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**Rohingyas Boat Peoples Arrested Again Thai-Navvy in Southern Thailand On Their Way To Malaysia**
THE BURMA’S UNION DAY

On 12 February 1947, General Aung San held Panglong Conference in Shan State. After series of meetings and serious consultations between General and Supreme Council of United Hill Peoples (SCOUP) delegates, the unanimous agreement called the Panglong Manifesto (Declaration) was born. In this historic conference, the principle of formation of a Union of Burma was agreed, and full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas was accepted in principle. On the basis of the Panglong agreement based on the agreed upon principle of ‘unity in diversity’, articulated by Gen. Aung San, a right model for a country like Burma with diverse ethnic nationalities, the Union of Burma was eventually born on 4 January 1948 by and large through the joint efforts of all people of the country.

To allay fears about the unequal treatment of the ethnic nationalities, Aung San assured: ‘if Burman receives one Kyat, you will also get one Kyat.’ However, there were many serious shortcomings. Representatives of some major ethnic nationalities, such as Karen and Karenni were either absent or had not actively participated; other minorities of frontier areas like the Pao and Wa, Rohingyas or Muslim Arakanese were bypassed by the agreements reached.

This year on 12 February, 65th anniversary of the Burma’s Union Day was celebrated across the country with mixed feelings. The government of U Thein Sein made some positive changes with a promise to bring about more changes towards democratic and political reforms and to working with Panglong spirit while the leaders of Burma democracy movement with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi are of the consensus that a 21st Century Panglong Conference needs to be convened in not distant future for the institutionalization and promotion of federal democracy in Burma. Yet majority people doubt the promises of U Thein Sein and as such, they think Aung San Suu Kyi may not be able to accomplish her democracy mission under the present political scenario with a constitution that guarantees military Paramountcy. However, the Rohingyas people are in a limbo and the wind of change has not touched them yet.

Despite deficiencies, the Panglong Conference, which resulted in the agreement of 12 February 1947 signed by 22 representatives, brought together minority groups and Burmans to take independence jointly and as such Aung San, who negotiated the independence, was able to convince the British that the minority areas should not be separated from Burma proper.

The Panglong Conference was, in fact, an epoch — making event. The history of Burma would have developed differently if there was no Panglong Agreement. The diverse peoples of Burma still consider the spirit of Panglong a requisite. Every year its anniversary is celebrated as Burma’s Union Day. The Union Day is an expression of emotion to unite all peoples of the country and to work in unison for the perpetuation of the Union. ###

OUTFLOWS OF ROHINGYAS FROM ARAKAN

The Rohingyas are an ethnic, linguistic and religious minority group mainly concentrated in North Arakan in Burma. Today an estimated 1.5 million Rohingya population live in whole Burma with about 1.5 million in diasporas. Rohingyas are descendants of Moorish, Arab and Persian traders, including Moghul, Truk, Pathan and Bengali soldiers cum migrants. They are a mixed group of people with many ethnic and racial connections. They speak a language which was then spoken in the VAISHALI or WESALI period of Arakan. They profess Sunni Islam and are distinct from the majority Burmese population who are of East Asian stock and mostly Buddhists.

During colonial period the British identified Rohingya as Muslim/ Mohammedan/Arakanese Muslim while Rakhine as Mugh /Arakanese Buddhist. They also called the Rohingyas as Arakanese while the Rakhine as Mugh. In post independence history of Burma, their separate ethnic identity ‘Rohingya’ was recognized by the then Democratic Government of Premier U Nu (1948-1962). Since Burma’s independence in 1948, the Rohingyas have been gradually excluded from the process of nation-building. Their situation worsened after the military takeover in 1962 progressively subjecting them to humiliating restrictions and harsh treatment by the state. While all the minorities in Burma are facing human rights violations the Rohingyas are the worst victims of crimes against humanity facing statelessness.

The regime has created an impossible situation for the Rohingyas to live in their ancestral homeland. Frequent drive operations have been conducted against them. There were mass exoduses to Bangladesh in 1978 and again in 1991-92. Each time, international pressure persuaded Burma to accept them back and repatriation followed, often under coercion. But the outflow continues. In 1982, Burma’s military rulers brought the 1982 Citizenship Law which deprived most people of Indian and Chinese descent of citizenship. It has been observed that: The Rohingyas are recognised neither as citizens nor as foreigners but categorized as “Myanmar residents”, which is not a legal status.

In Bangladesh, the 28,000 Rohingyas still remaining in two camps are recognised as refugees; but it is estimated that up to 200,000 more live outside the camps. Bangladesh considers them as irregular migrants and they have no access to official protection. Several hundred Rohingyas are currently languishing in Bangladeshi jails arrested for illegal entry. Most are still awaiting trial, sometimes for years. The combination of their lack of status in Bangladesh and their statelessness in Burma puts them at risk of indefinite detention. Several hundred Rohingyas are currently languishing in Bangladeshi jails arrested for illegal entry.

However, the truth is that they are people who escaped persecution at home on ground of their religion and ethnicity. It is important that they should be able to live peacefully and honourably in their own homeland of Arakan/Burma with all human dignity and rights. The international community should take collective action to end the persecution they suffer in Burma. As persecuted people they also need, as they deserve, adequate protection in their countries of refuge. Despite this, only a small number are

Cont. P. 3
The amendment of the constitution: nationalities of Burma came up with a 5 point proposed outline for in unity for the country's independence from the then British colonial rule.

The 9 points agreements are:
1. A member of the Frontier Areas will be appointed to deal with the affairs of the Frontier Areas;
2. The said member will be a minister in the interim government of Burma led by Aung San;
3. The said Minister for Frontier Areas will have two deputies;
4. The two deputies will be entitled to attend meetings where the affairs of the Frontier Areas are discussed;
5. The Frontier Areas will enjoy full autonomy in internal administration;
6. Miltkyina and Bhamo districts will be reserved for the future Kachin State;
7. Citizens of the Frontier Areas shall enjoy rights and privileges which are regarded as fundamental in democratic countries;
8. Financial autonomy vested in the Federated Shan States shall be maintained;
9. Kachin Hills and Chin Hills will continue to receive financial assistance from the revenues of Burma. It will be examined whether the financial arrangements similar to those between Burma and the Federated Shan States can be applied to Kachin Hills and Chin Hills.

Within one year, Burma won its independence from British and became a sovereign nation on January 4, 1948. But the agreement, which was never implemented, provided for the creation of a Federal Union, called for power sharing between the majority Burman and non-Burman ethnic nationalities, and granted the non-Burman ethnic nationalities autonomy in the administration of their territories. In 1961, at the Taunggyi Seminar of Federal Union, the ethnic nationalities of Burma came up with a 5 point proposed outline for the amendment of the constitution:

1. Burma Proper must be a constituent state like Chin, Kachin, Shan and others;
2. Equal power to the two Houses of Parliament;
3. Equal representation for each state in the Upper House;
4. Reservation of the following subjects for the Union government and the remaining subjects for the states: Foreign affairs, Defense, Finance, Coinage and paper currency, Posts and Telegraphs, Railways, Airways and Waterways, Union Judiciary and Sea Customs Duty;
5. Fair distribution of the revenue collected by the Union Government among the states.

of them would have and the non-Burmans would have said, “Well, that’s democracy. There’s still another time to try it again.” But on March 2, 1962, Gen. Ne Win and his group staged a bloodless military coup saying the present setup was disintegrating by the ethnic groups and Burmese MPs.

The Military framed Constitution of 2008 is likely to lead to the continued Burmanisation of ethnic minorities and increased militarisation of ethnic areas, with the subsequent increase of human rights abuses which always follows the presence of the Burmese Army. It could also lead to large-scale conflict as armed ethnic groups with ceasefire agreements are told to become part of the Burmese Army as border guard forces, and are threatened with military attack if they refuse. This in turn could lead to a major human rights and humanitarian crisis.

The failure to address the legitimate rights and aspirations of Burma’s ethnic groups is a root cause of instability and dictatorship in Burma. There will not be peace and stability in Burma until they are addressed.

This is why Burma's new Constitution is fatally flawed. It does not address any of these issues. There is no way that Burma, under the 2008 Constitution, can achieve peace, stability, democracy and full human rights.

On 12 February 2012, all Burmese celebrated the 65th Union Day or Paytaungsu Naay in side and out-side the country that commemorates the signing of the Panglong agreement of 1947. On this historic occasion it is particularly important to ensure that political reforms in Burma live up to the aspirations of the non-Burmans and Burman ethnic nationalities, including their desire to participate equally in public life.

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Celebrating the 65th anniversary of Union Day in Rangoon, the Nationalities Brotherhood Forum, a five-party ethnic alliance stated, “We are saddened by the continuing lack of equality and national democratic rights for the ethnic nationalities, despite the fact that Independence was collectively achieved for the Union of Burma through the spirit of Panglong,” reads the official statement released for the occasion.

Held at M3 Hall in Maynigone Township of Rangoon, the ceremony was attended by over 300 guests, including the National League for Democracy party leader Aung San Suu Kyi as the most prominent guest. In a short speech, Suu Kyi stressed the importance of the Burmans and non-Burmans, and the need to respect the rights of all ethnic groups working together for the sake of the Union.
A political solution to the question of the future of the ethnic nationalities must be reached in order to create “lasting peace.” “The entire nation will be overjoyed to see a democratic contest in the elections and equal participation in state affairs,” Thein Sein further said. “It can be seen that the new government is showing respect to people’s voices and fulfilling their aspirations.”

Unfortunately current ceasefire negotiations are repeating the mistakes of the past with government representatives failing to address the root causes of the conflict. As U Zin Linn noted in an op-ed calling for the implementation of the Panglong Agreement “[w]ithout addressing and honoring the ethnic people’s demand for self-determination, the latest parliament-based government seems unable to stop political and civil strife throughout ethnic areas … National reconciliation and ethnic self-determination are two sides of the same coin, and they must be addressed in the new parliament and in respective regional and state parliaments. If the current government fails to deal with the Panglong initiative or equal rights of ethnic minorities, its so-called political reforms will not be a meaningful process.”

A number of ethnic armed groups are seeking to recapture the spirit of Panglong Agreement on its 65th anniversary and are insisting that ceasefire negotiations be accompanied by political dialogue. The NMSP Chairman Nai Htaw Mon stating that “[w]e have told the government many times that it must stop fighting in Kachin State and Shan State but it has failed to do so. It is our sincere hope that Thein Sein’s government will recognize this desire on the part of the people and move forward with genuine political dialogue such that next year, on the 66th Union Day, we can say that there is true peace and unity in Burma.”

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Rohingya Boat Peoples arrested again in Southern Thailand

By M.A. Alam

Rohingyas Boat peoples were arrested again by Thai Security Forces in the southern Thailand on their way to Malaysia on 8 February 2012, reported Phuketwan. A boat containing 85 Rohingya men and boys was arrested off the Thai province of Satun, South of Phuket. The would-be refugees, heading for Malaysia, were taken into custody by local police at La Ng to after being spotted by National Park rangers near Lidee Island.

It’s believed their 12-metre vessel ran out of petrol and the sailors, all male, told villagers that they had been without food for four days. According to officials who confirmed the capture of the men to Phuketwan, the would-be refugees were given food and drink by locals and will be handed over to Thai Immigration officials on 10 Feb, 2012.

The men said they had set off from Ranong, a port on the Thai-Burma border, with the blessing of local Thai officials and were aiming for Malaysia. A television camera captured the boat arriving in Satun and the footage has been posted at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature.

Despite the signs of a more open and free approach by the Government in Burma, the Muslim-minority Rohingya remain non-citizens, without the rights accorded to other residents. Restrictions on movement and marriage inside Burma mean many Rohingya men and boys put to sea in rickety boats in an attempt to begin a new life elsewhere.

A crackdown by authorities in northern Burma and neighboring Bangladesh, where many Rohingya have fled to become unwelcome refugees, briefly interrupted the flow of boats south. More boats have been sailing recently. One vessel, apprehended in Phang Nga, north of Phuket, on January 28, 2012 contained 79 men, including at least one Thai who appears to have been the person who provided the boat in Bangladesh.

That arrival and another arrival of 54 men on December 4, 2011 at Takuapa, the Phang Nga district capital on the Andaman coast, were also filmed. Another boatload of 54 Rohingya is reported to have landed in the Indonesian province of Aceh on February 1, 2012.

Although the Thai military-Navy continues to be involved in the covert detention of the men who land in Thailand, non-government organisations are confident that they are no longer being mistreated. The policy of Thai Navy patrols which intercept Rohingya vessels at sea is to “help on” boats to Muslim-majority Malaysia, their preferred destination, with food, water and repairs if required.

It’s a change from January 2009, when Phuketwan and the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post newspaper revealed that hundreds of Rohingya were being “pushed back” in a secret operation from an island in Thailand. Scores are thought to have perished at sea before survivors reached Indonesia and the Andaman and Nicobar islands, which belong to India.

The change in approach by the Thai authorities means that some of the men have been directed to an island off southern Thailand, where people-traffickers have picked them up for transfer to Malaysia. It is believed that those who are taken back to the Thai-Burma border by the Thai Army-Navy are also quickly returned to brokers.

The policy of the Burmese Navy is the same as that of the Thai Navy, although the “help on” policy in Burma sometimes comes with beatings, boatpeople report. The boats usually come ashore in Thailand of necessity when the Rohingya run out of food and water or experience mechanical problems.

Often, navigating by sight, the men have no idea whether they are off Thailand or have reached Malaysia. In recent years there have been many landings north and south of Phuket, including one on southern Phuket in January last year.

On February 1, 2012, a total of 54 Rohingya boat people stranded on the open sea off North Aceh were rescued by Acehnese fishermen, reported in Jakarta Globe.

The rescued people are all from the Burmese Muslim ethnic minority Rohingya, and are thought to have been en route to seek asylum in Australia when the motor on their wooden vessel broke down. Jamali, a leader of a fishermen’s association in North Aceh’s Dewantara sub-district, took part in the rescue, which was undertaken at about 2 p.m. “Fishermen from Krueng Geukueh succeeded in evacuating the Rohingya from one wooden boat, which was damaged and its motor dead,” Jamali told journalists.

Once safely ashore, the asylum seekers were taken to nearby Blukat Teubai village, where they were accommodated in the annex of a mosque. Dozens of villagers donated food and drink to the exhausted seafarers. “Their condition was very concerning. He added that the villagers intended to move them soon to the Krueng Geukueh port area.

This is the fourth time that Rohingya refugees have been rescued in Acehnese waters. On Jan. 7, 2009, a boat carrying 194 Rohingya was stranded near Sabang, and a month later, on Feb. 3, a further 198 were found in the waters off Idi Rayeuk in East Aceh. On Feb. 16 last year, a vessel carrying 129 Rohingya refugees was found near Laweung in Aceh Besar.

Rohingyas are world most persecuted people in their ancestral home land Arakan of Burma. The Rohingya leave Burma because of political persecution, with those who take to the seas usually setting out for Australia or Malaysia.

If they are rescued in Indonesian waters, the Rohingya are normally processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to determine their status. The UN agency then looks for a third-party nation willing to accept them. There are 11 designated countries for refugee resettlement, but acceptance depends on recipient countries’ annual quotas.

Of concern to NGOs lately have been three capsize incidents involving four boats. Many men were picked up by local fishermen off the Bangladesh coast but it’s believed as many as 200 may have drowned. The annual “sailing season” for Rohingya begins each November and does not end until the monsoon arrives, usually in April, when putting to sea in the kind of boats they pay brokers to use becomes even more dangerous. ## Source: Phuketwan & Jakatapost
Today is the 65th anniversary of the Union Day of Burma. It marks the signing ceremony of the ‘Historic Panglong Agreement’ between General Aung San and the leaders of Chin, Kachin and Shan ethnic groups guaranteeing a genuine federal union of Burma. However, Burma’s military forces have seized control of most parliamentary seats. Remarkably, 77 percent of the parliamentary seats have been seized by the military faction monopolized-parliament to form an effective coalition.

Without addressing and honoring the ethnic people's demand for self-determination, the latest parliament-based government seems unable to stop political and civil strife throughout ethnic areas. In reality, ethnic people's demand for equal rights is not a new one but already mentioned in the 1947-Panglong agreement.

Burma’s sixty-four year-old Historic Panglong Agreement has been ignored by the consecutively Burmese regimes. The said agreement has been disregarded by the military leaders as they did not support the ‘Federalism’ since 1962. The Panglong Agreement was signed on Feb. 12, 1947, between General Aung San and leaders of the Chin, Kachin and Shan ethnic groups guaranteeing to establish a genuine federal union of Burma.

National reconciliation and ethnic self-determination are two sides of the same coin, and they must be addressed in the new parliament and in respective regional and state parliaments. If the current government fails to deal with the Panglong initiative or equal rights of ethnic minorities, its so-called political reforms will not be a meaningful process. ##

BY ZIN LINN, February 12, 2012, UTC

The conference was a break from the talks of the hardships they faced. Food was served in the conference, too! Their religious practices revolve around the mosque, which is central to the community. They believe that together the ethnic minorities of Burma are stronger, as Nant Bwa Bwa Phan (Burma Campaign Office volunteer) said at the start of the gathering “Burma is all of ours”.

BROUK’s president Tun Khin spoke about their history and how the origins of the Rohingya’s dates back to the 8th century in the area of Arakan in Burma. They had a hand in the defining moments in shaping the history of Arakan from the Arab conquests to the British rule.

The culture of the Rohingyas is deeply treasured; much of their culture is influenced by the different people the Rohingyas encounter throughout their history such as the Burmese, Indians, Arabs and Persians. BROUK’s Yasmin Ara, spoke about their daily life routines; the women are the early risers who collect water for the family, this also gives the women to get together and gossip! Their religious practices revolve around the Islamic practices such as the five daily prayers and Eid. The Rohingya food is predominantly made of sticky rice, fruits and vegetables; meet is eaten only on special occasions- some great food was served in the conference too!

The conference was a break from the talks of the hardships of what the Rohingya people face, and instead the Rohingyans spoke of things which they are passionate about, the things which are at the very core of their culture beyond their sufferings. This undoubtedly makes one recognise them as a people rather than the most persecuted ethnic minority. All in all it leads to a great understanding of the Rohingya people. ##
There are some three to four hundred thousands of them in the city, but, according to the law, they simply do not exist. The Burmese Muslims - known as Rohingyas –make up a sizable portion of illegal immigrants living in Karachi, and, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), are considered to be one of the most persecuted ethnic groups in the world.

Although they are often misconstrued as Bengalis, the Rohingyas, both culturally and linguistically, are very much different from the people of Bangladesh. “For the layman, they are all Bangladeshis, but the Burmese people are poles apart in every way, even in terms of facial features,” said Muhammad Khan Lodhi, an assistant director at the National Alien Registration Authority (Nara).

**History**

“The Rohingyas are a stateless people,” says Daniyal Rizvi of the Futuristic Foundation, a social research institute that works extensively on issues of illegal immigration and human trafficking in South Asia.

Rizvi said that a majority of the Burmese people living in Pakistan belong to the Arakan province of Myanmar. The Rohingyas are not considered Burmese by the government of Myanmar because they are not of a ‘pure Buddhist bloodline’.

In the late 70s, and again in early 90s, two major Rohingya exoduses took place. Their people were, for all intents and purposes, forced to leave their home country due to the imposition of laws that restricted their intermarriage and religious freedom. They took refuge in Bangladesh.

“There is not a single new mosque built in the whole of the Northern Arakan State (NRS) during military rule – a state where 80 percent of the population is Muslim, even after multiple resettlement programmes by the state to bring down the Muslim population,” added Rizvi, who has visited Myanmar nine times for research on these issues.

The Bangladeshi government does not consider them refugees. The Rohingyas live on the roads from Teknaf (the Bangladesh-Myanmar border) to Chittagong and are hounded by the police. They have no land of their own.

**Life in the city**

“My parents came to Pakistan because it is a Muslim country,” said Shabbir Hussain, a taxi driver and a madrassa graduate.

According to reports, there are 65 shantytowns populated by Rohingyas and Bengalis in which members of both communities live side by side. At least two such colonies are named after the Burmese lineage in Karachi: Arakanabad (named after the Arakan province in Burma) in Korangi Dai Number and a Burmese colony situated near Landi.

The Burmese population, like that of the Bengalis, is mainly employed by the city’s textile and fishing sector, where they have to work for ten to twelve hours a day. “They are the lumpen prole-tariat of Karachi,” says Salman Mukhtar, a senior social activist who works on poverty-related issues in Karachi.

“These people are basically migrant labourers. They have no legal status, no job security; they are virtually slaves to the whims of contractors who take work orders from textile and fishing companies to, for example, get an export assignment done,” he told The News.

“They work for the minimum possible wages; the Bengali and Burmese population, because of their low pay-rate, played a pivotal role in making Pakistani textiles competitive in the international market during the mid-80s and the 90s.”

Despite living in run-down shanty homes, where there is no access to electricity or clean water, the Rohingyas have managed by the mainstream Pakistani, a fact that does not bode well with the Bengali community leaders.

**Political ambitions**

The Bengalis claim that the Burmese, who started coming to Pakistan in the late 70s, call themselves Bengalis because they want an excuse to get naturalised citizenship; however, the Rohingya leadership denies having any link whatsoever to Burma (Myanmar).

“They have nothing to do with Pakistan. We are Pakistanis, we have been living here since before the fall of Dhaka, we gave sacrifices for the creation of Pakistan, we have a stake in this country,” said Masud-ur-Rehman, the general secretary of the Pak-Bangla Ittehad, a community-based Bengali organisation.

This turf war between the two groups has resulted in much political activism in recent times. Playing on the Bengali card, the Rohingyas have managed to form a party called the Action Committee which is backed by the largest political party of Karachi.

Mehsud’s claims were refuted outright by Abul Hussain Sonar, who is a member of the supreme council of the Action Committee. “We are Bengalis. We have no connection with Burma whatsoever. I am a second generation Pakistani. My parents migrated from Bangladesh in the 1960s.” Sonar claims that there are no Rohingyas living in Karachi, and that even if there are, there is a minimal number of them. The Bengalis, on the other hand, think that their political mandate is being exploited. Masud says the Burmese have money and are relatively better educated, which has allowed them to claim representation of the ethnic Bengalis in the city, who are at least four times more than the Rohingyas in number.

“If you actually make a comparison, you can see that there are a number of differences between our communities. For example, the Burmese have a tendency to send their children to madrassas; they are well-read and are a very close-knit community, which has given them an edge.”

Whatever the truth may be, one thing is for sure: the Rohingyas have successfully buried their violent past and have begun a new life with a new identity in the city of Karachi. ##

Source: The Internal News of Pakistan, Dated:2/22/2012

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A young Rohingya refugee carries firewood at the Leda refugee camp. Some 12,000 to 16,000 Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic community from Burma’s Arakan State, live in this "unregistered" refugee camp.
The Constitution of 1947 failed to guarantee federal democracy, equal rights, autonomy and self-determination of the ethnic Panglong or Union Day has never been realized since independence on January 4, 1948.

Although this Agreement or Union Treaty was based on the agreed upon principles of unity in diversity, the true spirit of the Panglong Agreement.

We cautiously welcome the recent changes made by the civilianized military government of U Thein Sein, such as release of substantial number of political prisoners, cease fires, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s participation in next April bye-elections. But it is yet to be seen how far the government is sincere.

However, the attitude of the U Thein Sein government towards Rohingyas is not changed yet. Persecution against them is callous and greater than before. The so-called Nasaka border security forces are licensed to tyrannise the Rohingya people round the clock.

It is high time to revitalize and translate the true spirit of Panglong, through all-inclusive genuine political tripartite dialogue for an acceptable national accord in order to establish a blissful and well-built Union of Burma.

The scenario then could potentially be a return to a full-scale civil war. The ethnic groups have repeatedly made clear that only through revisiting and realizing the original spirit of Panglong can the Union be re-established and sustained.

It is now up to the Burmese government to decide whether they want to give the Union Day its true meaning by embracing the true spirit of Panglong, or carry on with the failed policy of the last six decades. ##

The following is a press release dated. 12th. February 2012, issued by Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO), Arakan Burma on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of Union Day.

STATEMENTS OF ARAKAN ROHINGYA NATIONAL ORGANISATION (ARNO) ON 65TH ANNIVERSARY OF UNION DAY

65 years ago, on February 12, 1947, the Panglong Agreement was signed between Gen. Aung San and leaders of the several ethnic groups in Panglong, Shan State. It was an epoch-making event in the history of Burma. The national leaders of both the Burman majority and ethnic nationalities of Burma committed themselves, for the first time, to achieve the country’s national sovereignty through the pure spirit of national unity, equality and fraternity. The history of Burma would have developed differently if there was no Panglong Agreement.

Although this Agreement or Union Treaty was based on the agreed upon principles of unity in diversity, the true spirit of Panglong or Union Day has never been realized since independence on January 4, 1948.

The Constitution of 1947 failed to guarantee federal democracy, equal rights, autonomy and self-determination of the ethnic nationalities, causing resentment and civil war continuing till today.

To add salt to the injury, Gen. Ne Win seized the power in 1962 and ended the Union Treaty and destroyed all vestiges of democratic structures while promoting the assimilation policy and military supremacy.

We cautiously welcome the recent changes made by the civilianized military government of U Thein Sein, such as release of substantial number of political prisoners, cease fires, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s participation in next April bye-elections. But it is yet to be seen how far the government is sincere.

However, the attitude of the U Thein Sein government towards Rohingyas is not changed yet. Persecution against them is callous and greater than before. The so-called Nasaka border security forces are licensed to tyrannise the Rohingya people round the clock.

It is high time to revitalize and translate the true spirit of Panglong, through all-inclusive genuine political tripartite dialogue for an acceptable national accord in order to establish a blissful and well-built Union of Burma.

The Rohingya who rank among the world’s most persecuted and forgotten people must be allowed to be a part of the country’s democratic and political process; and their citizenship rights and ethnic rights have to be guaranteed in the family of the Union of Burma. ##

Moreover, it is almost certain that during the political dialogue down the line, the ethnic armed groups will repeat their decades-long demands for a new constitutional arrangement that will reflect the original spirits of Panglong, which is equality and autonomy within a federal constitutional structure.

Union of Burma Flag (c.1948 to 1974) is not reflect a Union of many ethnic constituent states

And what’s more, it is also almost certain that the Burmese government will insist that the ethnic groups need to try and realize that change through the Parliamentary channel, which is near impossible under the extremely rigid amendment procedure provided in the 2008 constitution.

Union of Burma Flag 2010
Ethnic groups say the single star on the new Burmese flag doesn’t reflect a Union of many constituent states

The scenario then could potentially be a return to a full-scale civil war. The ethnic groups have repeatedly made clear that only through revisiting and realizing the original spirit of Panglong can the Union be re-established and sustained.

It is now up to the Burmese government to decide whether they want to give the Union Day its true meaning by embracing the true spirit of Panglong, or carry on with the failed policy of the last six decades. ##
NEW OIC BODY TO RESOLVE RIGHTS ISSUES

BY SYED FAISAL ALI, ARAB NEWS, February 14, 2012

JEDDAH: The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) plans to take up the issue of human rights on priority basis and play a constructive role in resolving them through an independent body.

The OIC spokesman Rizwan Sheikh stressed, “The Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) of the OIC is seeking to be part of solutions to issues of human rights and not a problem.” The commission will act as the human rights conscience of the OIC, giving its member states the full benefit of its advisory opinion on the whole range of rights issues, Sheikh said. The first formal session of the IPHRC is scheduled to be held in Jakarta from Feb. 20-24, and OIC Secretary-General, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, will attend the inaugural session.

The 18-member commission is required to have two regular sessions in a calendar year. The OIC spokesman said the commission will discuss human rights conditions in many regions including Syria, Palestine and Cyprus, in its meeting in Jakarta. In a press conference held at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah, Sheikh said the commission has an advisory capacity and non-mandatory for the OIC member states, pointing out that this status gives the commission a wider scope of work to monitor and evaluate human rights conditions worldwide.

He said that the commission will submit its recommendations on human rights to the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers’ meetings. The OIC spokesman underlined the fact that the statute of the commission does not impose any restrictions on it for communicating with civil society organizations in the member states and other bodies and institutions, in order to obtain necessary facts in the course of its assessment of human rights conditions in those countries.

BGB ARRESTS MALAYSIA BOUND VOYAGERS AND ROHINGYAS INFILTRATORS AND FLOATING DEADBODIES

FROM A CORRESPONDENT, COX’S BAZAR, BANGLADESH, February 10, 2012

On February 7, 2012, a group of voyagers consisting 150 people in a Trawler (engine boat) was going to Malaysia left from Teknaf. On the way, they were chased by a boat of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) which had around 12 BGB personnel on board. The BGB chased the boat until it stopped at Shapuriqip ghat (jetty), said BGB personnel from Teknaf.

“The voyagers were in panic started fleeing away from boat while the Malaysia bound Trawler (engine boat) stop at the ghat (jetty).” “Subeder (officer) Tota Meah, the commanding officer, the chasing BGB personnel group, arrested 6 voyagers and the trawler.”

After investigation, Colonel Jahed Hassan, BGB 42 Battalion confirmed that the boat people were going to Malaysia by giving huge amount of money to the human traffickers -- Ismail, Bulu, Hossain, Nurhakim, Sanjida Begum and Sukkur. Most of the voyagers were from Teknaf and Cox’s Bazar.

According to Kaladan News 32 Rohingyas from Burma were arrested by BGB and Police from different Tenaf border areas. Of them 13 Rohingyas were sent to Jail and other 19 Rohingyas were pushed back to Burma. The Commanding officer Lt. Col. Zahid Hossain of Battalion No 42 and Office-In-Charge (OC) from Teknaf police station has confirmed the news.

On February 7, 2012, 13 Rohingyas were arrested by police at an early morning while they were entering the Bangladesh through the border point of Rongikhali under Teknaf police station. Later they were sent to Cox’s Bazar District Jail after filling cases against them, said a police official.

The arrested are identified as Shahjeda Begum, Rabik Akter, Md. Salim, Iliyas, Shah Alam, Ayoub Ali, Abul Hussain, Harim Hussain, Abdul Hakim, Abudr Rahaman, Abdul Goni, Shah Alam and Abu Siddik. They hail from different areas of Maungdaw Township of Arakan State, Burma, the official added.

Besides, on February 7, 2012 at 7:00 am, the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) of Nilla BGB-out-post arrested nine Rohingyas while they were entering the Bangladesh through the entry point of Nilla. The BGB pushed back them to Burma at 3: 00 pm, according to BGB source.

On the same day, the BGB arrested another 10 Rohingyas from different vehicles at Whykong check-post after checking their identities, said an officer from BGB. The arrested Rohingya are:-- Shahjaul Alam (22) son of Hossain Ali, Rahim Ullah (25) son of late Abdul Kuddus, Sabuj Meah (30) son of Karim Ullah, Rafique (27) son of Sadar Ali, Rabi Alam(20) son of Akkas Meah, Mufiz Alam (23) son of Shahed Ali, Monjur Alam (30) son of Abdur Rashid, Muslim Uddin (26) son of Towfik and Sagar Ahmed (17) son of Mohsen Ali. Later, they were pushed back to Burma from Lamba Bill border in the afternoon, said BGB officer.

More than ten dead bodies are floating in the Naf River since February 7, 2012 along the Burma side near the Myinhutl village tract under Burma border security force (Nasaka) area number 8, said a village administration office member from Myinhutl village. “The dead bodies floating in the Naf River are not allowed to collect and bury by their relatives and villagers. The order was given by the commander of Nasaka area number 8.”

“The dead bodies are hopefully belonging to Malaysia bound voyagers who left four days ago from Nasaka area number 8 with the cooperation of Nasaka where the Nasaka collected 50,000 kyats per head. The Malaysia voyage’s boat may capsize in the Bay of Bengal. But no one confirm it.”

The Nasaka personnel and the commander are denying collecting and burying the dead bodies from river as fear of exposing their involvement in the boatpeople trafficking, said a school teacher from the village. “The Nasaka also ordered the villagers to push the dead bodies to the river if any dead body reaches the shore.”

The Nasaka personnel want to destroy the dead bodies, but they afraid of investigation by Human Trafficking department which occurred last November 23, 2011 where more than 138 were missing while a Malaysia voyage’s boat capsized in the Bay of Bengal where the dead bodies were drowned in the sea by the Nasaka personnel after fastening heavy stone with dead bodies for destroying the evidences of the event, said an aide from Naska camp.

The voyage to Malaysia from Bangladesh and Burma is a risky route where some boatpeople were died on the way with risky boat which sank in the sea, some were arrested by Thailand and Burma, but voyagers from Burma and Bangladesh are still not stopped to go that risky route.

The Rohingya community in northern Arakan is facing same as before such as discriminations - restriction of movement, marriage, education, health, employment and etc.-. Though there is some reforms appear to be marked in the Burma, the repression and oppression of the Rohingya community are not stopped, said a trader from Maungdaw.

The Nasaka is using the policy of “killing two birds in one shot” means the Nasaka is trying to reduce the population of Rohingya community from Arakan soil and earning money by giving permission to go abroad. But, there is no permission for Rohingya community to enter their homeland again.

Source : Kaladan News
Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organizers of this important event for inviting us. I really feel honoured to be with you today and to speak a few words on this auspicious occasion.

First, on behalf of the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO), Burmese Rohingya Organisation (UK) with the Rohingya people, I would like to express my heartfelt felicitations to all Kachin people at home and abroad. At the same time, I salute those heroes died as martyrs for the cause of the Kachin people.

We fully appreciate the recent heroic resistance of the Kachin brothers and sisters. In fact, the war was forced upon them by the Thein Sein government in violation of ceasefire agreement. It is an intrusion or an entrance by force to their area. We support you, and we stand with you in your fight for freedom.

Kachin are a great people with rich history and culture. They had remarkable contributions in holding Panglong Conference on 12 February 1947 toward building Burma Union. It was really an epoch-making event in the history of Burma. The national leaders of both the Burman majority and ethnic nationalities of Burma committed themselves, for the first time, to achieve the country’s national sovereignty through the pure spirit of national unity, equality and fraternity. The history of Burma would have developed differently if there was no Panglong Agreement.

Today, the people of Burma, especially the ethnic nationalities, are unhappy about their situations. They feel that the expectations of their leaders at Panglong were unfulfilled or ignored, to a certain extent. Generally they are lack of federal democracy, human rights and equality. On top of that, it is specifically a constitutional matter. The resentment started right from the independence over the extortion of the agreed upon principle of ‘unity in diversity’. Now we are seeing some reforms in Burma. We welcome those changes such as release of substantial number political prisoners, ceasefires, and participation of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in the by-election in April next. But it is yet to be seen, how far the government is sincere. There must be national reconciliation or national accord. For this there must be meaningful constructive political dialogue. This is the only way out of the present impasse. Again the democratic and political process must be ‘all inclusive’. No one should be left out.

Here, I would like to speak a few words on the situation of the Rohingya people. The Rohingyas are now in catch-22. There is no wind of change in the Rohingya area of North Arakan. Persecution of Rohingyas is greater than before. Harassment, torture and atrocious crimes of Nasaka, police, army and repressive functionaries increased. Despite indigenous to Arakan, the Rohingyas are rejected, hated, excluded, persecuted and discriminated against in Aung San. They are rejected by the successive governments, the worst being the military regime from 1962. On the other hand, the forums of the Burma democracy movement and ethnic nationalities are reluctant to accept and accommodate them in their numerous alliances, on democratic principles. Under the circumstance, the Rohingyas will continue to be left out from the country’s future political and democratic process. This is a real dilemma of the Rohingyas. Why not fair dealing or unpleasing treatment with them?

Here, the regime is double standard. Rohingyas are people who exercised right of franchise, right to vote and to be elected in all Burma’s elections. The elections of April, 1947 for the First Constituent Assembly, the first Parliamentary elections in 1951-52, the second in 1956 and the third, following eighteen months of military rule, in 1960, BSSP held Pyithu Hluttaw elections in 1974, SLORC held multi-party elections of 1990 and SPDC held general elections of 2010. On top of that they were allowed to participate in the SPDC’s 2008 referendum for the adoption of its constitution. Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights on Burma Thomas Quintana said, “What is more significant than the possibility to vote for the Constitution of a Nation to show that one belongs to the Nation? If this population was considered apt to give its views on the adoption of the Constitution, then it should be granted all other privileges, including the citizenship, which recognized ethnic groups, citizens of Burma do enjoy in the Union.” Is not it a ‘systematic racism’ and an international crime to call these Rohingyas people non-nationals rendering them stateless in their ancestral homeland?

The origin of the Rohingyas in Arakan rooted to ancient Chandra dynasty, known as easterly Hindu kingdom of Arakan where the rulers and ruled are Indian Bengalis. So the culture there also was Bengali. The Indian Chandras ruled this country until they were defeated by the Mongolians in 10th century. That invasion had completely changed the landscape of Arakan, from language, physical features to culture. The language used during that time has got similarities only with the language of Rohingyas. For instance, Ananda Stone Monument (Annada Kauksa), erected by King Ananda Sandra in 8th century, is greatly related to Rohingya language. Here I would like to make an appeal for your understanding. There is no good reason to exclude and deny us. At least our compatriots need to demonstrate a feeling of universal brotherhood of mankind at our untold sufferings, boat people tragedies with more than a thousand drowned over the recent years to become fish feed of the angry sharks.

I would like to urge upon our fellow countrymen and all democracy loving people, please try to understand our problems, a problem of ethnic, religious and political persecution, deeply entrenched in the Burmese government’s extremely discriminatory policies and planned extermination of the Rohingyas from their ancestral homeland of Arakan. In fact, this issue 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 the Rohingyas will be in a permanent limbo. Please support the Rohingyas cause, stand with them, speak for them, treat them equals in Arakan and help them integrate fully in the Family of the Union of Burma.

In conclusion, once again, we assure our solidarity with our Kachin brothers and sisters. Thank you. ##