



Monthly

ARAKAN

News and Analysis of the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation, Arakan (Burma)

**SIGNING CEREMONY OF POLITICAL ALLIANCE
BETWEEN
NATIONAL UNITED PARTY OF ARAKAN (NUPA)
AND
ARAKAN ROHINGYA NATIONAL ORGANISATION (ARNO)
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Olive Branch between Rohingyas and Rakhine

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EDITORIAL: OLIVE BRANCH BETWEEN ROHINGYAS AND RAKHINE

The Muslims (Rohingyas) and Buddhists (Rakhaines) had been peacefully coexisting in Arakan over the centuries like twin brothers. According to M S Collis, before the 8th century Arakan was a Hindu kingdom and that both the people and government were Indian. Historian D.G Hall described the Rakhines of today as basically Burmese with an unmistakable Indian mixture... the earlier dynasties are thought to have been Indian, ruling over a population similar to that of Bengal. Rohingyas are not solely descended from migrants people but are the local indigenous people living in Arakan since the dawn of the history that later embraced cultural and religious reformation to upgrade their ancient tradition. Rohingyas and Rakhines lived side by side for centuries with amity and concord as one family and ruled the country together. Both the communities in Arakan had all along been hand in glove. They shared in rain and sunshine, the sorrow and glad tidings one another and enjoyed the fruits of nationhood for long long years. No social, cultural and political function was without the participation of Rohingya and Rakhine with their laughter transcending the crescendo of the functions. Unfortunately the golden era of Arakan has gone into oblivion.

Narameikhla was restored to the throne of Arakan by the Muslims of Bengal. To snatch advantage from change of the world's politics the Rakhine had to forsake a tradition in ideas, and be up to date. They had to learn the history of recent events, the meaning and the triumph of Islam. It took them a hundred years to learn the doctrine from the Muslims. For the hundred years, 1430 to 1530, Arakan remained feudatory to Muslim Bengal, paid tribute and learnt history and politics. In 1531 Zabuk Shah ascended the throne. He was one of the strongest rulers in the history of Arakan. With him the Arakanese graduated in their Islamic studies and the 'Arakanese Empire was founded' (JBRS VOL-110,P- 493). Sudden rise of Arakan to importance in the Bay was indicated by his coins. Arakan turned into a Sultanate. (JBRS VOL - Page- 493)

Salim Shah knowing that his life would be to an end transferred the rule of kingdom to his Prime Minis-

ter Ashraf. Khan. The kingdom of ARAKAN was entrusted to the joint rule of the son and daughter of the Thado Mintra, after his death. The daughter and the Chief Minister, Magan Thakur, had very important roles in the administration of the state. Speaking about a village named Bandar in Roshang (Arakan) the poet Abdul Karim says, "There lived in that village Qazis, Muftis, Ulimas, Pir and Sufis. Those high ranking Muslims used to converse with the kings on equal and friendly terms" In 1784 Arakan was invaded and conquered by the Burmese at the invitation of Rakhines. For the first time Arakan had lost a government of their own!. Thousands of Arakanese both Muslims and Buddhists entered Chittagong district and Captain Cox rehabilitated many of them in Cox's Bazaar. 40 years of Burmese rule over Arakan was marked with unprecedented tyranny and cruelty. People were forcibly conscripted for army services and forced labour. By 1798, two thirds of the inhabitants of Arakan were fled to Chittagong district. Both Muslims and Rakhine had suffered during the Burmese occupation.

In 1967 rice riot both the Rohingyas and Rakhine were gunned down by the army. Persons seriously wounded but still alive were said to have been dumped in mass grave in unknown places of Akyab. "In Arakan State, where tensions between Buddhists and Muslims have long been prevalent, these two religious groups now marched hand in hand (during the 1988 democratic uprising)" Wrote by Bertil Lintner. At Akyab (Sittwe), more than 1000 Rohingya Muslims joint the demonstration led by

the Buddhist monks on September 2007. After the military crack down, the spirit of united movement against the junta is waning down and the junta is again using the Rakhines against the Rohingyas of Arakan. Now they are on the side of nepotism while the Rohingyas are confined to ruthlessness. Even those Rakhines who take refuge in Muslim countries, like Malaysia and Bangladesh, are working against the Rohingya Muslims instead of doing anti-junta activities. Only Dr Khin Maung and his party members are in favour of unity with Rohingya for which they have to pay the prize in social and political activities. Still they are going ahead with the unity process. A Rakhine lady who is the product of 1988 democratic uprising is now living in Bangladesh and working hard and fast against the Muslim Rohingya with the collaboration of ALP, a party fully against Rohingya Muslims. They are living in the deep forest of Bangladesh reportedly cultivating poppy and kidnapping Bangali rich people for ransom money. Almost all Rakhines educated persons (except Major Tun Kyaw Oo, Dr Shwe Lu Maung and a few others) are engaged in writing against Rohingya. Dr Aye Chan branded Rohingyas as virus. Dr Habib Siddiqui wrote that, "there are some Rakhine activists like Khin Maung Saw are doing is nothing academic but pure xenophobia. Their argument to deny human rights of the Rohingyas is so childish and ridiculous that they give a bad name to academic and serious researchers of every field, and not just in cultural anthropology." Sai Soe Win Latt wrote, "The claim that the name 'Rohingya' is invented and therefore unaccept-

able completely contradicts the very foundational understanding of ethnicity. It is conceptually ridiculous and empirically wrong. Ethnicity is not just a 'thing' but also a process. If we agree that Rohingyas migrated from Bangladesh or somewhere else, Rakhines must have migrated from a place somewhere else. None of these groups fell from the sky." Major Tun Kyaw Oo always supported Rohingyas. He used to celebrate 3rd January as Rohingya Day. He published three books on Rohingya. His view of 'Rohingya and Rakhine are the same person' is written in his books with the most authentic references. Dr Aye Kyaw is preaching that Rohingyas are floating people. He is a native of Taungup where the mosque was demolished and the Muslims were driven out and the town is now Muslim free as the junta and many of the Rakhine people want to erase Rohingya Muslims in each and every town and city of Arakan. The junta is now playing with citizen cards. Sometime they say green card of guest citizen would be issued to Rohingyas. And sometime they say the white cards would be issued for Rohingyas. All Buddhists including Rakhine, Barua, Khami, Mro, Daingnet, Chin etc—are given pink colour full citizen cards. The government is deliberately dividing the people of Arakan on religious basis. If this religious distinction is eliminated the Rohingya will come under the same category as the Arakanese Buddhists'. (Sultan Ahmed, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Minorities.) The junta use all weapons-racial, religious, political, economic and propaganda to mislead and divide the two sister communities of Arakan.

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

TIME FOR UNITY BETWEEN RAKHAINE- ROHINGYA

By SU Ahamed

Hitler's holocaust of Jews, Polpot's genocide of Cambodians and Radovan Karadic and Slobodan Milosevic's ethnic cleansing of Bosnians and Kosovans are few glaring examples of crimes against humanity which deserve unequivocal condemnation unless one is a pure racist or communalist. Human civilisation can never accept or condone such crimes on grounds of political expediency. It is a shame that these kind of crimes could be committed in this most sophisticated and so-called civilised world, of today under the ever-vigilant eyes of the world bodies and various international organisations including the United Nations, the International Court of Justice(ICJ) and International Criminal Court(ICC). When UN Secretary General Mr. Kofi Anan visited to Bosnia he has lamented UN's failure to protect the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people during Bosnian war.

Today crimes against humanity are being perpetrated daily in a more subtle way by the ruler against the ruled, by the strong against the weak and by the rich against the poor eluding, in many instances, the attention of the justice upholding international community. Some time a seemingly aggrieved party struggling for justice could be so cruel and unjust against a weaker party which falls prey before it. Many so-called clamourers of truth and justice are simply blinded by racial, religious and political prejudice from seeing the truth. It is so much regrettable that the upholders of democratic values and human rights in Burma have so far failed to understand the afflictions of 3.5 million Rohingyas of Arakan at the hands of not only the successive communal regimes but also their own sister community, the Rakhine of Arakan.

When Arakan had been independent ruled either by a Buddhist or a Muslim, its two different ethno-religious communities lived side by side in perfect amity. When the ruler happened to be a Buddhist, his chief minister or defence minister would be a Muslim and vice versa. The kings whether or not they accepted Islamic faith, had not hesitated to keep Muslim names without any outside pressure. They even inscribed their coins in circulation, medallions and state emblems with Kalema - the Islamic profession of faith. Not only the administration was run on the pattern of Muslim Bengal, the Arakanese also copied the imperial court of Delhi. The common Buddhist citizens of the country happily adopted Muslim culture like Rakhine Buddhist women remaining secluded at home and wearing veils. It was not irritating to the Buddhist masses when historic Sandikhan mosque was built at Mrohaung (Pathariqillah) in 1433 by Muslim conqueror Gen. Sandikhan in his own name. Tire hardy boatmen appointed by King Min Bin (Zauk Shah) in his royal navy were all ethnic Rohingyas of Bengali descent. They were all smiles when non-Buddhist ethnic people developed country's agricultural infrastructure, trade and business. They never had any qualms when appointing Muslim Kamans as archers of royal guard. The Buddhists of Arakan had never worried of being proselytised by the Muslim inhabitants rather than the invasion, occupation, enslavement and tyranny of the Burmans.

History has proved beyond any doubt that Muslim Bengal never had any aggressive design on Arakan. There had never been any attempt to forcibly convert Buddhists or assimilate them with Muslim culture when Arakan was under the political influence of Bengal. Whatever little deterioration of relationship between Arakan and Bengal happened was after 1660 following Shah Shuja's murder in Arakan and collusion of Arakanese kings with Portuguese Pirates, in the depredation of lower Bengal. Even today, the Rakhine could well feel themselves whether they have freedom of worship, whether they can preserve and protect their culture or

are susceptible to the cultural tide of overwhelming Muslim population in Bangladesh. From the cultural and civilization point of view the Rakhines are safer in Bangladesh than in Burma where they are increasingly exposed to the danger of Burmanisation.

Throughout the history the Rakhines had identified the Burmans as invaders, marauders, tyrants and even as thieves and dacoits of their most revered Buddha Image, the Mahamyatmuni. They sarcastically call the Burmans "Auk Tha" meaning people of lower land or (cast) and "Auk chi" meaning lowly filth, where as a Burmese proverb goes "if you face a Rakhine and a poisonous snake at a time, kill the Rakhine first". Completely cut off from Burma by high range of Arakan Yoma, the Rakhines never drank together, with the Burmans from the same stream nor were they dependent on Burma for trade or commerce. Historian D.G.E.Hall has rightly pointed out, although before the establishment of Mrohaung by Naramaikhla in 1433 there was from time to time Burmese and Mon interference, Arakan's contacts with Mohamedan India were probably closer than those with Burma." It seemed that the Rakhines could never forget the barbarity of Bodawphaya while pillaging Mrohaung in 1784. It also seemed equally impossible that the Rakhines could ever forsake the centuries old friendship with their sister community, the Rohingyas.

Rakhine-Rohingya relation had been more or less cordial during most of the one and a quarter century of British rule over Arakan. However, since the beginning of 20th century some Rakhine political leaders developed second thoughts upon the Rohingyas and identified more with their Burmese counterparts while struggling to achieve independence of Burma. After separation of Burma from British India their attitude towards Rohingyas turned manifestly hostile. Whoever should be attributed to the massacre of more than 100,000 innocent Muslims of Arakan in 1942, the Rakhines can in no way feign innocence. The swords that fell on the necks of the Rohingya Muslims had been wielded by the Rakhines no matter who ordered them to do so. Again it were the Rakhines who tried to put obstacles and impediments on the return of Muslim refugees from Bengal back to their homes in Arakan after the war was over. At the Panlong nationalities conference, the Rohingya had been barred to represent on behalf of Arakanese Muslims at the instigation of Rakhines. Thus the Rakhines had been able to represent on behalf of the whole people of Arakan at a time when the rights and privileges and demarcation of boundaries of nationalities areas were going to be finalised on ethnic lines. Surprisingly while all other nationalities secured either 'Autonomy' or 'Autonomy with right of secession' the Rakhine representative opted to remain under Burman dominated central administration for reasons best known to them.

In 1949, soon after independence, the BTF (Burma Territorial Force), a frontier security force raised with local recruits manned by 90 %Rakhine in Arakan, unleashed a reign of terror in north Arakan under the direction of Fire-brand (Miteik) Kyaw Oo (aka Muslim throats cutter) the Rakhine Deputy Commissioner of Akyab district, killing hundreds of people, burning several villages and triggering refugee exodus numbering more than 50,000 people. During 1948-1962 constitutional rule the Independent Arakanese Parliamentary Group (IAPG) formed by Rakhine members of parliament and Ra Ta Nya (Rakhine National United Organisation) had all along been engaged to undermine the legitimate rights of the Rohingyas in and out of parliament and misleading the Burmese politicians.

The Rakhine availed another unfettered opportunity to carry out large-scale ethnic cleansing of Rohingya during Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) rule as they were in full control of Arakan chapter of BSPP. The King Dragon (Naga Min) Operation launched in 1978 by the BSPP regime was planned and executed by the Rakhine BSPP stalwarts with the cooperation of Burmese army. They are solely responsible for the death of over 50,000 Rohingyas both in the detention centres and in the refugee camps. Among all nationalities, the Rakhines were the only group which benefited from one-party socialist rule in Burma. They became rich and powerful overnight at the expense of Rohingya Muslims, enjoying the lion share of Arakan state.

As the military rule prolonged in different names and style, no people in Burma irrespective of race, religion and culture could remain immune from high-handedness of the military being subjected to egregious human rights violation and grinding poverty. What has happened has happened. It shall be of no use if we remain lamenting on our past mistakes, rather the people of Burma should learn seriously from the experience of past more than 60 years.

The oppressed people of Burma should realise that they can only get-rid of this infamous junta through a hard, long drawn struggle which demands utmost sacrifice and solid unity among Burma's diverse ethnic groups. It is clear that the military had been taking advantage of the disunity between various ethnic nationalities either created by them or bequeathed as the legacy of the past. While almost all opposition organisations, revolutionary or political, are willing to carry out a united struggle, ironically a particular ethnic group-- the racist Rakhines activists —has been once again opposing tooth and nail at all forums including National Democratic Front (NDF), Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) and Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC), the inclusion of Rohingya in the united struggle who represent more than 3.5 million of Arakanese people. The Rohingya would like to spell out their outrage in unequivocal terms this enigmatic attitude of the Rakhines racist activist towards the Rohingyas. The Rohingyas had tried their best to be part and parcel of the mainstream opposition forces

and render necessary sacrifice for the common weal of the Burmese people. However, if the Rohingya continues to receive step-motherly treatment from the mainstream opposition forces, at the insistence of unjust and communalist Rakhines history shall never pardon them for identifying and aligning themselves with the unjust, at the cost of the most oppressed nation- the Rohingyas of Arakan. The Rohingyas have been compelled to feel that with their this undemocratic behavior, the ongoing democratic struggle which envisages to establish an egalitarian society based on equality and justice is not free from smacks of prejudice, discrimination and injustice.

Now is the crucial time to shape the destiny of the people of Arakan by Arakanese themselves. It is the time to abandon racist, phobia, hatred, despise, hostile attitude, contempt and communalist thinking by the Rakhine activists to work together with Rohingyas to free all Arakanese people from the long sufferings of the Burmese autocratic colonial rule.

ARE WE THE PEOPLE IN BURMA SUBJECTS OR CITIZENS?

By Aman Ullah

A subject is someone "under the dominion of a monarch", says the Oxford English Dictionary.

A citizen however is someone who does have rights. In ancient Greece and Rome that meant some citizens took part in government.

The difference between a citizen and a subject

A citizen has the right to vote and right to be elected and right to participate in the political life of the state. A subject has neither the right to take part in the political life of the State nor any say in the government.

A subject shall obligatory to abide by the all laws promulgated by those he is subject to and has no say in how they are treated. A citizen has the right to refuse to comply or to actively resist all laws that violate against his fundamental rights.

A subject is raised to believe that government is ultimately in power. A citizen knows that it is himself, and his fellow men that are in power, and he is answerable to none but his own soul.

A citizen has the right to travel and do as they please provided they do not infringe the rights of others. A subject often need permission to travel and can only take what the state says they need with them.

A citizen has the right to self-defense but a subject has not even he has no right to use effective means of defense. The role of a subject in war is most often as cannon fodder, from ancient days to modern. In short, a citizen has rights, a subject has privileges; a subject does what he is told - but a citizen has the right to be heard.

Are the people in Burma subjects or citizens?

For over 800 years, from 1044 to 1885, the Burmese lived under an absolute monarchy. All legislative, executive and judicial powers were concentrated in the hands of the monarch. Justice was administered by issuing royal commands. As the loyal subject of the kings, the people needed to surrender all

their wills at feet of the kings. They had neither rights nor liberties nor a say in the affairs of the state. The rule of the Burmese kings came to an end in 1885 when Burma became Her Majesty Queen Victoria's possession. All the people of Burma were became the subjects of the Her Majesty Queen Victoria. During the colonial rule the British granted some stand of civil rights and liberties; promoted the development of economic welfare; developed communication, education, health and agriculture; introduced political democracy but the colonial state was something that was imposed from above.

The period of Japanese occupation that followed was, in terms of national independence, law and order, continuity of the state and human rights, completely a disaster.

When the British came back to Burma in 1945, they introduced to Burma the rule of law, which was used as a mere tool that expresses the will of the ruler and not of the ruled. Being the colonial subjects of the British, the people had to pass their lives under the yoke of the British colonial power.

On 4 January 1948 the Union of Burma achieved independence. The people of Burma ceased the subjects of British became independent citizens of independent country.

A constitution for this new sovereign independent republic was adopted on 24 September 1947 by a constituent assembly, which was drafted around the same time as the Universal Declaration for Human Rights.

The 1947 constitution provided safeguards for fundamental rights. Under this constitution, the people of Burma irrespective of "birth, religion, sex or race" equally enjoyed all the citizenships rights including right to express, right to assemble, right to associations and unions, settle in any part of the Union, to acquire property and to follow any occupation, trade, business or profession".

The country entertained a competitive political party system and a free press. The Supreme Court was made the guardian of human rights and was given the power to preserve them through issuing directions in the nature of habeas corpus, mandamus, prohibition, quo warranto and certiorari. No one is master or subject all are citizens. For fourteen years civil society was allowed to flourish.

Being one of the worthy citizens of Burma, the Rohingya Muslim of Arakan also enjoyed the same rights and privileges as the other nationals of Burma regardless of their religious beliefs or ethnic background. Their homes were secure, their roads were safe, their properties were protected and their justices never denied at the court. Their religious lessons were included in the school's curriculum of their children. They were enfranchised in all the national and local elections of Burma. Their representatives were in the Legislative Assembly, in the Constituent Assembly and in the Parliament. As members of the new Parliament, their representatives took the oath of allegiance to the Union of Burma on the 4th January 1948. Their representatives were appointed as cabinet ministers and parliamentary secretaries. They had their own political, cultural, social organizations and had their programme in their own language in the official Burma Broadcasting Services (BSS).

However, since 1962 and the advent of military dictatorship, human rights have neither been institutionalized nor protected. The 1974 Constitution failed to afford the judiciary any independence. Although there was a chapter dealing with fundamental freedoms, these freedoms were heavily qualified and contingent upon fundamental duties. In 1988, following the violent suppression of the pro-democracy uprising, the State Law and Order Restoration Council ("SLORC"), which has since renamed itself the State Peace and Development Council ("SPDC"), came to power and rules the country by decree.

The ruling military junta in Burma is one of the world's worst violators of human rights. A government or an army is obliged to serve and defend the people. When it wildly and indiscriminately open fires on its own men, women, children, doctors, nurses and monks it can only be regarded as an enemy of the people.

It has been condemned internationally for committing serious human rights abuses including extra-judicial killings, torture, rape, disappearances and forced labour. There is no rule of law. In some ways SLORC / SPDC rule resembles pre-colonial Burma where the king was an autocrat and his power was absolute and all the people were their subjects. Like the Burmese king, the current military junta is lord and master of the life and property of the Burmese subjects.

During pre-colonial period the people of Burma were subjects to the kings, during the colonial period they were subjects to Queen and now under the military regime they have become subjects to the generals. Only for a period of 14 years, during the democratic government, they were able to enjoy as the citizens of the

country.

Among all the subjects of the junta the Rohingyas are the worst victims of human rights violations, including denial of citizenship rights, severe restrictions on freedom of movement, education, marriage, religion, forced labour, rape and confiscation, expulsion, destruction of settlements, arbitrary arrest, torture, extra-judicial killing and extortion on daily basis.

Owing to these deliberate actions of the ruling military junta of Burma today the Rohingyas have become increasingly landless, shelterless, jobless, handicap, no access to education and healthcare and illiterate and unhealthy section of Burma's population. These extreme conditions have forced them to leave their hearths and homes for various destinations of the world even risking their lives through turbulent seas and oceans by small boats in search of better tomorrow.

MYANMAR: MUSLIMS BACK MONKS, WARN CHINA

By B. Raman 29Sept 2007

The Muslims in the Arakan (now called Rakhine) State of Myanmar have strongly come out in support of the uprising against the military junta spearheaded by the Buddhist monks, students and others.

In a statement disseminated on September 28, 2007, the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO), which represents the local Muslims strongly condemned the Junta's brutal crackdown against unarmed peaceful demonstra-

tors and urged the international community to take concerted and tougher action to stop the regime from further committing crimes against humanity and against the people of Burma. It added: "We salute the courageous efforts of the revered Buddhist monks and the people who are holding fast aloft the message of freedom and democracy risking their precious lives, and we hope their sacrifice will certainly serve as a beacon light in our emancipation movement. In solidarity, we express our total support to this extraordinary and inspiring mass uprising. It is heartening that, on 26 September 2007, the Rohingyas and Rakhingis had jointly participated in the demonstration staged by the Buddhist monks forming human chains in Akyab chanting the slogan: "we are a family and we are travellers in the same boat, we Burmese citizens need to be united without regard to religion, class or race." This has revitalized the spirit of rapprochement and solidarity between our twin brothers in Arakan as did in 1988 the democracy mass uprising. Meanwhile, we caution all not to fall prey to the Junta's machination to divide the people on religious line and remain vigilant to foil its possible attempt to incite communal disturbance in Arakan and the rest of the country with a view to diverting minds of the people away from the present crisis. We call on the UN Security Council (UNSC) to pass an urgent binding resolution requiring the military regime to free all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all those arrested in the current crackdowns, and to engage in a meaningful tripartite

dialogue for a transition to democracy setting specific deadlines outlining targeted sanctions to be imposed in case of non-compliance. We also call on the neighbouring countries, particularly China, India, and ASEAN to stop lending any covert and overt support encouraging the murderous military regime, out of deference to the Burmese people's legitimate wishes and aspiration for democracy, human rights and federalism, in the interest of long term mutual benefit, peace and stability in the region. We welcome the statements and stance of the Governments of U.S, U.K, and other countries expressing support to the ongoing democracy movement in Burma."

While the Muslims have regretted reports of Indian support to the Junta, they have used stronger words against China, which they have described as "the military dictatorship's main backer" and warned it that it would be held accountable before the international community if there is a repetition of the 1988 bloodbath in Myanmar. The ARNO has been collecting signatures on a petition to be jointly addressed to the President of the UN Security Council and President Hu Jintao of China. The petition inter alia says as follows: "We stand alongside the citizens of Burma in their peaceful protests. We urge you to oppose a violent crackdown on the demonstrators, and to support genuine reconciliation and democracy in Burma. We pledge to hold you accountable for any further bloodshed."

Reports received so far indicate that the Junta has avoided using military force against the protesters in the Arakan area. Nor have

they imposed a curfew. Rohingya Muslim sources in the Arakan area have reported that there were two demonstrations on September 27, 2007. In the first at Akyab (Sittwe), the capital of the State, about 200 monks and others participated. In the second at Taungup, about 10,000 people participated. The Army did not interfere with the demonstrations. No report on the local situation on September 28, 2007, is available since the Army has cut off all communications between the Arakan State and the rest of Myanmar as well as the rest of the world.

However, Rohingya Muslim sources based in Akyab disseminated on September 28, 2007, the following report regarding the situation which prevailed during the previous two days: "The Burmese military junta and members of the United Solidarity Development Association (USDA) have warned all monasteries in Akyab not to allow young monks, called novices, to go out of the monasteries. The order came after authorities imposed curfew in Rangoon and Mandalay, said a resident in Akyab. The USDA members and junta officials visited all the monasteries in Akyab and told senior monks not to allow young monks to go out of the monasteries to the streets. Should any monastery flout the order they would face action. More than 4,000 monks and people demonstrated on the streets of Akyab on September 25, while more than 100,000 people hit the streets of Rangoon. More than 1,000 Rohingya people (Muslims) from Akyab joined the demonstration led by monks on September 26, said a Rohingya elder from Akyab. The ruling authorities brought soldiers from Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 374 from Kyauktaw and Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 289 from Maruk-U to tighten security in Akyab on September 25, said sources. Authorities in Arakan closed routes in the state and monitored monks who were traveling." The USDA is a front organisation of the Myanmar intelligence.

With the Junta cutting off all communications between Myanmar and the rest of the world, no more details of the situation in Yangon (Rangoon) have been coming out and the flow of visuals has declined. No authentic figures of casualties are available. While the official figures given are nine dead and many injured, Myanmar exiles say that the fatalities as a result of repeated firing by the Army in Yangon and Mandalay run into dozens. The Junta's present strategy is to keep the use of military force confined to Yangon and Mandalay and avoid the use of force in smaller towns and to drive a wedge between the younger monks, who are in the forefront of the protests, and the older monks, who seem to be following a more restrained policy in order not to provoke the Junta.

There have been rumours of some soldiers refusing to fire on the monks and of differences between the head of the Junta Senior General Than Shwe and his second-in-command, Vice-Senior General Maung Aye over the brutal crack down, but these have not been confirmed. If there is a repetition of the bloodbath of 1988, there is a danger of anti-Chinese riots similar to what one had witnessed in 1967-68 at the height of the Cultural Revolution in China.

Intriguingly, the Christian elements in the population---mainly in the Kachin and Karen areas---- have mostly kept away from the anti-Junta demonstrations and have not been supporting the Buddhists. Christian participation has not so far been significant.

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CONTINUED FROM NOV 2009 ISSUE

THE TERRIFYING VOYAGE OF BURMA'S BOAT PEOPLE

The Thai military kept the Rohingya men on the island for 15 days, routinely beating them. "There were many more of us than the soldiers, so it must have been to intimidate, to control," explained Mohammed. Then a military boat and a ferry arrived, and took them back to four of the the same boats they had come ashore in. "We found when we got on that they had taken out the engines. Then they connected the four boats with ropes and one of the military boats towed us all out to sea. They told us they were taking us to Malaysian waters. But after a day and half they cut the ropes and abandoned us, drifting in the high seas".

"It was then," continued Mohammed, "that we understood that the promise of Malaysia had been false and we all began to cry. The four boats were taken by the currents in different directions, until ours was alone. We were certain we would die." Moniur, on another of the four boats, had an identical tale to tell.

Their stories have been corroborated by Chris Lewa's exhaustive research, and the Thai government has even owned up. Prime Minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, was forced to admit that in "some instances" such events had taken place. Though, as far as anybody knows, no official inquiry has taken place.

Should there be such an official in-

vestigation, the upshot would probably have to be charges of murder and attempted murder on a massive scale. There were 575 people on the four drifting boats. On Moniur's, the largest, there were 152. After 10 days of lacerating tropical sun and 10 nights of darkest despair, people began to die. "We had no food or water; 19 people died," said Moniur, in his staccato manner. "We threw the bodies overboard. All the rest of us could do was wait for our turn to die too."

Mohammed's boat was luckier, at first. It took just five days for rough seas to sweep them towards some Thai fishermen, who fed them and led them to shore, where the Thai military again arrested them, then handcuffed them, blindfolded and interrogated them. They had drifted far south, to near Bangkok, but were loaded onto lorries and then a military boat which delivered them once more to Red Sand Island.

He and 200 others ("lots of the people there had sores on their backs from sitting crammed on the boats") were kept on the island for a month. "Then they loaded us onto a big barge and towed us out to sea, this time with food – seven sacks of rice and two drums of water. But they took our engine out again," Mohammed said, "and after two days and one night, again, they cut us loose and left us.

"We drifted for 14 days. Many of us got sick, many lost consciousness. I had no doubts I would die. There was no hope of land or rescue. We had no energy even to talk any more." But then it rained, they gathered the water in the plastic sheeting, and hope returned. On the 16th day they saw land, and at dawn the next day they awoke to discover they were surrounded by fishing boats. They were not Thais this time. The fishermen took them ashore to their home, a place called Idi, in northern Indonesia.

Moniur meanwhile reached land after 14 days adrift. "We found water to drink, wild fruit to eat," he recalled, "and we walked, stumbling through the bush, from nightfall to dawn. We saw some markings on a tree, which told us, to our joy, that this was a deserted island. We kept walking, with new energy now, and found some villagers who gave us tea and bananas... This was India. The Andaman Islands." The former rickshaw driver spent the next nine months in an Indian detention centre.

Mohammed did make it to Malaysia, to Penang province, where I interviewed him. Following his rescue by Indonesian fishermen he awoke, after two days unconscious, in an Indonesian hospital bed. Then he met an Indonesian policeman who, instead of beating him, took him home and, together with his wife, nursed and fed him back to health. Two weeks later he moved to a refugee camp, where he stayed for six months.

Every Friday he was allowed out to visit the policeman and his family, until one day the policeman helped him realise his dream, giving him the money and the means to cross illegally, but safely, through the Straits of Molucca into Malaysia.

Salim was not set adrift on an engineless boat. After spending 21 days in the immigration detention centre in Ranong in Thailand he was put on a fully-functioning boat that, he was told, would take him up the coast to Burma.

He was landed, instead, on the Thai coast and handed over by the Thai

immigration authorities to Thai traffickers – one of numerous examples I came across during my interviews with Rohingyas, and confirmed as pattern by Lewa, of collusion between people-smugglers and Thai officials. “They packed 10 of us into a hidden compartment underneath a van and drove us to a rubber plantation,” recalled Salim. “They took us to a long house there, where there were lots of other people like me, who had tried to get from Bangladesh to Malaysia. They asked us for the phone numbers of friends or relatives in Malaysia. They said that if we gave them the numbers they would phone and ask for the price of getting us over the border into Malaysia.” “I had no friends or relatives in Malaysia, and I said as much,” Salim continued. “But they did not want to believe me. They beat me with a cane, every day for 10 days.” At which point the traffickers conceded defeat. The frail boy, 18 years old now and hardly bigger than an average 13-year-old in Europe, had been the pride and hope of his family in Burma, but that was the extent of his worldly connections. So the traffickers put into action their ‘Plan B’: they delivered Salim and nine other Rohingyas to a Thai fishing harbour and handed them over to a trawler. “At first I was happy. It was very hard work. Just three days off in the month. We left for sea at five in the afternoon and worked till 10 next morning, casting the nets, pulling in the fish, cleaning the nets, cleaning the boat. We slept from 10 in the morning till four in the afternoon.” He paid less than £1 a day for his expenses and he awaited eagerly his pay packet at the end of the month. But then he

saw, when the end of the month came, that the Thai fishermen on the boat got paid and he did not; that they went off to shore to see their families but he was not allowed off the boat.

“When I asked for my wages I was told, ‘No, you are not like the rest of the crew. Your wages are paid elsewhere’. They said I had been sold, that my boss took all my money. I asked who my boss was and they told me the name of the Thai trafficker who ran the rubber plantation with the Sikhs.” What did he feel at that moment? “I suddenly felt the whole sky fall on my head: I could not move for a long time. They told me nothing more. I thought I was sold for the rest of my life. I believed I was sold forever. I cannot remember a day for the rest of the time I was there that I did not weep silently.” There was no prospect of escape, he said. “I heard stories of others like me who had been thrown overboard because they tried to get away.” Nine months into his captivity on the boat, to his utter surprise, some people came in a van, employees of the trafficker who “owned” him and took him on a long journey over the border into Malaysia. “They are cruel people, they beat people, they buy and sell people, they are killers, but with me they were true to their word. My nine months of work had paid the money it would have cost to get me over the border if I had had relatives to pay.” It was a peculiar case of honour among thieves. They dropped him off at a mosque inside Malaysia’s Penang province, where once it was revealed that for all the callousness in the world there is also kindness. Salim, whose life had been held to ransom, met

an elderly man at the Malaysian mosque who took him under his wing. “He gave me a phone to call my family; he gave me some work to do, and paid me some wages, then he gave me some money to go on a bus south to Georgetown – a big city where I hoped to find steady work, which I soon did.”

He succeeded where Moniur, older and tougher, failed. Back in Bangladesh where I interviewed Moniur just a month after his return from India, he allowed himself just one moment of weakness, when I asked him if he would contemplate setting sail for Malaysia again?

“Look,” he said, “many times, many times I thought I would die. Many times. So, no. No, no. I will not try again. I will stay now and always in Bangladesh. Life is hard here, but it is life.” The Kutupalong refugee camp itself is life too. It is a pretty bright and cheery sort of life after you’ve emerged out of the dark places that Moniur, Mohammed and Salim descended into. Almost bright and cheery, if you hold your nose and shut out your eyes to the misery all around – to the open hillside gutters and the baking-hot shacks with mud floors and black plastic roofs – and if all you do is look at the smiles on the faces of the 10,000 children there. They mob us foreign visitors, whose every gesture they find hilarious. One girl, of maybe 11, wearing violet-blue glass earrings, struck us as strikingly beautiful. We took photographs of her, for which she posed with confidence, but as we left the camp, we feared for what the future might hold for her. The thought passed through one’s mind that if sex traffickers were as active here as the people-smugglers, which we were told was the

case, then what hope for this girl?

And even if she were lucky and escaped the clutches of evil men – who reportedly sell Rohingya girls to places as far away as China – what kind of a future could she hope to have?

The children's smiles and laughter were little different to those of children with access to soap and water and food and education and Nintendos in the greenest suburbs of Surrey. But fast-forward a decade in your imagination and the little girl with the violet-blue earrings transforms into Nur Ayesha, a woman of 23 I met inside a sweltering shack.

Nur, a woman of delicate features in a hard face, told me she had left Arakan four years ago to get married, as she and the man she loved lacked the marriage licence money that the Burmese military demanded of them (assuming they would have been lucky enough to have secure official permission to marry).

But after a year of life in Kutupalong, her husband decided to set off alone in search of a better life for them both. She did not know, or would not tell, whether he had gone on a boat to Malaysia or tried to get there overland, as some also did. But the fact was that he never returned.

She assumed he had died, leaving her with a two-year-old child for whom she could not care. "I was sick and so was the child. I had no money for treatment. I was hungry and had no money to buy food," she told me, bringing to mind an image I had seen at a nearby port of another young woman, waist deep in water with a child in her arm, begging for fish from an arriving boat. So Nur took the option of last resort. "I was told that there were people who bought little children. I sold my two-year-old boy to some people who said they were from the city." Nur tells herself that the people who bought the child will rear him well; that they bought him because they were unable to have children themselves. Workers for NGO's who know Bangladesh well say this is unfortunately unlikely to be true; that the mother is either deceiving herself or lying. The child, they assured me, is condemned to a life of slavery, possibly even sex slavery. I asked Nur how much she had sold her child for. She replied, registering no horror or sense of injustice, as if the price had been fair one, that she had sold him for 500 taka – about £4.

"I am sad, I will always be sad, but what could I do?" She might have avoided the need to do that had her

husband made it to Malaysia and sent money back to her in the refugee camp. But, was life really better for the Rohingyas in Malaysia? Was the pursuit of that dream worth the cost and the sacrifice and the risk?

Mohammed and Salim, having made it there, seemed to think that, on balance, the answer was yes. Mohammed had found some occasional work on a building-site, and has met up with a small Rohingya community and found a little mosque where he can pray in peace, whenever he wants. His regret is that he has not managed to live up to his family's hopes yet, and has not been able to send any money home.

Salim, who has found a job in a tea shop, has sent money home, only to discover that a third of it is immediately lifted in "tax" by the local Burmese military who exercise such close Big Brother control over the Rohingya population that they can detect, through phone-tapping and spies, when a family acquires new money.

Did he consider himself, nonetheless, fortunate? Salim thought long and hard before answering. "I consider myself fortunate that I was let go from the boat and brought here, and that many died and I survived. But my greatest fear is that I will be arrested here and end up working as a slave on a fishing boat again, and that then I may not be so lucky, that I might have to do that forever."

I asked him if he would ever return to Burma. "I would like to see my family again," said small, neat, deliberate Salim, a bright boy with dark sad eyes who at 18 has already lived a thousand lives. "But how? No, it is not possible. This is my life now." It is his life now, just at it is the life of some 25,000 Rohingyas who have found a precarious home in Malaysia.

I went to a school in Penang province, or rather a little house, where a dozen or so Rohingya children spent their days doing what the children at Kutupalong wished they could do: learning writing, maths, English, the Koran. On a wall there was a chart with the flags of all the countries of the world on it. I asked a teacher to point out to me his flag. I asked a child. I asked all the children. Each silently and without hesitation placed their finger on the flag of Burma, a country from which they have fled, that does not want them and that humiliated and exploited them every day of their lives.

EVENTS OF 2009 IN BURMA

December, 2009

For Burma's generals, 2009 was little more than a breathing space between last year's constitutional referendum and next year's election. For everyone else, however, it was a year full of disturbing developments, with just the faintest ray of hope on the horizon.

Early in the year, the plight of the Rohingya grabbed the headlines, highlighting a humanitarian crisis that is just one of many in military-ruled Burma. Before the year was over, tens of thousands of refugees from other ethnic minorities would pour over the country's borders with Thailand and China, fleeing military offensives launched by the junta and its allies.

But for the regime, all of this was merely a sideshow. The generals' main tasks for the year were to keep opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi safely under wraps—which it accomplished thanks to an unwanted American "visitor" and a compliant court—and to rein in restive cease-fire groups ahead of the 2010 election.

When it wasn't settling scores within its own borders, the regime was busy forging new ties overseas. But while the Burmese generals found fellow pariah state North Korea to be a natural ally, they seemed less sure about how to respond to the friendly overtures from the US, their staunchest international critic.

Many in Burma welcomed the US initiative with cautious optimism, but after yet another year marked by farce and tragedy, few look forward to the year ahead with any great expectations.

Rohingya Refugees on the High Seas

Thai authorities process Rohingya boat people apprehended in Thailand's territorial waters (Photo: Royal Thai Navy)

The plight of Burma's minority Muslim Rohingya won wide international attention in January when it was disclosed that Thailand's navy had intercepted more than 1,000 in open boats in Thai waters and sent them back out to sea with little food or water.

A few hundred were later rescued near India's Andaman Islands and Indonesia's Aceh Province, but many others are presumed to have died at sea.

The Rohingya were taking to open boats to escape oppressive conditions in Burma's Arakan State, most hoping to reach Malaysia. Many failed to make it that far south and ended up on Thai beaches.

The Arakan Project, a Thailand-based NGO that advocates for the Rohingya, estimated in June 2008 that more than 8,000 Rohingya had reached Thai shores over the preceding two years.

Burmese Foreign Minister Nyan Win said the boat people would be allowed to return, but only if they identified themselves as "Bengalis" born in Burma, rather than as Rohingya. In a bid to stop illegal border crossings, Burmese authorities are building a 200-kilometer wire fence along Burma's frontier with Bangladesh.

Courtesy: Irrawaddy

NASAKA EXTORTS MONEY FROM PARENTS OF DEAD SCHOOL BOY

Kaladan News, December 10, 2009

Maungdaw, Arakan State: Burma's border security force, Nasaka, extorted Kyat 500,000 from a parent due to his son's death by a buffalo, while he was rearing cattle on November 29, a close relative of the victim said, on condition of anonymity.

The victim has been identified as the son of Tazer Muluk. He hailed from Naribill East village of Maungdaw Township. The father was absent when the incident occurred, so the mother of the boy was called to the Nasaka camp for investigation. However, later she was released.

On November 28, in the morning, Md. Idris (10), a student of class III, son of Tazer Muluk was killed by a buffalo, while he was feeding cattle in the compound of his house. When the boy was feeding the cattle, the buffalo suddenly struck the boy with its horn and gored his stomach. The child died on the spot.

Immediately, the parents of the boy informed the concerned Nasaka camp and police station. The body was brought to Maungdaw General Hospital for post-mortem and the following day, the body was returned to his relatives. Later, in the evening, the boy was buried at his native village cemetery.

However, the parents of the boy had to pay Kyat 500,000 to the Court of Maungdaw Town, TPDC (Town-

ship Peace and Development Council) office, District Peace and Development Council (DPDC) office, and District police officer of Maungdaw, on allegations that the parents did not take care of their son, said a local trader. Besides, Nasaka Commander Major Nay Myo of Nasaka area No. 6 demanded Kyat 500,000 more from the parents. The buffalo was also brought to the Nasaka headquarters, according to a Nasaka aide. "The parents lost their son, their buffalo and had to pay a lot of money to the concerned authorities regarding the incident. It was an accidental death, yet why the concerned authorities extracted money from the parents is uncertain," said another close relative of the victim. A village elder said, "In other countries, except Burma, if people encounter problems like accidental death, the concerned authorities come forward to help the victim, but, in Burma it is quite different.

VPDC CHAIRMAN FINED FOR PROTESTING ILLEGAL SCHOOL FEES

Kaladan News, December 14, 2009

Maungdaw, Arakan State: A Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) Chairman was fined Kyat 1.7 million by Burma's border security force (Nasaka) on December 2, for protesting against a primary school headmistress collecting illegal monthly fees from primary students in Maungdaw township, said a local elder on condition of anonymity. He was identified as Mamon Rashid (23), son of Anis Ullah, from Nanda Khali (Thakay

Pyin) village under the Nasaka area No.6 of Maungdaw Township. He is also a current VPDC Chairman of the village. Recently, a primary school headmistress Daw Hla Myint (Bama) of Nanda Khali Government Primary School collected Kyat 500 per student as monthly school fees without any information to the school's teachers-parents association. Earlier, the school fee was only 100 Kyat. The parents of the students complained to the school headmistress, but she did not pay any heed as she has a good rapport with the Nasaka Commander Major Nay Myo of Naska area No. 6 of Maungdaw Township, said one of the parents who did not want to be named.

The parents of the students then drew the attention of the local VPDC Chairman Mamon Rashid. The village Chairman went to the school and discussed about the school fees and asked her not to collect Kyat 500 in place of Kyat 100 because the parents could not afford it. But, the headmistress did not agree, so there was some argument between them. After which the VPDC Chairman went home. The headmistress complained to the Nasaka Commander Major Nay Mo of Nasaka area No.6. The Nasaka Commander called Mamon Rashid to the Nasaka camp and extorted Kyat 1700,000 for quarrelling with the headmistress, said a close relative of the victim. One of the parents said, "The VPDC Chairman has the right to talk about the school fees because of the excessive collection of fees from the students. But, he was fleeced by the Nasaka Commander."

A local businessman said, "The world community should be aware about the kind of human

rights violation that is going on in north Arakan against the Rohingya people." A local trader said, "Both the Nasaka Commander and the VPDC Chairman are government servants, but the Commander does not pay heed to him because of his religion."

NASAKA EXTORTS MONEY FROM VILLAGERS DISREGARDING ARMY'S ORDER

Kaladan News, December 14, 2009

Maungdaw, Arakan State: Burma's border security force, Nasaka, extorted Kyat 1.1 million from six villagers of Maungdaw Township on December 22, disregarding the Burmese Army's order. The villagers were accused of cutting pillars from forests without permission from the concerned authorities, said a local school-teacher, on condition of anonymity. The villagers had permission from the army to cut pillars from forests for the construction of the fence on the Burma-Bangladesh border. The victims were identified as Nur Alam (25), Shoffi Rahman (27), Mamoon Rashid (35), son of Khalu, Md. Taher (30), son of Imam Hussain, Safi Afan (30) and Abdul Salam (25). They all belong to Gorga Bill village of Kyauk Hla Gaar village tract of Maungdaw Township. On December 21, the villagers were ordered to do this job by the army personnel, who came to Maungdaw Township from Buthidaung Township for security and supervision of the barbed wire fencing on the Burma-Bangladesh border. The villagers were forced by the army personnel to carry logs (pillars) from forests

for construction of the fence on the border, the teacher added.

On December 22, the villagers went to the forest to carry pillars and the Nasaka personnel of Nasaka area No. 6 stopped them, while the villagers were going to Pranpru village tract of Maungdaw Township carrying the pillars to where the army has been temporarily staying. The villagers told the Nasaka that they were ordered by the army to carry pillars for fence construction on the border. But, the Nasaka authority took no heed about the order of the army and arrested all of them and brought them to their camp.

However, the incident was informed to an army officer and the army went to the Nasaka camp to release them, but, the army personnel failed to set the villagers free. However, later, the villagers were released by giving Kyat 1.1 million to Nasaka officer Major Nay Myo, according to a close aide of the Nasaka. A local village elder said on condition of anonymity, "The villagers are innocent as well as forced labourers. Why did the Nasaka extort money from them? Why is the army unable to free them from the Nasaka? What are the reasons?" A local trader said, "The villagers paid money for fear of torture by the Nasaka and it has become a lawless country." The villagers have to follow the orders of the army as well as Nasaka. Why did the Nasaka extort money from innocent villagers by defying the army's orders?" a close relative of one of the victims asked.

NASAKA DECEIVES VILLAGERS AFTER GIVING PERMISSION TO OWN MOBILES

Kaladan News, December 14, 2009

Maungdaw, Arakan State: Recently, Burma's border security force, Nasaka, deceived three villagers in Maungdaw Township by giving them permission to possess mobile sets for commercial purposes after taking money, said a close relative of one of the villagers, on condition of anonymity.

Two months ago, Nasaka Commander, Major Nay Myo of Nasaka area No.6 of Maungdaw Township gave permission to two villagers for using mobile sets for commercial purposes in their village by taking Kyat 100,000 each as monthly fees. Use of mobile sets in North Arakan is prohibited by the concerned authority.

The villagers have been identified as Hussain Ahmed (27), son of Abul Khasim and Moulvi Hafez Ahmed (38), son of Fazal of Sarfaddin of Maungdaw Township. However, on December 7, the officer called the two villagers to the Nasaka camp of Nasaka area No.6 and asked them to surrender their mobile sets and took extra Kyat 110, 000 per person, giving the reason that the commander will be transferred to another place soon, said a Nasaka aide, who declined to be named. As a result, the two villagers have lost their mobile sets as well as their business and have also lost a lot of money, which was invested in their business.

Besides, on December 3, Sultan (30), son of Nazir, who hails from Redwin Chaung village of Maungdaw Township, was arrested by the Nasaka personnel of Nasaka area No.6, while he was returning home after buying edible oil and kerosene from Teknaf of Bangladesh. Earlier, five months ago, he was permitted to hold a mobile set by the Nasaka for doing business with Bangladesh as he has to pay monthly tax to the Nasaka. But, this time, he was fined Kyat 500,000 for possessing a mobile phone and was later released. So, Sultan has lost all his money which he had earned in five months, said a relative of the victim.

Nasaka destroys all businesses of Arakanese Rohingya people in northern Arakan, after letting them trade for a limited time and later destroys all his/her investment into the business, said a local rice trader.

Arakanese Rohingya people are unable to do business in north Arakan because of movement restrictions. A small number of Arakanese Rohingya people, who have a good rapport with the concerned authorities, have the chance to do some small business for a limited time. However, without sharing details with the concerned authorities about the business, the Arakanese Rohingya people have no right to do business. In short, all the businesses are controlled by the concerned authorities in Arakanese Rohingya areas, said a local shopkeeper of Maungdaw Township. "The Nasaka has been established in Arakan since 1992 and all the activities such as--- economy, education, health, politics, business, social welfare and other activities --- of the Arakanese Rohingya people are being controlled by the Nasaka. The Nasaka also controls domestic animal rearing of the Arakanese Rohingya people in rural areas, said a schoolteacher from Maungdaw Town. The last goal of the Nasaka is to completely destroy Arakanese Rohingya people's businesses, said a politician from inside Arakan.



A Rohingya refugee woman in Kutupalon Un-official refugee camp put on the wall of her room that they want

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- 1. Religious rights
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Na-Naingngan Ranthu (enemies of the country)

Aha-Aha Nha rhu (power monger)

Pha-Pha Seit Wadi (facist)

WISH YOU A HAPPY NEW YEAR