which was to become Vaishali, there was probably in existence a sizable number of colonists from the sub-continent, making it an ideal choice for the high-born Licchavi. Then again, if it was Dhanayavati, it is unclear if the Licchavi replaced the earlier ruling house. This was an important site containing the Mahamuni Shrine, with its reputedly miraculous ‘living’ bronze image containing the Mahamuni Shrine, with its reputedly miraculous ‘living’ bronze image of Buddha. How-ever, apart from legendary accounts inventured centuries later, there is as yet no evidence of a contemporary nature to suggest that the shrine was already in existence when the Licchavi established the spot as their new capital.

As Sada was mentioned in the Maha-niddesa, followed by Mitchiner’s interpretation of Ptolemy’s 2nd century ren-dition of “Chandra”, perhaps the dynastic name of this older dynasty, too, was Chandra? Little is known of these early raja(s) who ruled at Dhanayati, apart from the fabricated accounts in later native chronicles which date this dynasty from 600 BCE to 400 CE. Hun Shwe Kaing has gone further and pushed the date for “the First Dhan-yavati dynasty” to 3000 BCE, which one must accept pure wishful thinking.23

In circa 729 CE, the inscription set by Ananda Chandra provided a list of the long line of past rulers, and the major events which occurred during their time of sovereignty. It stated that as the region was unstable, the monarch Dven Chandra had to subdue no less than 101 kings, presumably local tribal chiefs [this is a common symbolic number used to describe the many races of man, implying that as the conqueror of so many, he was entitled to the status of supreme ruler or Emperor].

Dven Chandra then laid out a nagaram (royal city),24 ovoid in plan and measuring 2.7 square miles in area. It was protected by fortifications and moats. If this was the present site of Vaishali, one will have to speculate that either for sentimental reasons, or on seeing the topography with its vast fertile lands which resembled the locality of their former home, the Licchavi decided to name their new city after it. Vaishali is a derivation of Visala meaning broad, extensive, spacious, magnificent. It was also the name of Visala, the founder of the dynasty, who was the son of Trinabu of the Iksavaku dynasty, possibly a semi-mythical ruler.

The original Vaishali in Bihar, described as “a small but powerful republic governed by nobles of the Vrij family”, was one of the six great cities of India visited by Buddha.25 It is situated about 27 miles north of Pataliputra (Patna) and contains the Licchavi Relic stupa and the Abhishek Pushkarini or Coronation Pond of the later Vaishali rulers.

Fa-Hsien and Xuanzang, the Chinese pilgrims who were in India between 401-410 and 629-645 respectively, travelled to the older “Fei-shi-li”, and reported that although the region was very fertile, this celebrated site was already in ruins.

Whether it was Dhanayavati or Vaishali, centuries later in Arakan, the Ananda Chandra Inscription of 729 [henceforth to be known simply as the Inscription] enthused that because of its magnificence the newly built but unnamed capital, “saundarya hasinam” [laughed at the grandeur of Amaravati, the Vedic deity Indra’s fabulous capital in Svarga (“Light of Paradise”)].26 & 27

Gutman has suggested that the city built by Dven Chandra was not Vaishali but Dhanayati, and dated the former to the 6th century; this was based on surviving archaeological evidence such as sculptures.28 Earlier, she had suggested the 7th century.29

If this is the case, it had to be the splendid city of Dhanayati which supposedly expressed amusement at the opulence of Indra’s Svarga. On the other hand, if Dhanayati had been constructed by Dven Chandra sometime between circa 370-425, who then was responsible for relocating the capital to a site named Vaishali? At the moment, no one appears to agree and each expert offers a bewildering array of dates and theories.

VAISHALI ESTABLISHED EARLY 6TH CENTURY

If the first half of the 6th century has been recommended by Gutman for its foundation, there were only two maharaja(s) listed in the Inscription for this period. They were Bhuti Chandra (circa 496-520) and Niti Chandra (circa 520-575). In all probability, it was the latter, for the Inscription indicated that he reigned for fifty five years. There was also peace in the realm, and more importantly, the economy appeared to have been strong [this may be attested by fact that the coins issued by him are the most common in the Chandra to have survived].

But that was all. There is no mention in the inscription of a new capital being built during his reign.

The mystery is, why was such a vitally important subject as the relocation of the capital not confirmed and identified in the text? Although it recorded the construction of a city, frustratingly it failed to name or date the event. To confuse matters further, the later Rakhaing chronicles have also claimed a date for the establishment of Vaishali — in fact a baffling number.

To quote but a few. One source 32 asserted that Vaishali was built by the monarch Vasudeva [not listed in the Inscription]. Another said that Vasudeva and his nine brothers took over old Arakan and established themselves at Dvaravati [now Thanlwin, also known as Sandoway during British colonial times; the city reputedly had a habit of floating off into the air and had to be tethered to the ground by a massive chain].

Vasudeva is also another name for the god Krishna, who is the eighth Manifesta-tion of Vishnu. Providentially, we have Gutman’s version regarding this mysterious Vasudeva. She explains that he was the focus of the Bhagavata cult [connected with the worship of Vishnu or Krishna] adopted by the Gupta monarchs, which the Chandra rulers felt obliged to imitate, doubtless to bolster their self-importance.33

According to Dallapiccola, in India the cult later amalgamated with the Vaishnava faction of the Pancaratrastras.34

One must assume that somehow this information filtered down through the centuries to later Rakhaing

Cont. P.11

VAISHALI BUILT IN 327 CE

The writers Myar Aung and Shwe Zan have claimed that Vaishali was built in 327 by Maha Taing Sandra, who is not listed in the Inscription, and that this was the year in which the great Pharagri image was com-missioned and installed at the capital at the instigation of his consort Thupaba Devi (see Chapter Eleven).31 Conversely, the late San Tha Aung, insisted that the year was 370.

VAISHALI ESTABLISHED EARLY 6TH CENTURY

VAISHALI FOUNDED IN CIRCA 2ND CENTURY BCE

In 1972, Aung Thaw, Director of Archae-ology, recorded that “a Hinduised dynasty was ruling at Vaisali (Wethali) about the 2nd century B.C.” 30

ARAKAN FOUNDED IN CIRCA 2ND CENTURY BCE

In circa 729 CE, the inscription set by Ananda Chandra provided a list of the long line of past rulers, and the major events which occurred during their time of sovereignty. It stated that as the region was unstable, the monarch Dven Chandra had to
From P. 10 chronicles who were totally unaware of its significance, and presumed it was the date of a minor event, therefore ignoring its importance.

VAISHALI CONSTRUCTED IN 788 CE
An indication of how these supposedly ancient Rakhaing chronicles could get their facts terribly wrong is revealed by Collis, who was equally ignorant of the piece of information he was quoting.

“The area now known as north Arakan has been for many years before the 8th century the seat of Hindu dynasties; in 788 A.D., a new dynasty, known as the Chandras, founded the city of Wesali [the dynasty then] came to an end in 957 A.D., being overwhelmed by a Mongolian invasion.”

[The date could not possibly be 788, for the Chandra dynasty had ended by circa 600. Yet, according to Kyi Khin, who was doubtless quoting one of the later Rakhaing chronicles, it was Maha Tain Sandra who rebuilt the old [and presumably abandoned] city of Vaishali in 788, and that it was destroyed in 957.]

VAISHALI BUILT IN 790 CE
Forchhammer, quoting the Sappadana-pakarana (Saravsthanaprakarana), claimed to be “an ancient Arakanese manuscript of great value” added another twist to the story:

“In the year 152 B.C (Buddhist Era) (A.D. 790) the new city of Vesali [sic] was founded by the King Mahataingcandra on the site where the old town had stood.”

As the chronicle did not identify this “old town”, Dhanyavati is out of the question as it is nearly sixteen miles to the north. Another source, however, said that this “old town” was Ramavati (“The City of Rama”).

VAISHALI CREATED IN 887 CE
Aung Tha U, who failed to reveal his source, made the surprising claim that Vaishali was founded by Maha Tain Sandra. He was obviously not aware that the oldest section of the Inscription [the text on the east face of the pillar] was already in existence by the reigns of either Bhumi Chandra (circa 489-496) or Bhuti Chandra (circa 496-520) in Vaishali itself, and that by 887, the Chandra dynasty had long ceased to exist.

The by now bemused and mystified reader will be relieved to learn that at this point in time all theories are tentative. Until archaeological and scientific investigations have been conducted thoroughly, and centuries of entrenched and bewildering myths created by later native chroniclers which influenced some naive foreign scholars, eradicated.

It will probably be many years before a competent archaeologist or historian, will be able to unravel this mystery and present an acceptable account period. Regarding the founding of the earlier Dhanyavati, as Gutman has suggested a period sometime between 370-425, one must also presume that this should be accepted as the date for the construction of the Mahamuni Shrine on Sirigutta hill, thereby causing the chroniclers, invariably monks of a later age, to spin in their graves.

These pious men have stated, and with great authority, that the dedication of the shrine and its bronze icon was attended by none other than Buddha himself, who “activated” the stone by breathing life into it, and named it the Candasara image. One is informed that on that fabulous day when the bronze image was created, among the distinguished guests were none other than Indra and Visvakarman (Tvashtri), the celestial architect and creator of Indra’s Swarga, who was also responsible for casting the image, and for the construction of the shrine to house it.

This preposterous claim is still accepted by the entire country. As supernatural beings, if Indra and Visvakarman were endowed with such impressive magical powers, why was there a need to actually cast a bronze image? Could it not have been magicked out of thin air? Then again, why were Hindu gods attending and taking part in a Buddhist ceremony?

If so, it is now claimed that this centre of worship was of great importance at the time, why it was not mentioned in the Inscription?

The Rakhaing who are of Sino-Tibetan stock, did not arrive at their present homeland from Western China until about the 10th century CE. However, their quasi-historical records which are secondary material compiled centuries later, and liberally sprinkled with anachronisms, now maintain that they have been in their country since 5000 BCE. They also claim, quite seriously, the early Indian dynasties of Dhanyavati and Vesali as their own—peopled by the Rakhaing race.

All these incredible assertions have been eclipsed by Ah Lon Maung’s recent and extraordinary account entitled “Some Stupas from Ponnagyun Area” which appeared on the Internet in 2006. In it he stated that over time, there had been several cities in Arakan called Vaishali which had been built and then abandoned. An idea of the time scale between the present city-site and its predecessor in the quote below is mind-boggling.

“With the accession of king Marayu and the rise of Danyawadi, the name of Vesali had gone silent for about 36 centuries until 327 AD, when king Taing Candra chose it as his capital to make it the seat of the most splendid dynasty in ancient Rakhaing.” [Marayu allegedly reigned for 62 years from 2666 BCE; this is a confused and purloined corruption of the word “Maurya”, a dynasty of India. According to later Rakhaing chronaries, Marayu was the offspring of a female deer and a Brahim rishi — the animal was miraculously impregnated by drinking his urine which contained semen].

Shwe Zan has also added to these bewildering pronouncements on the supposed founding date of Vaishali. “Up to 3325 B.C. a local dynasty ruled over Vesali. In 3337 B.C. [sic] savages (Rakhaik) [presumably rakshasa (demons)] overtook the city and rendered it without a king.”

This spectacular dating conflicts wildly with Gutman’s more restrained suggestion that Vaishali was founded sometime during the first half of the 6th century CE. Nevertheless, there is a glimmer of light at the end of this dark tunnel which represents present Rakhaing scholarship. Signs are that a more enlightened attitude is being adopted by a few sensible Rakhaing who are better educated, living abroad, and consequently have access to more liberating scientific views. Above all, they have no qualms about offending, with their candid modern views, their old-fashioned and bigoted compatriots back home.

In 2007, it was refreshing to read the Narinjara News (on the Internet) which had been set up in 2001 by a group of Rakhaing who had fled to Bangladesh to avoid persecution by the Myanmar military regime. In the section on ancient Arakan, instead of the usual eccentric claims by their dogmatic fellow countrymen in Rakhaing Land that their race had been in the country since 5000 BCE, they have stated that their forebears entered the country only in the ninth century CE as the advance guard of the Myanmar people.

Doubtless this will be seen as a contemptible statement and will be vigorously denied by the outraged present Rakhaing writers in Arakan. I also acquired a copy of an article by Leider in which the reliability of the Arakanese chronicles was discussed.

This was a forthright, no nonsense type of paper which was published, surprisingly, by the Myanmar Historical Commission for their Golden Jubilee in 2005. Yet, less than two decades ago, the dreaded Si-sit-ya or the State Censors would have been foaming at the mouth and declaring that the paper was a vile attack on the integrity of revered Myanmar and Rakhaing scholars.

It would seem things are certainly looking up, and long may they continue. For the reader who feels that my attitude to the native chronicles is a biased one, it is revealing to quote the views Cont. P. 12

FROM THE PAGES OF HISTORY

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From P. 11 from 1922 of an educated Rakhaing on the 'ancient' ancestry of his race, or the reliability of the native chronicles. San Shwe Bu, that great scholar and Honorary Archaeological Officer for Arakan, stated:

"I thoroughly agree with the view held by Mr. Harvey [the historian] that none of our historians can, on the material, e.g. palm leaf on which they are written, go back three centuries at the outside. For the material is too perishable, the climates too destructive, the old government too unstable for preservation of archives even though proper record-room methods are understood." 42

[Unfortunately, and this is infantile and unwarranted, the majority of Rakhaing civil servants of the colonial days have now been branded "British stooges"] The talent for self-delusion among the civil servants of the colonial days have unwarranted, the majority of Rakhaing underestimates their heritage.

Colonel commented on the Rakhaing of this period: "The [Rakhaing] Court was shaped on Gaur and Delhi; there were the eunuchs and the seraglio, the slaves and the executioner. But [from the 15th century onwards] it remained Hinayana Buddhist." 46

Many of the high ranking officials, together with sections of the army, in particular the Archers of the Royal Guard, were Muslims; those latter were known collectively as Kaman: Persian for a bow or archer. From 1661, fresh archers recruited from North India virtually controlled the weak Rakhaing administration, assassinating and setting up kings, until they were finally overcome and exiled in the early 1700s. 47 Unlike the courts in Myanmar proper, a form of purdah existed within the Rakhaing palace and among the upper classes.

The 15th century also witnessed a great flowering of Rakhaing literature, yet so far, the earliest surviving work, known as the Rakhaing min-thami ei-gyin ("Lullaby for a Princess of Rakhaing") only dates from 1455. 48 It is to be presumed that it was at about this time also that many of the 'ancient' chronicles were compiled. San Tha Aung said that although there are forty eight historical works, he knew of only eight, and that regarding these, he was unsure of the reliability of accounts before 1000 CE. 49

One should bear in mind that the Rakhaing chroniclers of old were incapable of reading the contemporary Sanskrit epigraphic sources in Devanagari from Vaishali. In 1975, San Than Aung commented that native scholars capable of reading Devanagari could be counted on one's hand. 50 Presumably, these 'experts' have no interest whatsoever in the Ananda Chandra Inscription, for the majority of the un-translated portions still remain a total mystery 2008. The section on Ananda Chandra itself was inaccessible for over a millennium and was deciphered in the late 1930s by Johnston, an Englishman, and published in 1944. A translation of Johnston's article by San Tha Aung only became available to readers in Burma in 1975. 51

Endnotes: -
1. Majumdar, Ancient Indian Colonies etc, pp. 56-57.
2. Kala Muka is not to be confused with a Shaivate sect who wore a black urdhvapunda (sectarian mark), and were notorious for their bizarre Tantric practices which

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Visit rohingya.org for more information.
THE PLIGHT ON THE ROHINGYA

By Nurul Islam (U.K)

Introduction

The Rohingya are one of the most forgotten, persecuted, voiceless, and underrepresented peoples on earth. Their population is estimated to be more than 3 million. Of them about 1.5 millions are in diasporas particularly in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Malaysia, Thailand etc. They are still willing to return to their ancestral homeland of Arakan in Burma. Their settlement in Arakan dates back to latter part of 7th century A.D.

-Muslim massacre in Arakan

The Second World War had major bearing on the inter-communal relationship between the Rohingya Muslims and the Rakhine Buddhists. In April 1942 communal riots flared up between the two communities and about 100,000 unarmed Rohingya were massacred while some 50,000 were forced to take refuge in Bengal or adjoining British Indian territory. A British Commander in Arakan Major Anthony Irwin remarked, “The Arakan before the war had been occupied over its entire length by both Mussulman and Maugh. Then in 1941 the two sects set to and fought. The result of this “war” was roughly that the Maugh took over the Southern half of the country and the Mussulman the Northern.... it separated two peoples into two distinct areas of influence.”

British colonial government ignored Rohingya

On 10th June 1942 the Rohingya Muslims declared North Arakan as ‘Muslim State’ and ‘Peace Committee’ was entrusted for administration of the area 2 (Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung area). In December 1942 Brigadier C.E. Lucas Phillips of British 14th Army came to Maungdaw....After hard negotiation, the Peace Committee formed by Rohingya Muslims headed by Mr. Omra Meah and Mr. Zahir Udddin Ahmed allowed the British 14th Army reentry through the Naf border town of Maungdaw. As per Public Notice No. 11-OA-CC/42 dated 31st December 1942, the British Military Administration declared the former Muslim State as “Muslim National Area”.... On 1 st. January 1945 Brigadier C.E. Lucas Phillips became the Chief administrator of the area and appointed members of Peace Committee as administrative officers of the area. This represents a landmark in the history of Burmese independence. The British recognized the Rohingya Muslims as a distinct racial group and the British officer-in-command promised the Rohingya to grant autonomy in North Arakan. But the fact was manifestly ignored by the outgoing British. Neither their case was recommended to the British colonial government nor to the Burmese leaders.

-Gen. Aung San’s word of honor

In March 1946 “Gen. Aung San came to Akyab and sought the cooperation of the Muslims of Arakan. He met the Muslim leaders at Youngman Society in Thet Kaybin, at Akyab.” He assured the Muslim leaders, advocate U Pho Khine, advocate U Yasin, advocate U Khalilur Rahman and U Sultan Mahmood (Ex. Health Minister), of the full national rights in post independence Burma. Gen. Aung San also assured Muslim leaders saying “We want Muslims to work together with us. I give (offer) you a blank cheque. We will live together and die together. Demand what you want. I will do my best to fulfill them. If native people are divided, it will be difficult to achieve independence for Burma”. It was unfortunate that Gen. Aung San and some of his colleagues were assassinated on 19 July 1947. It is sad to say that “on the very day of Bokyoke Aung San’s martyrdom, he had a special appointment with Muslim M.L.Cs. from Northern Arakan, Mr. Sultan Ahmed of Maungdaw and Mr. Abdul Gaffar of Buthidaung, in connection with the nationality and political status of Muslims or Rohingyaas of Arakan. He (Bokyoke) had also assigned Mr. Sultan Mahmood and U Aung Zan Wai, to go Maungdaw and Buthidaung, so as to organize the public there for Pa-Sa-Pha-La. Anti Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL).

The Rohingya people still believe that their full rights and freedoms would be guaranteed and undying if the father of the nation Aung San were alive. The Rohingyas in the rural areas still sing with lamentation, “if Aung San were alive the golden Burma would be in peace and the Rohingya would not be wretched but blissful.”

Burma Territorial Force’s carnage (1948-49)

Throughout the independence struggle and in post independence period, the Rakhine leaders tried their utmost to harm the Rohingyas and to influence the Burmese national leaders into excluding them from country’s politics. Since independence on 4 January 1948, the Rohingyas had been alienated. To the great grief of them, a Burma Territorial Force was formed in 1948 with hostile Rakhine youths. Under the pretext of looking for rebels, they took the law in their own hands, burnt down number of Rohingya killed or gunned down hundreds of Rohingya villagers. The Rohingya leaders strongly protested this carnage inside and outside parliament.

Parliamentary government and ‘divide and rule’ in Arakan

However, during the parliamentary rule (1948-1962), the Rohingya, by and large, enjoyed fundamental rights and freedom to some extent, although serious discrimination existed against them. Despite that, the Rohingyas were recognized as one of the many ethnic nationalities of the Union of Burma. It is grossly offensive to decency and morality that the two sister communities of Muslim Rohingya and Buddhist Rakhine have been at loggerheads under ‘divide and rule policy’ of the government and due in part to the policy of exclusion of the xenophobic Rakhine politicians and academics imbued with illusory perception that Arakan and Buddhism are synonymous and the Rohingya or Muslims are outsiders. Today this campaign has become more vigorous under the patronage of the administration.

Burma Citizenship Law of 1982

The civilianized military government of U Thein Sein continues to reject Rohingya. In 1982, Ne Win redefined the citizenship through enactment of a notorious Burma Citizenship Law and the Rohingya are now legally considered illegal aliens in the country. This law violates several fundamental principles of customary international law standards and has effectively reduced the Rohingya to a position of statelessness. It is an oppressive law injurious to democracy and human rights. Shockingly, the Rakhine academic Dr. Aye Kyaw was instrumental to framing this discriminatory racist law under infamous Ne Win. Citizenship is the social and legal link between individuals and their democratic political community.

Statistical genocide and communal strife

The regime is making statistical genocide in an effort to make Rohingya people look few, small and insignificant as a part of an evil design to deny them of their rights and prepare the minds of the people of the world for appalling consequence of slow-burning genocide. The regime launches frequent drive operations and makes forced relocation to sweep off the Rohingya inhabitants. The authorities in consonance with the state patronized non-state actors stir up occasional communal strife in Arakan and other parts of Burma resulting in the heavy loss of Muslims’ lives and properties. From 1983 the townships of Gwa, Ponyagunt and Taung-gut in southern Arakan have been turned into a ‘Muslim free zone’. Cont. P. 14
THE PLIGHT ON THE ROHINGYAS

SITUATION REPORT & ANALYSIS

ARAKAN MAGAZINE I DECEMBER ISSUE 2011 14

FROM P. 13 'Rakhine State' is attributed to the Buddhist Rakhine only

Under his Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSSP) regime’s socialist constitution former Dictator Ne Win had granted statehood of Arakan in 1974 changing its name to ‘Rakhine State’ to attribute it only to the Rakhine or the Buddhist community of Arakan, at the exclusion of the Muslim Rohingyas. The uncompromising Rakhines had manned and dominated the ‘Rakhine State Council’, which ruthlessly strived to implement Ne Win’s Twenty Year Plan (a secret plan) to exterminate the Muslims from Arakan.

‘Arakan’ is the name of the place or country, not the name of its people. But in recent years the Rakhines are using “Arakan” as their racial name (despite their official name ‘Rakhine’) with an intention to deny the existence of Rohingyas in Arakan. Settler villages and demographic changes Planned increase in Buddhist settler villages built on the Rohingya lands dotting pagodas in every nock and corner of the Rohingya homeland has caused serious demographic changes. It has systematically exterminated the Rohingya population. Vast tracks of their lands were confiscated and allotted to the Buddhist settlers invited from inside the country and Bangladesh. Some of them are drug addicts, ex-convicts and stray people and are hostile to the Rohingya villagers. They go on rampages through the surrounding Rohingya villages and committed loot, robbery, extortion, kidnapping and theft of cattle and movable properties under the patronage of the administration. These have forced the Rohingyas to become increasingly landless, internally displaced and to eventually starve them out to cross the border into Bangladesh.

Restrictions on the freedom of movement

The Rohingyas are banned from traveling from place to place, even within the same locality, without a pass. They cannot visit their friends and relatives, buy food from markets, visit hospitals and doctors, attend the funeral of their loved ones, send their children to schools, and work on their farmland outside their locality. Without paying a bribe travel permission is not issued. These restrictions on their freedom of movement and residence within the borders of the country have coerced many Rohingya families to live away from each other. Even Members of the Parliament and servicemen are not spared from this humiliation. On 29 July 2005, U Kyaw Min (alias) Shamsul Anwarul Haque, who is a Rohingya M.P. was sentenced to 47 years in jail, under Emergency Provision Act and Nationality Law. His wife and three children were also sentenced to 17 years each for traveling and residing in Rangoon.

Restrictions on marriage

The Rohingyas are banned from getting married and founding families. Prospective couples have to obtain permission from different authorities, including the Nasaka, army, police and immigration. In all these cases bribery is obvious and rampant. Getting this permission could take one or two or more years. Sometime no marriage permission has been granted. An estimated 15,000 applications for marriage permission now remain pending with the authorities in northern Arakan. Each Nasaka Sector Commander capriciously issues oppressive diktats with a freehand to compress the Rohingyas. There is no similarity in harsh mechanism from one commander to another.

From September 2003, newly married couples have to agree not take more than two children. Since February 2006, Nasaka seldom presses the bridegroom to shave his beard as a precondition for marriage permission. The engaged couples were called for interviews together asking wicked questions in front of their guardians. From time to time, an application for marriage permission has to be witnessed by three clean-shaven guardians. It has been officially encouraged to needle as much ridicule and irony and sarcasm as possible, so that life becomes dreadful and intolerable for the Rohingyas. During his visit to Buthidaung jail in northern Arakan in February 2010, the UN Special Rapporteur Quintana affirmed that most of the prisoners he saw were connected with marriage cases.

Restrictions on higher studies

Since promulgation of Burma Citizenship Law in 1982, the higher studies of the Rohingya students are under serious restrictions. They are restricted to study in any seats of learning in the country. Professional courses are a problematic matter for them. From 2001 they are even restricted to travel to regional capital Akyab (Sittwe) for studies at Sittwe University. The Rohingya students are not treated as equals. Unlike other colleges and universities, the Rohingya students reading in Sittwe University have no security of life, honour and dignity. They are frequently attacked by fellow racial Rakhine students and muggers. They are not protected in the dorms and the hostels so that they abandon their studies. Due to such horror, now all Rohingya students in Akyab have left the university hostels.

In addition, there are few high and middle schools with no enough primary schools. This inhuman policy has further marginalized the Rohingyas as the most illiterate section within Burma population, and they are thus forced to embrace a very bleak future. So long these practices of thugs lacking a spiritual nature exist there will flourish no democracy, no human dignity and rights in Arakan, nay, in the whole of Burma.

Other grave human rights violations

Northern Arakan has turned into a militarized zone with increased violations of human rights. Forced labour still exists despite increasing pressure from ILO. Arrest of Rohingyas for the purpose of extortion under various pretexts, false and imaginary charges are daily phenomenon all over Arakan. Nasaka border security forces and armed forces are licensed to practice crimes against humanity in North Arakan. They routinely confiscate properties, cattle, fowls, cash and food while committing criminal atrocities without let or hindrance.

Rape of Rohingya women becomes an official military strategy to depopulate Rohingyas to be populated by Buddhist settlers. It is the most horrendous and degrading way of ‘ethnic cleansing’. Many mosques and madrasas (religious schools), Waqf lands (endowments) and graveyard have been demolished or taken over. Extension, repairs and renovation, or construction of new mosques or religious institutes are prohibited. Muslim relics, monuments and place names have been destroyed, changed and erased. All these attempts aim at effacing the Muslim character of Arakan. Lots of Rohingyas were arrested by the authorities for making usual necessary repairs to their mosques.

Exodus into Bangladesh is in cyclic order

Bangladesh has had experienced two unprecedented Rohingya refugee exoduses from Arakan in 1978 and 1991-92, each with about 300,000 refugees. Despite repatriation, the flights of refugees into Bangladesh are still continuing unabated. Given the continued persecution of Rohingya – their position of statelessness, food insecurity, denial of access to education and employment, lack of security of life, property, dignity and honour – they have virtually become a dying alive people, counting their days in a state of terror and jeopardy. This impossible situation is a ‘push factor’ that the Burmese regime has created wanting the Rohingyas to slowly leave their hearth and home for Bangladesh and other countries, if at all possible, without international attention. Thus their exodus into Bangladesh is in cyclic order.

Rohingya become desperate to be drowned in the sea

Under extreme situation, the Rohingyas have desperately chosen...
FROM P. 14 perilous voyages by rackety boats and oceans; and hundreds across seas and oceans; and hundreds of boat people have had drowned over the years to become fish feed of the hungry sharks. Some of them were rescued or detained in Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. A large number people were victimized at the hands of the greedy exploiters and human traffickers.

In 3rd week of November 2011, about 140 Rohingya boat people had drowned. The floating dead bodies in the river Naf were not allowed for funerals or burials on the Burmese side of the border. Another group of 63, who were intercepted by Burmese security forces at Kawthaung, in southern Burma, were sentenced to one and half years each by a township court under Immigration Emergency Act 31(6)(2). It is absolutely an inhuman act. In another mishap at least 5 people drowned and around 25 went missing when a Malaysia-bound trawler carrying some 130 passengers capsized near Saint Martin Island in the Bay of Bengal on the night of 14 December.

U Thein Sein government has accelerated the persecution of Rohingyas. Its anarchic Nasaka forces have wrecked the whole Rohingya population. Then again, particularly after the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Burma on 5-7 December, the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are in fear and frustration that they might be forcibly repatriated to Arakan, where the situation of human rights has further deteriorated. According to various reports, living in squalid condition, the refugees have had endured much harassment of the Bangladesh law enforcement agencies, camp security personnel and local goons. Many refugees lost their lives over the years whilst resisting repatriation without their deliverance. Now again, the refugees become desperate to take to the sea in their attempts to go to Malaysia in order to avoid being repatriated to Arakan and to escape persecution and starvation in Burma.

The attitude of the ruling civilized military government

The new civilized government of U Thein Sein is talking changes in Burma. The sudden adjustment in political stratagem of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, followed by a three-day visit to Burma by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton from November 30, revives people’s hope for at least amorphous changes. But there is no serene expression on the faces of the Rohingyas due to increasing sign of regime’s harsh attitude towards them. The regime reaffirmed its discriminatory racial profiling in parliament at the end of August. Immigration Minister Khin Yi justified the continuation of restrictions on the basic freedoms of the Rohingyas, such as freedom of movement, marriage and education by accusing them of Bengalis having shared common religion, culture, appearance and language with the people in Bangladesh.

This disavowal has encouraged to launch anti-Rohingya propagandas by the state patronized racists and xenophobes inside and outside the country, under the guidance of Rakhine National Democratic Party (RNDP). Today the popular slogans of the xenophobes in Arakan are, “Arakan and Buddhism are synonymous. Arakan is only for Rakhine. Muslims or Rohingya are illegal Bengali immigrants; they have nothing to do in Arakan”.

Why common sense is not applied in the case of Rohingya

Burma is an ethnically diverse country. Peoples of different ethnical backgrounds are living all around the bordering areas of the country. All of them have natural affinities with the people living on the other sides of the international borders; for example, Kachin in China and India, Chin in India and Bangladesh, Rakhine in Bangladesh, Mon and Karen in Thailand and Laos etc. While this inherent identicalness between them are accepted, the regime and vested interest groups reject the existence of Rohingyas in Burma for having resemblance with the people of adjacent Chittagong region in Bangladesh, only because they are Muslims and are in South Asian appearance in contrast to Southeast Asian appearance. In reality all the Buddhists are not citizens of Burma, not all the Muslims and Christians are illegal immigrants of Burma.

Aspect of the Rohingya Problem:

The Rohingya problem has two aspects: political and humanitarian. It is political because it constitutes grave violations of human rights and flagrant denial of elementary liberty and freedom, particularly the liberty to continue their living in their own homeland and in the hearth and home of their ancestors. During his visit to Burma from 15 to 19 February, 2010, Mr. Tomas Ojea Quintana, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma, “urges the regime to end the unacceptable discrimination, human rights abuses and resultant severe economic deprivation they (Rohingyas) face, including denial of citizenship, under 1982 Citizenship Act, which contravenes generally accepted international norms to ensure that there is no state sanctioned discrimination on the basis of religion and ethnicity”. Earlier in March 2009, in his statement at the 10th session of the Human Rights Council, Mr. Quintana said, “Despite being in this region for generations, this population is stateless. This population is not recognized by the Government as one of the ethnic groups of the Union of Myanmar and is subject to discrimination.....it should be granted all other privileges, including the citizenship, which recognized ethnic groups, citizens of Myanmar do enjoy in the Union.”

Rohingya dilemma

From all legal stand points, the ethnic Rohingyas are one of the national races of Arakan and constitute one of the many indigenous peoples of Burma. In spite of that, the regime has totally rejected them as Burmese nationals; the Rakhine Buddhists of Arakan also rebuff and censure them as illegal Bengali settlers, while the forums of the Burma democracy movement and...
**Conclusion**

The “Rohingya problem”, with their ‘refugee issue’ and ‘boat people crisis’, is a manmade human tragedy deeply entrenched in the Burmese junta’s extremely discriminatory policies and planned extermination of the Rohingya minority from their ancestral homeland of Arakan. In fact, the issue of Rohingya tangle or problem needs to be resolved first and foremost within Burma, where they are not recognized as an ethnic group and denied citizenship. Until these root causes are addressed by the ruling junta, as well as those all concerned in future, the Rohingya will be in a permanent limbo; and Bangladesh, because of her geographical contiguity with Arakan, has to continue bearing the brunt of the Rohingya problem.

There is bee-line escaping of Rohingyas from Arakan into Bangladesh and onward to Middle-East, Southeast Asian and other countries using all available means of transportation. Thus the Rohingya problem is a regional problem with international dimension. In the absence of national protection they deserve international protection, and as such international community can be taken as their hope. Meanwhile, a permanent solution is to be found out with the concerted efforts of the international community with UNO, OIC and all those countries that are caught up in the Rohingya refugee problem and boat people crisis. In this connection, the government of Bangladesh is required to play a “key role”.

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**Endnotes:**

5. Towards Understanding Arakan History, p.99
The reclusive south east nation of Myanmar - still known as Burma in the international arena - has been very much in the news for sometime for obvious reasons. The United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has paid a visit to the country, making it the first in last fifty years by an American dignitary of her status. The visit was much talked about across the globe since it was associated with the willingness of the regime in that country for democratic reforms that are very much vaunted by the people of Burma.

The country has been under military rule since General Ne Win seized power in 1962 and remained in office till 1988, when SLORC, composed of 21 senior military officers took over from General Ne Win. Even though the newly 'elected' regime claims that it has now a representative government following last year's controversial elections, it is a nation where a lady known as "icon of democracy" is struggling for the last few decades to establish popular rule and her difficult quest for democracy earned her the Nobel peace prize.

But Aung San Suu Kyi, who earlier was denied power despite winning the elections way back in 1992, still remains midway through the complex task of democratisation of her country. Hillary Clinton met her and also the regime chief President Thein Sein amidst growing signs that the country is veering towards reforms that would help flourish democracy. The US secretary of state appeared upbeat about coming developments in Burma as regards creating a democratic environment, but remained cautiously optimistic. Because, it is believed that the road to democracy in the country is still strewn with many impediments and it makes it interesting to witness when Burma can really overcome such obstacles. Nonetheless, things look better for the country which so far defined international glamour for changes and is now happily showing signs that are encouraging.

As a sequel to the visit of the US Secretary of State, certain changes are discernible in Burma that augurs well for democratic reforms. The regime has freed a good number of political prisoners while the opposition is asking for the release of many more. A major development in recent times in the country has been the decision by Aung San Suu Kyi to contest the by-elections in the coming months as a mark of her participation in the process aimed at bringing the character of the representative authority in governance. Her National League for Democracy (NLD) party boycotted last year's polls which saw a massive victory by the supporters of the current regime. The country's rulers claim that it is now a "popular" government while democratic world has shunned the balloting as lacking in credibility. Suu Kyi's party was not registered with the election commission although it won a landslide in the 1992 voting. The elections carried little legitimacy as the nation continued to remain ruled by the same group of people - albeit under a different façade. The democratic leader - Aung San Suu Kyi - remained under house arrest for long and this spell of internment ended only after the conclusion of the so-called elections.

But rather surprisingly, the reformist leadership of president Thein Sein, a retired general and former Junta member, has now persuaded the opposition force to register as a political party and contest the coming by-elections. Suu Kyi is running for one of the seats in the by-elections and this is being seen as a step forward towards creating an atmosphere conducive to democratic polls. The regime has also allowed anti-government protests on a limited scale that was prohibited earlier.

The positive fallout of the visit of the US secretary of state are palpable in other areas as well since Hillary Clinton announced concessions to Burma in terms of relaxing the economic and other restrictions imposed earlier through UN embargo. Business and other contacts from the West are now showing interest in Burma.

However, the Western restrictions were not very effective as several nations including China, India, Thailand and Singapore are in close trade and business interactions with Rangoon despite its lack of democratic credentials. Evidently, regional, political and other strategies are playing a role here. Beijing and even democratic India seem to be wooing Burma for strategic purposes. Hillary Clinton has not announced total withdrawal of the sanctions imposed earlier because of denial of political reforms and iron-fist rule and oppression of opponents. But the concessions are seen as an encouragement by the West for national reconciliation that until recently showed scant respect for human rights. President Barack Obama had surprised the world to an extent when he had announced his secretary of state's Burma visit at a regional summit at Bali in Indonesia. It appears that Clinton's visit went off fairly well given the complexity associated with it.

Burma is also conscious that it is getting the opportunity of leading the regional grouping ASEAN in the coming years and this makes it more keen to open up and embrace democratic principles as far as possible. For, it cannot justify that position as fellow ASEAN members demonstrating bigger eagerness for the representative governments in recent years. The signs pouring in from Burma are encouraging, but the road to final destination is still a bumpy one and it remains to be seen how far really the regime will go with the cherished democratic reforms. Because, the regime while being willing to bring about reforms, is also likely to be keen on remaining at the helm of state affairs and this may discourage it from going all the way on the democratic path. SOURCES: BSS OF BANGLADESH ##
News of Boat People

Bangladesh Cracks Down on Boat Migrants to Malaysia

Nearly 200 people – half of them Rohingyas – have been arrested and some 10 boats seized since the latest wave of migration began in early November.

By Shafiq Alam from Dhaka

Bangladesh has launched a crackdown on groups smuggling economic migrants and ethnic Rohingya refugees out of the country to Malaysia, via a perilous and sometimes fatal sea crossing.

According to police, dozens of wooden boats overloaded with Rohingyas and Bangladeshi migrants, have attempted the approximately 3,200 kilometre journey since the monsoon rains ended in October.

Last week a boat carrying 120 people – mostly ethnic Rohingyas – capsized in the Bay of Bengal, said Colonel Zahid Hasan of the Border Guards of Bangladesh (BGB).

"Some 100 people have survived, we learned from fishermen, but the rest are missing and presumed drowned," he told AFP. Since the accident, a series of BGB raids in the southeast coastal towns of Teknaf and Sabrum, which border Burma and host a large population of Rohingya refugees, have prevented a number of boats from illegally setting sail.

Described by the United Nations as one of the most persecuted minorities on earth, thousands of Muslim Rohingyas – who are not recognised as citizens in Myanmar — stream across the border into Muslim-majority Bangladesh every year. Bangladesh recognises 28,000 of them as registered refugees, who live in two official UN camps near the border. This figure is a fraction of the 200,000 to 300,000 "unofficial" refugees, according to government estimates.

The Rohingyas are driven by a sense of "utter frustration" to attempt the boat trip to Malaysia, said Mojibur Rahman, a registered refugee at the UN's Kutupalong refugee camp. "For many, the risky sea journey is better than the squalor and near starvation in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. A lot of Rohingyas know that the trip is like suicide. But do they have any choice?," he told AFP.

Bangladesh stopped a UN-managed program to help Rohingya refugees resettle in third countries last year, said Rahman, who estimated that at least 3,000 Rohingyas had embarked on the sea crossing to Malaysia since late October. They have been joined by a large number of impoverished Bangladeshi living in southeast coastal villages, who see Malaysia as their best — and closest — opportunity for carving out a new life.

The vast majority hope to secure unregistered work as manual labourers on construction sites. "Traffickers charge only around 20,000 taka ($300) for a boat ride to Malaysia, which is at least 15 times cheaper than the migration fees being charged by recruiting agencies," said Teknaf police chief Mahbubul Haq.

The arrested sea voyagers are — Mohamed Seraz (25), Mohamed Taher (16), Shona Meah (25), Eman Hossain (26), Noor Hossain (25), Abul Hossain (40), Salim Ullah (16), Aman Ullah (21), Abdul Hamid (38), son of Noor Mohamed, and Nurul Hakim (60).

"The sea voyagers have already paid Taka 30,000 per each to Salim Maji (driver), son of Ghura Meah, hailed from Lomboki village of Teknaf, and Gaffor Maji, hailed from Fansari Para of Saparun union for the voyage of Thailand or Malaysia," according to an arrestee. ### Source : KALADAN PRESS

BurmeSE Authority Bans Again on Prayer Calling (Azn) in Maungdaw

Thursday, 29 December 2011
Maungdaw, Arakan State: The concerned authority – District and Township administration offices- had banned again on prayer calling (Azan) with loudspeakers in Maungdaw on December 26, according to a religious leader from Maungdaw.

"The order was dispatched to village administration offices by U Aung Myint Soe, the district administration officer and U Kyi San, township administration officer." "Some of the village administration officers from Burma border security force (Nasaka) area number 6 were ordered to their villages not to use the loudspeakers while prayer calling (Azan) in the mosques."

U Than Htun, the village administration officer, Shwezer village had ordered not to use loudspeakers while prayer calling in the Mosques on December 27, according to an elder from the village.

"The massage was again called by Captain Hay Win Min Htun, the officer in charge of camp 14 under Nasaka area 6 while the Nasaka called meeting with village’s elders and villager administration officer on sDecember 27."

"We stopped to call with loudspeakers for prayer calling in the Mosques after the meeting in the Shwezer village tract."

"It is the new civilian government styles for moving the discipline democracy which the head of the state U Thein Sein stated that freedoms of religious are available in the country, but the authorities are going to stop some systems of religious other than Buddhist in northern Arakan where Rohingya community who believed Islam are resided."

The ruling party – Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) –promised and ensured the Rohingya community that will remove restriction on marriage, education, movement, building worships places when the party came to campaign for election 2010 in northern Arakan. But, the promised and ensured which given in the election were disappeared and more imposed restriction on Rohingya again.

"Burma persecutes the Rohingya, the minority Muslim group of northern Arakan, denying them citizenship and harassment and persecution of all Human Rights abuses. In particular, it said Rohingya women suffer at the hands of the government. Freedom House has reported mass military rapes of Rohingya women. Fearing for their lives, many of these women have fled the country to Bangladesh. According to UN Watch – a nonprofit NGO – stated a recent session on women’s rights of the Forum on Minority Issues of the UN Human Rights Council. ## Source : KALADAN PRESS
2.4 Racial and religious intolerance

The present situation of the Rohingyas are the result of joint oppressions by the ultra-racist Rakhine and Burmese military government through forcible expulsion from their homeland by means of persecution, genocidal massacres, torture and harassment in the most inhuman manner. Therefore, prior to any refugee repatriation process, the government of Burma (Myanmar) should accept the following pre-requisites and fully implement them in Arakan.

3. Pre-requisites for repatriation

1. Recognition of Rohingyas as an indigenous ethnic minority of Burma.
2. Issuance of national securitization cards to all Rohingyas.
3. To lift all form of restrictions and harassments such as travel ban, marriage restriction, land and property confiscation, extortion, arbitrary arrest, forced ration collection for army etc.
4. To stop building model villages and sent back all model villagers to their origin.
5. To return all confiscated lands and properties to the original owner.
6. To give assurance for religious freedom.
7. To give access for higher education and to provide enough hospitals and medical facilities in northern Arakan.

As all above-mentioned factors are the main elements that directly contribute to uproot and displaced hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas from Arakan, unless and until developing the situation in Arakan, the repatriation of refugee will not fulfill its primary objective that is the durable solution.

4. Creating conducive environment for returnees

Instead of passively waiting for conditions to be changed Burma, refugee agencies, must work actively to create conditions conducive to their safe return. It should emphasize on:

**The right of all persons to return to their country;**
**The prime responsibility of countries of origin to establish conditions for safe and dignified return;**
**The obligation of Burma to accept the return of their nationals;**
**Calls on Burma to promote conditions conducive to the return of refugees and to support their sustainable reintegration.**

5. Welfare of voluntary returnees

It is essential to maintain an image of truly voluntary repatriation. Voluntary repatriation requires asylum, it respects the refugees, and allows them to make unpressured decisions. The returnees should have the following:

1. Overall peace and security;
THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE PROBLEM

BY DR. HABIB SIDDIQUI (USA)

1. Background

Recently, bilateral talk has been taken placed in between the government of Burma and Bangladesh regarding refugee repatriation. However, the situation in Arakan, after the election, becomes worst than ever. The persecution and the human rights violation accelerated than before. It is too early to repatriate refugees to Arakan without changing any situations in Arakan. Premature repatriation will repeat mass refugee exodus again as we have witnessed the second mass refugee exodus in 1992, after 14 years time from the first mass refugee exodus in 1978. In order to gain long lasting solution, hosting countries and international bodies need to find out the root causes of the problems.

2. Root Causes of the Rohingya Refugees

The Rohingya, who have been living with distinct socio-cultural entity, are not tolerated in Burma, and they have long been oppressed and persecuted in a planned way in order to transform the Arakan into a purely Burmanized Buddhist Arakan. Apparently, the successive military government of Burma with the aid of ultra racist Rakhine (Magh) have been pursuing the policies of de-Muslimization and Burmanization in Arakan applying various kind of inhuman polices to drive them out from the soil of Arakan. Indeed it is a problem of religious intolerance and political persecution and is a systematic eradication of an ethnic Muslim minority from their ancestral land; periodically, armed operations were conducted against unarmed Rohingya civilians since her independence on Jan 4, 1948.

1. The armed operations against Rohingyas

01. Military Operation (5th Burma Regiment) November 1948;
02. Burma Territorial Force (BTF) Operation 1949-50;
03. Military Operation (2nd Emergency Chin regiment) March 1951-52;
04. Mayu Operation October 1952-53
05. Mone-thone Operation October 1954
06. Combined Immigration and Army Operation January 1955;
07. Union Military Police (UMP) Operation 1955-58;
08. Captain Htin Kyaw Operation 1959;
09. Shwe Kyi Operation October 1966;
10. Kyi Gan Operation October-December 1966;
11. Ngazinka Operation 1967-69;
12. Myat Mon Operation February 1969-71;
14. Sabe Operation February 1974-78;
15. Nagamin Operation February 1978-79;
16. Shwe Hintha Operation August 1978-80;
17. Galone Operation 1979;

Out of 19 operations, 18 were carried out within 43 (1948-1991) years time, it means every 2½ years there was one operation for Rohingya. Obviously, Rohingyas are constantly and gradually migrated to Bangladesh, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Thailand and Malaysia to escape from the persecution. However, the junta and the racist Rakhine (Magh) are still not satisfied and the Na-Sa-Ka operation was started in 1992.

2.2 The Na-Sa-Ka Operation

(From 1992 — Presently going on)

It was the longest and the worst ever operation in the history of Rohingya. It was a new extermination design, with long-term plans and programmes under the command of ex-Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, the Chief of the Directorate of the Defence Service Intelligence (DDSI) and the Secretary No. 1 of the SPDC then. Through this operation, the Rohingyas are made educationally backward, economically crippled, socially and culturally de-generated. Many mosques have been destroyed and closed down. Arbitrary killing, confiscation of land, forced labours, forced relocation, forced ration collection for army, extortion of money and raping of women are the tactics used in this operation.

2.3 The Citizenship Law of 1982

1982 Burma citizenship law (Pyithu Hlut-taw law No.1982-87) supersedes the 1948 Constitution Nationality Laws. According to the 982 law, there are citizens, associate citizens, and naturalized citizens. Under this law, citizens by birth are Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Burman, Mon, Rakhine and Shan ethnic groups.

The new citizenship law was purposely formulated to target the Rohingya Muslims and denying their rights to nationality and thus rendered them to the status of stateless people. This particular law will continue to create outflow of refugees which overburden other countries and create threats to peace and tranquillity within the region.

The Rohingya problem is a man-made tragedy recurring in cycle. The neighbouring countries, particularly Bangladesh, are over burdened with the Rohingya influxes. It creates regional instability posing serious threat to the world peace.

Aye Nu Sanuwarha, a Rohingya woman who accompanied actress Michelle Yeoh is seen in a group photo with Speaker John Bercow. The Speaker John Bercow and actress Michelle Yeoh meet in the Speaker’s chambers at House of Commons at Westminster during a visit of Burma Campaign UK on December 14, 2011. Michelle Yeoh portrays Aung San Suu Kyi in the upcoming film, ‘The Lady’ which will be released across the UK on December 30, 2011. Mr. Bercow is a long time supporter of democracy and human rights in Burma.

In this Photo: (L-R) Moe Bu, Zoya Phan, Wai Hnin Pwint Thon, Michelle Yeoh, John Bercow, Anna Roberts, Aye Nu Sanuwarha and Joshua (December 14, 2011 - Photo by Eamonn McCormack/Getty Images Europe)