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OBAMA URGES MYANMAR TO FREE AUNG SAN SUU KYI

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BURMA ON THE PATH OF NUCLEAR POWER

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EID MUBARRAK

EDITORIAL: OBAMA URGES MYANMAR TO FREE AUNG SAN SUU KYI

President Obama urges Burma to release detained Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, urging the regime to take a path to 'true security and prosperity'. Sanctions will remain until there are concrete steps toward democratic reform. 'We support a Burma that is unified, peaceful, prosperous and democratic. And as Burma moves in that direction, a better relationship with the United States is possible.' Obama said in a speech delivered in Tokyo.' That is how a government in Burma will be able to respect to the needs of it people,' he said. 'That is the path that will bring Burma true security and prosperity'. In a joint statement after the talks, the U S and ASEAN leaders warned the junta that the election planned for next year must be 'free, fair, inclusive and transparent' to be credible. Anand Sagar wrote that, "For many long years in Myanmar the hopes and aspirations of its people have been brutally crashed by one of the world's most repressive and abusive military regime in power. But, for once, there is also a flickering glimmer of hope that the generals might free the country's foremost pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi ...soon. Or so it seems. It is, of course, an ironical use of four -letter word "soon". After all, how soon is soon enough _ considering that Suu Kyi has already spent some 14 of the past 20 years under solitary detention!-" The Obama administration's Burma Policy consists, to free all political prisoners including Suu Kyi, securing genuine tripartite dialogue, pressing an end to conflicts with ethnic minority groups and holding the junta accountable for human rights violations. In recent months the US has begun to talk directly with the generals, which previous administrations had shunned such a move. There has been a serious meeting between senior US diplomats and Burmese government ministers including the Prime Minister, Thein Sein in Burma, New York and elsewhere. The most critical meetings were when Assistant Secretary, Kurt Campbell visited Burma in early November. The most significant is that Rohingya represented in his talk with the ethnic groups.

Myo Than represented a Rohingya Organization. Scot Marciel, the deputy US assistant under- secretary for Asia and Ambassador to ASEAN, who also

accompanied Campbell to Burma told, "We feel that there are more than 50 million people in the country who deserve the efforts of the international community to try to help bring about progress and we are committed to that." "Dialogue is not an end in itself," Marciel stressed""there has to be concrete results." "The Obama administration has yet to spell out what they mean by free and fair elections," said David Steinberg. "Does that mean Aung San Suu Kyi being allowed to run or campaign? The NLD being able to contest the elections?" Unfortunately everything still remains open to interpretation." The future is likely to become clearer in the few weeks - after the SPDC quarterly meeting and the United Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) congress in Naypyidaw. The USDA is expected to announce the formation of its political party. An interim cabinet _ which has already been dubbed as interim government _ is also to be announced before the end of the year, according to the Burmese government sources. The ball is firmly in Than Shwe`s court. It is up to him to free Suu Kyi, if she could convince him that she will not hurt his strategy for the future.

FINANCIAL EXPRESS DHAKA, MONDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2009

'Experts for bilateral talks to settle maritime dispute' FE Report

The government should resolve maritime dispute with India and Myanmar through bilateral talks as arbitration at the United Nations may not yield desired result, experts said Sunday. They made the observation at a dialogue in the city more than a month after Bangladesh went to the UN to settle its long-standing rows over ownership of sea territory with the two neighbours. Policy Research Centre, a local think-tank, organised the dialogue on 'Bangladesh's Maritime Boundary Concerns, Regional Tensions and the Myanmar Factor'. Speakers at the dialogue said the government should have taken adequate preparation and conducted survey on maritime boundary before moving to the UN for arbitration. "Arbitration is the last resort and we should move there after bilateral negotiations exhaust," former ambassador Rashed Ahmed Chowdhury said. Chowdhury, the chief discussant, said the prime minister should raise the maritime row with her Indian counterpart in her first visit to the neighbouring country after coming to power in January. "This is high opportunity for Sheikh Hasina to bring some-

thing for her countrymen through negotiations during her visit to New Delhi," the ex-envoy said. "There are no permanent friends or enemies. But national interests are permanent," he said, stressing renewed and vigorous talks with neighbours to resolve key disputes. Chowdhury also stressed consensus among the main political parties on key issues including the maritime row with neighbours. "We have huge challenges ahead of us and political leaders should reach consensus on major issues. Attention of the USA and China on the Bay of Bengal is a reality and we have to manage that. "Professor Tareq Shamsur Rahman, who moderated the dialogue, said the maritime cell of the foreign ministry has not been strengthened in the last 37 years. "Bangladesh is now paying price due to such gross negligence," he said. The Jahangirnagar University professor said the maritime boundary may be demarcated on the basis of equality or equidistance basis. "It is major question whether national interest would be protected at the UN arbitration." "Steps should be taken to solve other existing problems such as border disputes and Rohingya issue with Myanmar," he said. Maimul Ahsan Khan, professor of law at Dhaka University, said international definition of equality and equidistance in maritime boundary should be redefined. "Our position has to be strengthened otherwise we will not be able to realise our rights," he said. Mahbubul Haque, director of Policy Research Centre, in his keynote paper said the arbitration is a lengthy process and neither India nor Myanmar has responded to the arbitration notifications. "Previous attempts at negotiations have fallen flat. So we must be fully equipped with facts, figures and justification to ensure our claim has enough weight to carry it through and win a positive verdict from the international tribunal," he said. Senior journalist Joglul Ahmed Chowdhury, however, defended the government's move to take the maritime boundary delimitation issue to arbitration at the UN. "But that is not enough. We have to convince the international community that our demand is fair. National consensus is also needed," he said. Geo-political analyst Dr Dilara Chowdhury, an ex-professor of Jahangirnagar University, said Bangladesh is to blame for deteriorating ties with Myanmar as Dhaka tends to be complacent in its dealings with Naypyidaw.

Rights activist Farida Akhter demanded amicable settlement of the Rohingya issue with Myanmar. "I know it's a political issue. But we have to see whether we are addressing the issue in a right manner." Abu Sayed Khan, managing editor of the Shomokal, columnist Farhad Mozhar and Prof Mansur Musa, former director general of Bangla Academy, also spoke on the occasion.

BURMA ON THE PATH OF NUCLEAR POWER

By Aman Ullah

"Before 2000, the idea that Burma might one day become a nuclear power was considered fanciful"
Andrew Selth,(Australian defense analyst)

Ever since Burma regained its independence from the United Kingdom (UK) in 1948, successive Burmese governments, from U Nu, Ne Win to present SPDC, have sought to enhance the country's security and counter nuclear threats by opposing the manufacture, deployment and use of nuclear weapons by any state, anywhere in the world.

Burma has been a full member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and was a founding member of the Geneva-based Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee (ENDC). It was among the first countries to become a State Party to the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, banning nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water. Burma has signed and ratified the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which prohibits the placing into orbit around the earth of any objects carrying nuclear weapons, the installation of such weapons on celestial bodies, or any other manner of stationing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in outer space.

In 1992, Burma became a State Party to the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and has always supported the concept of nuclear free zones, and in 1995 signed and later ratified the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone. In 1996, Burma signed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which it described as 'an essential step towards nuclear disarmament'.

In 2000, Burma was elected Chairman of the UN's First Committee, which deals with proliferation and international security issues. Over the past decade, Burmese representatives to the UN and associated bodies have reiterated Burma's 'firm belief that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against a nuclear disaster'.

After 2000, however, these fictional scenarios seemed to be coming true. That year, the ruling State Peace and Development Council announced that it planned to purchase a small nuclear reactor from Russia.

Burma first initiated a nuclear research program as early as 1956, when its then-democratic government set up the Union of Burma Atomic Energy Center, UBAEC, in then-capital Rangoon. Unrelated to the country's defense industries, it came to a halt when the military seized power in 1962.

Burma's stagnant nuclear program was revitalized shortly after Pakistan's first detonation of nuclear weapons in May 1998. Senior general and junta leader Than Shwe signed the Atomic Energy Law on June 8, 1998, and the timing of the legislation so soon after Pakistan's entry into the nuclear club did little to assuage international concerns about Burma's nuclear intentions. Some analysts believe the regime may eventually seek nuclear weapons for the dual purpose of international prestige and strategic deterrence. Burma's civilian-use nuclear ambitions made global headlines in early 2001, when Russia's Atomic Energy Committee indicated it was planning to build a research reactor in the country. The following year, Burma's deputy foreign minister, Khin Maung Win, publicly announced the regime's decision to build a nuclear research reactor, citing the country's difficulty in importing radio-isotopes and the need for modern technology as reasons for the move.

The country reportedly sent hundreds of soldiers for nuclear training in Russia that same year and the reactor was scheduled for delivery in 2003. However, the program was shelved due to financial difficulties and a formal contract for the reactor, under which Russia agreed to build a nuclear research center along with a 10 megawatt reactor, was not signed until May 2007.

The reactor will be fueled with non-weapons grade enriched uranium-235 and it will operate under the purview of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog. The reactor itself would be ill-suited for weapons development. However, the training activities associated with it would provide the basic knowledge required as a foundation for any nuclear weapons development program outside of the research center.

The agreement does not mention North Korea, but in November 2003 the Norway-based broadcasting station Democratic Voice of Burma, run by Burmese exiles,

reported that 80 Burmese military personnel had departed for North Korea to study "nuclear and atomic energy technology."

The report remains unconfirmed, its source unclear. If Burmese military personnel traveled to North Korea, it's more likely for training in maintenance of missiles, which Burma then wanted to buy from North Korea but could not yet afford.

Alarm bells rang in August 2008, after India withdrew permission for a North Korean plane to over fly its airspace on route to Iran, just before taking off from Mandalay in Burma where it had made a stopover. The Ilyushin-62 carried unidentified cargo, and it's destination after the stopover was unclear.

Reports of some cooperation between Burma, Russia, North Korea and Iran have also come from two Burmese nationals, an army officer and a scientist, who recently left the country. According to them, a Russian-supplied 10-megawatt research reactor is being built, at Myaing, north of Pakokku, said to be for peaceful research. But according to the defectors, another facility exists south of the old hill station of Pyin Oo Lwin, formerly known as Maymyo. Three Russians supposedly work there while a group of North Koreans are said to engage in tunneling and constructing a water-cooling system. The defectors also assert that in 2007 an Iranian intelligence officer, identified only as "Mushavi," visited Burma. Apart from sharing nuclear knowledge, he reportedly provided advice on missile systems using computer components from Milan.

Burma has uranium deposits, and the Ministry of Energy has identified five sources of ore in the country, all low-grade uranium unsuitable for military purposes. But the defectors claim that two more uranium mines in Burma are not included in official reports: one near Mohnyin in Kachin State and another in the vicinity of Mogok in Mandalay Division. The ore is supposedly transported to a Thabeikkyin refinery, conveniently located between the two alleged mines.

According to Swedish journalist Bertil Lintner "Until such reports can be verified, or refuted, speculations remain. It may be years, if not decades, away from developing nuclear-weapons capability. But the fact that the country's military leadership experiments with nuclear power is cause for concern."

But it may not be years or decades away from developing nuclear-weapons capability for Burma, it is building a secret nuclear reactor and plutonium facilities with the help of North Korea and aims to have a nuclear bomb in five years, according to a two-year investigative report. The report, published in the Bangkok Post's Spectrum magazine recently after a similar article appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald, was the result of a two-year investigation into Burma's nuclear ambitions by Desmond Ball, a regional security expert at the Australian National University, and Phil Thornton, an Australian journalist based on the

Thai-Burma border.

The Sydney Morning Herald reported recently that Burma appears to be establishing nuclear facilities with help from North Korea and Russia, possibly with the intent of producing nuclear weapons. If true, Rangoon's possession of nuclear arsenal will tilt the balance of forces by having in China's side allies like nuclear armed North Korea, Russia, Pakistan, and, perhaps, Iran too. Quoting two Burmese defectors who had disclosed details of the scheme to an Australian strategic studies analyst, Desmond Ball, and a Thailand-based journalist, Phil Thornton, some reports revealed that Rangoon's military regime has secretly constructed a reactor at Naung Laing that would encompass reprocessing technology designed to extract weapon-grade plutonium. Besides, a command and control facility for a nuclear-weapon program was reportedly prepared at a nearby underground location and members of the military nuclear battalion were working in the area, said one of the defectors. Basing their report primarily on the testimony of two defectors from the Burmese regime, including one army officer and a book keeper for a trading company with close links to the military, the report claimed that Burma is excavating uranium in 10 locations and has two uranium plants in operation to refine uranium into "yellowcake," the fissile material for nuclear weapons.

To have a capacity to make nuclear weapons Burma would need to build a plutonium reprocessing plant. Such a plant is planned in Naung Laing, central Burma, where Russian technicians are already "teaching plutonium reprocessing," the army defector, Moe Jo told the investigators. Burma signed a memorandum of understanding with Russia's atomic energy agency in May, 2007, to build a 10-megawatt light-water reactor using uranium.

The report suggests that Burma's non-military nuclear ambitions are nonsense. "They say it's to produce medical isotopes for health purposes in hospitals," civilian defector Tin Min, a former employee of the junta-connected Htoo Trading Company, told Spectrum. "How many hospitals in Burma have nuclear science? Burma can barely get electricity up and running. It is nonsense," Tin Win, an alias, said. Htoo Trading, owned by Burma business tycoon Tay Za, who has close connections with the military, is handling shipments of yellowcake to both North Korea and Iran, the report claimed. It speculated that in the future North Korea might provide Burma with fissionable plutonium in return for yellowcake.

The report's of two authors urged Burma's neighbors in ASEAN to closely monitor Burmese nuclear program, the subject of much speculation in the past. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton raised the specter of closer North Korean-Burma collaboration in nuclear armaments during her visit to Thailand last month to attend the ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia's main security event.

In the past, white elephants were considered a sign of power and prosperity in Southeast Asia, and rival kings would compete to get hold of as many as possible for their royal courts. Burmese kings felt an increased sense of power when they possessed a white elephant; a lucky king could call himself Sin Byu Shin, meaning "Owner of a White Elephant."

Today, the SPDC has been engaged in an ambitious expansion and modernization programme to become a significant military power in the region. As former kings need to possess white elephant to be lucky and to be powerful in the region the SPDC need to possess nuclear power. But how far they will able to prevent the dangerous accumulation of radioactive material and maintains the safety of nuclear reactor while they have trouble maintaining existing electricity generators. . But a nuclear-powered Burma would be a nightmare for all neighbors and would upset the balance of power in the region.

A BURMESE SCHOLAR VIEW ON ROHINGYA

Deriving from recent debates about ethnicity and other axes of identity in contemporary cultural geography, anthropology and history, my aim here is to respond to 'scholars', 'academics' and 'intellectuals' whose discontent with 'Rohingyas' seems to be more politically motivated than objective examination of the politics of ethnicity (My apology if this observation dose not reflect the complex Rakhaing-Rohingya struggle).

Before I start off, I should admit that my research area is not western Burma or Arakan/Rohingya/Rakhaing. Therefore, my discussion is less about the specificity of Rohingyas/Rakhaing/Arakan affairs than the very nature of identity at a conceptual level. My purpose here is not to take side with Rohingyas or to blame Rakhaings for being anti-Rohingyas (as I will discuss at the end). Instead, my aim is to point out that it is inappropriate and misleading the public to promote conceptually wrong arguments as if they are academically sound research and scholarly opinion. Most importantly, I'd like to discuss how these arguments theoretically and emp irically contradict the understandings of ethnicity that have been articulated in broader academia.

Perhaps, one of the most visible arguments is something like this: "If one carefully scrutinizes all available authentic historical and etymological facts it comes out clearly that there was no ethnic group called "Rohingya" in Arakan as well as in Burma, and it is only an invented name in the late 1950's. All claims of the "Rohingyas" are baseless and found out to be incorrect." (U Khin Maung Saw, http://kyaukphru.blogspot.com/2009/08/response-to-press-release-of-rohingyas_21.html).

If I may, I'd like raise two critical points:

(i) First, as scholars themselves know very well, any attempt to seek 'authenticity' is problematic because what we assume to be authentic is already constructed in the first place within particular epistemological frameworks. I am not sure if resorting to authenticity is a helpful academic practice. Moreover, picking something as authentic means the writer has already taken side, and has already taken that something for granted, instead of examining it.

When talking about etymological facts, U Khin Maung Saw's argument has problems in terms of time-space contingency. The reason I take issue with his 'etymological facts' argument is that it fails to take into account how ethnicity, political community, political process, etc are all contingent on certain historical and political processes with spatial and temporal dynamics. To elaborate, the kind of arguments by anti-Rohingya scholars that the place (i.e. Arakan state or earlier kingdoms) and the people (Rakhaing) 'have always existed' (and Rohingyas just moved in) is precisely the kind of argument that critical anthropologists (e.g. Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Malkki 1994; Appadurai 1988) and historians (e.g. Thongchai Winichakul 1994; 2000) would highly reject. Unlike U Khin Maung Saw, they all have argued in different ways that places, peoples and identities are not given, but are the products of various historical and geo-political processes that continue to divide and re-configure these peoples, places and cultures (and relations among them). Thus, arguing that Rakhaings exist, but not Rohingyas, seem to be highly problematic.

Then, the empirical and historical question would be: if the name 'Rohingya' did not exist before the 1950s, how about other names such as Rakhaing, Bamar, Shan, etc? Did they exist, let's say, in the 1300s or earlier? Have they come to exist independently of various political processes -- particularly the formation of the Burmese nation-state?

As Burma and Arakan state are the

products of the nation-state formation through a relatively long history, the name 'Rakhaing' and the place 'Arakan' (as well as earlier kingdoms) must have been "invented" at particular points=2 0in time, just like the name 'Rohingya' was invented at another point in time. If we agree that Rohingyas 'migrated' from Bangladesh or somewhere else at one historical point in time, Rakhaings must have 'migrated' at similar or another historical point in time. But immigrating earlier or later does not negate the problematic reality that both groups have migrated from somewhere else. None of these groups fell from the sky.

The way U Khin Maung Saw understands ethnicity is known as 'essentialist notion' which has been largely discredited in academia because it sees identity as fixed, static and already existed instead of seeing it in relational and performative terms as fluid, articulated, contested and performed (e.g. see various work of Leach, Lehman/Chit Hlaing, Keyes, Butler and Hall for a broader theoretical discussion). My second point will follow up on this.

(ii) Second, and most importantly, the claim that 'it is only an invented name... All claims of the "Rohingyas" are baseless and found out to be incorrect' is both conceptually ridiculous and empirically wrong, especially if we think identity in a more theoretically nuanced way. Ethnicity is not just a 'thing' but also a 'process' (and a means) in which state actors impose identities, and the people themselves actively articulate their own identities for the sake of political and material (economic) livelihood.

The claim that the name 'Rohingya' is invented and therefore unacceptable completely contradicts the very foundational understanding of ethnicity and other axes of identity in contemporary academia (except few colonial, ethnocentric and essentialist schools that are losing ground).

Ethnic identity is not a god-given thing, but different forms of identities are invented and re-worked through space and time. That's why the process of identity formation is known as 'social construction'. Actually, the term 'invention' is not even the most appropriate jargon in academic discourses.

Here is how identity is socially constructed and articulated. The kind of ethnic identity we embody or we know today is a colonial product (see e.g. Keyes 2001; Thongchai 1994; Hirschman 1988; Moore 2005; Pinkaew 2003; CLR James - various; Hall - various). Colonial administrators classified people biologically, linguistically and racially, and categorized them into hierarchical orders to manage them. Through this complex and racist process, some people came to be categorized as civilize-able, and some not (Keyes 2001; Li 2003; Sturgeon 2005). The former groups later became dominant (national) groups, and the latter ethnic/minority/hill tribes/native groups. In fact, the colonial creation of minorities and categories was to restrict these people from political and economic spheres by denying their human-ness. This is not only true for Native Americans and Africans, but also for the peoples in Asia. Also, this is a way of colonial control over labour (e.g. Malays in colonial Malaya were forced to work in agriculture, and Indians i n mining, etc. cf Hirshman 1988). This is the history in which Tai became Shan, Pakanyaw (spelling) became Karen, Jainpaw became Kachin (the list goes on). This is the same history in which certain people became dominant national groups, and some became 'backward'

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ethnics and minorities.

Here is an important point. Anthropologists (also historians and geographers) played a large part in the creation of these ethnic names and categories -- and subsequent problems we are facing today! That's why a well-know anthropologist Arjun Appadurai said the natives "are creatures of the anthropological imagination" (1988:52). Thongchai Winichakul's (1994) historical account also shows similar stories. On this basis, I'd like to emphasize that colonial-type scholars with political and cultural biases are part of the so-called ethnic problems we are having.

The very nature of identity (or ethnicity) is that these historically constructed ethnic identities are re-worked by post-colonial state actors and the people themselves. State actors impose racialized identities such as the Hmong in Thailand as outsiders, immigrants, criminals, opium growers and environmental destroyers. Meanwhile, their name changed from Meio to Hmong.

The people themselves re-articulate their ethnic identities as well. For decades, well known writers in the field of identity politics in Asia and beyond such as Leach, Lehman (Chit Hlaing), Charles Keyes, Judith Butler , Stuart Hall, Nelson.. to name a few, have shown enough about this.

Ethnographic studies have followed the braoder theoretical framework (E.g. the Akha in Thailand articulate themselves as 'Thai hill tribe' (McKinnon 2004); Thai Karens portray themselves as the guardians of Thai forests (Pinkaew 2003); masyarakat adat claim themselves as indegenous of post-Suharto Indonesia (Li 2000)). Of course, all these names were socially constructed -- to repeat. And, different characteristics of each ethnic group are constantly re-worked because access to political and material resources depend on "who" belong to where, and "who" should have access to what: i.e. access to resources are contingent on their identities. Because of this, people constantly (to repeat: constantly) articulate and re-articulate their identities. Thus, Hall (1990), argues that identity is about 'becoming'. He also compares identity with a bus ticket. People use the ticket to get to where they want to go. This is where identity formation takes on political meaning. On this basis, disregarding an ethnic identity for being political became absurd.

Thus, articulation of identity is the normal process of 'ethnicity' or 'identity'. And, it is how the process of identity formation works.

Also, I'd like to point out that Rakhaings opposing to Rohingyas is a typical process of identity formation.. We can see this kind of anti-someone in almost everyone in the world. That process is known as 'other-ing', i.e. making someone the ' other', outsider, enemy, against which t 'self' can be defined. In other words, the other or constitutive other is required to define the 'self'. Without the other, the 'self' cannot exist. For example, masculinity cannot exist without femininity. Being a man is not being a woman (or homosexual). To be a man requires differentiating himself from woman (and homosexual).

Similarly, Rakhings need the 'other' to define themselves, and to be a Rakhing is not to be a Rohingya, Bangali, Burmese, Mon, Karen, etc. And, articulating Rakhaing-ness requires differentiating themselves from Rohinya, Bangali, Burmese, etc. This is how identity formation works through the processes of 'other-ing'. That's why this kind of othering is visible in global regions: white against black, Canadian against American, French against Algerian, Thai against Burmese, Kenyan against Somali, etc. (Just a side note: 'other-ing' is not only for ethnic identity formation, but also for other identities such as class. We might have seen the rich colleagues differentiating themselves from the poor ones within our own groups).

Therefore, rather than taking side with one group either to blame Rakhaing for othering Rohingyas or to blame Rohingyas for 'inventing' the name, academics should distance themselves from discredited colonial, ethnocentric and essentialist notions of ethnicity. They should be progressive enough to realize that articulating identities and 'other-ing' are typical processes of identity formation. Thus, rather than blaming Rakhaings and Rohingyas for what they are doing as if they are the only ones 'othering' and 'inventing', a short-term task for academics is to focus on understanding how the identity formation of different groups take on different forms and meanings in order to mediate these groups so that everyone is secured from material deprivation (i.e. human security through equity and material well-being).

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ARAKANESE ROHINGYA PATRIOTIC SINGER DIES

By Tin Soe

Jeddah, KSA: Arakanese Rohingya patriotic singer, Shabir Ahmed (Shobu) died on November 19, 2009 at about 9:20 am at the King Abdul Aziz University Hospital in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), according to Ronnie, who works for human rights of Rohingya in Jeddah. He was 59.Shobu died due to failure of both kidneys. He was going through dialysis for the last one year.He was admitted to the hospital nearly two weeks ago, he said.

The Arakanese Rohingya patriotic singer, Shabir Ahmed (Shobu) son of Azhar Meah, hailed from Myoma Khayandan (Shidar Phara) village, Maungdaw. Shobu left his home town Maungdaw in 1980 for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for his performing arts given the oppression of the Arakanese Rohingya community by the Burmese military junta.

Shobu was the main singer of the Arakanese Rohingya theatre in Maungdaw and Buthidaung where they (he and some patriotic youth groups) explained about the Arakanese Rohingya and their situation through their artistic performance, said an elder from Maungdaw. He was a patriot and imparted love and patriotism to thousands of Arakanese Rohingya through his wonderful songs. Tears would roll down people's cheeks, when they heard his songs like "Arakanor Meri Herejohar…..", said his best friend, Mohamed Alam who loved his songs and worked for his stage shows in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Shobu was a friendly person and worked for his community whenever he had time and composed songs of his community situation in Arakan, said Alam."His songs were an inspiration and a shelter to run away from the many untold suffering that the Arakanese Rohingya have to go through," he added.

OPINION: BURMA'S MINORITIES MUST NOT BE OVERLOOKED

Before there's more dialogue with General Than Shwe, human rights abuses against ethnic minorities must cease.

By Richard Sollom — Special to GlobalPost
Published: November 28, 2009 10:19 ET

COX 'S BAZAAR, Bangladesh and CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts — Twenty years after the November 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, a repressive barricade is being quietly raised in the jungles of Burma.

The Burmese military junta has begun erecting a concrete and

barbed-wire fence along its western border with Bangladesh, allegedly to prevent smuggling, but more probably to prohibit the return from Bangladesh of some 200,000 Rohingya migrants — a persecuted Burmese Muslim minority group who are now stateless.

Burma's new barrier symbolizes the past five decades of military rule and isolation from the free world. It should also remind the West of the brutal repression of ethnic minorities who abide mass atrocities behind Burma's barricade.

As principal investigator for Physicians for Human Rights, I returned last week from a three-week trip to Burma and its neighboring countries — Bangladesh, India and Thailand — where I met with Burmese civil society and victims of human rights violations. Our investigation revealed ongoing crimes against humanity in this country where murder, forced displacement, slave labor, conscription of child soldiers, torture and rape comprise the military's arsenal of rights abuses inflicted against ethnic minorities.

In Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, I interviewed a 72-year-old Buddhist monk whom Burmese military imprisoned and tortured for the past two years after he had led the peaceful demonstration that sparked the Saffron Revolution — the name of which stems from the monks' colorful monastic robes.

In Aizawl, India a group of Christian women who fled Chin State in Burma this year reported to me unspeakable sexual violence they suffered at the hands of the Tatmadaw, or Burmese military, during its roundup of forced laborers.

In the Thai border town of Mae Sot, I met a 14-year-old landmine survivor whose left leg was blown off just days earlier while tending his family's four water buffalo just across the border in Karen State, Burma.

Such egregious breaches of human dignity are not isolated incidents. They highlight the military's widespread and systematic campaign to crush dissent by imprisonment, torture, enslavement and the silencing of ethnic minorities such as the Chin, Karen, Kokang, Rakhine, Rohingya and Shan. No group is spared.

Burma's de facto president, the reclusive Senior General Than Shwe, seized power 20 years ago while promising free and fair elections in 1990. The opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) trounced the military-backed State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) garnering 59 percent of the vote and 80 percent of the seats in the People's Assembly. SLORC dismissed the results, and subsequently detained NLD's Prime Minister-elect Aung San Suu Kyi.

The merciless head of Burma's military junta will not brook a second defeat at the polls next year. He has hence stepped-up militarization this past year resulting in forced relocation and attendant rights abuses. Than Shwe's Tatmadaw has locked up 2,200 political prisoners, destroyed more than 3,200 villages and forced up to 3 million civilians to flee — all of which make it nearly impossible for the NLD and other political parties to organize prior to upcoming elections.

President Obama has recently embarked on a new policy of engagement with the Burmese military claiming targeted sanctions have failed to reform the repressive regime. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell met this month in the capital city Naypyidaw with his Burmese counterpart in a second round of dialogue, which began this September in New York. And Obama himself met recently with ASEAN leaders, including Burma's Prime Minister Thein Sein, in Singapore.

For such diplomatic initiatives to succeed the Obama administration must establish benchmarks and present credible consequences should its new strategy of engagement fail to produce movement toward real political change within Burma. The minimum price for continued dialogue should be the unconditional release of all political prisoners and the immediate cessation of rights abuses against ethnic minorities — without which there can be neither free nor fair elections in 2010.

By meeting with the Americans, Than Shwe has already procured what he craves most — international legitimacy — and revoking it is perhaps the best hope for a shift in Burma. If these series of high-level diplomatic talks do not result in any significant positive change by the military junta, the United States should fully implement tougher sanctions already allowed by the 2008 Burmese JADE Act and press the U.N. Security Council to launch a commission of inquiry into crimes against humanity in Burma.

Burma's military regime has maintained its intransigence for decades in the face of outside demands for

change. As the United States tries to alter that posture, it must not forsake justice and accountability for toothless diplomatic engagement.
Richard Sollom is Director of Research and Investigations at Physicians for Human Rights in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he directs public health research and human rights investigations in areas of armed conflict

OBAMA SENDS HAJJ, EID GREETINGS TO MUSLIMS

AFP, WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON, Nov 25, 2009 (AFP) - President Barack Obama sent greetings Wednesday on behalf of the United States to pilgrims performing the annual hajj in Saudi Arabia, and to Muslims worldwide celebrating the Eid-ul-Adha holiday.
"The rituals of Hajj and Eid-ul-Adha both serve as reminders of the shared Abrahamic roots of three of the world's major religions," read a White House statement.

"On behalf of the American people, we would like to extend our greetings during this Hajj season-Eid Mubarak," Obama said, using a traditional Muslim greeting.
A sea of pilgrims from around the world, dressed in white robes and towels, began the five-day hajj late on Tuesday and early on Wednesday, circling the Kaaba shrine inside Mecca's Grand Mosque.

Few people appeared concerned over the main threat to the hajj, swine flu, despite the news that four pilgrims had died from the disease before the rites officially began.
Obama said in the statement that the US Department of Health and Human Services partnered this year with the Saudi Health Ministry "to prevent and limit the spread of H1N1" during the hajj.

"Cooperating on combating H1N1 is one of the ways we are implementing my administration's commitment to partnership in areas of mutual interest," the president said.

Swine flu has killed some 6,750 people around the world this year, the World Health Organization said on Friday, and Saudi authorities have deployed as many as 20,000 health workers.

Eid-ul-Adha is the holiday that marks the end of the hajj.

TOC COMMANDER WANTS YOUTHS FOR FIRE SERVICE TRAINING

News - Kaladan Press
THURSDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2009

Maungdaw, Aralkan State: The Tactical Operation Commander (TOC) stationed in Buthidaung Town has ordered the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) Chairmen of Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships on November 14, to send youths to the concerned Nasaka area for 'Fire Service' training, said a VPDC chairman from Maungdaw Township.

The Commander also asked the VPDC Chairmen to send 15 youths from each village tract to the concerned Naska area by November 20, for Fire Service training. The government will not provide any support for the training. All the expenditure is to be borne by the concerned village tract. The training is for one week.

The youths, who had taken basic military training earlier from Nasaka are allowed to take the Fire Service training. Therefore, Rohingya youths are automatically excluded from the training as earlier Nasaka gave basic army training to some of the non-Rohingya youths, said a local school teacher of Maungdaw town.

Earlier, some youths across the Arakan State were forcibly recruited from villages to serve in the army because the army authorities failed to recruit voluntary soldiers in Arakan as many youths refused to join the army. As a result, the authorities gave them (youths) basic military training and allowed them to go home by propagating that the youths had been trained for fire service, said an elder from Buthidaung township.

The youths of Rathedaung, Pauktaw, Kyauktaw and

Mrauk U townships, in Arakan State had already been trained in Fire Service. Actually it is not for Fire Service training, as the junta intends to give them training for the 2010 election on how to get support from local people. This is being done in the guise of Fire Service training, said a politician from Maungdaw town who declined to be named.

Some USDA members and village councils in rural areas of Arakan are now preparing for the 2010 election, said a trader from the locality requesting not to be named.

"We believe that the junta authorities will take votes forcibly from the people though there is pressure from the international community," a local businessman from Buthidaung Town said.

HUGE TOLL FOR SACRIFICIAL CATTLE IN MAUNGDAW TOWNSHIP

Monday, 30 November 2009 16:07

Maungdaw, Arakan State: The Arakanese Rohingya community celebrated Eid-ul-Azha (Qurbani Festival) peacefully in Arakan State on November 28 without any obstacle, but the authorities collected heavy toll for sacrificial cattle in Maungdaw Township, said an elder of Maungdaw town on condition of anonymity.

To get permission for sacrificial cattle in Maungdaw Township, the Arakanese Rohingya people had submitted an application to the authorities where they had to pay Kyat 2,000 to 3,500 to the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC). But, rates differed from Nasaka, Burma's border security force, sector to another sector, depending on its Commander. Villagers also had to pay Kyat 1,000 to Nasaka and Kyat 500 to the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) for each cow. The money was collected through the VPDC members on the orders of the TPDC Chairman of Maungdaw Township, said a local villager.

However, in southern Maungdaw Town, the VPDC collected Kyat 2,500 per sacrificial head of cattle by the order of the TPDC Chairman, said a local trade.

The authorities permitted only one cattle market at Shikdar Para (Myoma Kayan Dan) village of Maungdaw Township, so the villagers of Maungdaw south and north had to come to this market to buy sacrificial cattle. As a result, villagers faced many difficulties buying from this market as the place is very far from Maungdaw south and north. Two more markets, one for Maungdaw south, another for Maungdaw north ought to have been allowed. It was unnecessary harassment to the Rohingya villagers and was aimed to collect more toll, said a businessman of Maungdaw town preferring not to be named.

To transport cattle to Maungdaw south after buying cattle from the market, villagers had to cross three Nasaka check-posts on the Aley Than Kyaw- Maungdaw road. The Nasaka check-posts collected Kyat 1,000 to 15,000 per head while the purchaser crossed the check-posts with their cattle. There are three Nasaka check-posts ---Du Chay Ra Dan, Zaw Matted and Pandaw Pyin--- along the road. The Nasaka collected Kyat 1,000 each from the check-posts of Du Chay Ra Dan and Pandaw Pyin and Kyat 15,000 at the Zaw Matted check-post. Accordingly, the purchaser had to spend at least Kyat 22,000 per head only as toll excluding tax, said a local trader on condition of anonymity.

Arakanese Rohingya people also had to give 0.5 Viss to one Viss of beef from each sacrificial cattle to the Nasaka camp. (One Viss = 1.75kg). Nasaka is always extort-

ing money from the Arakanese Rohingya people and thinking of ways to harass them. Arakanese Rohingya people are a source of earning for the authorities, said another local villager from Maungdaw south.

Arakanese Rohingya people had to spend a lot of money for sacrificial cattle on account of Nasaka's arbitrary collection of toll Besides, the buyer of the cattle had to pay Kyat 5% tax to the auctioneer and the skin of the sacrificial cattle were also taken away by the auctioneers, said another businessman from Maungdaw town.

The Qurbani doer, who gave sacrificial cattle from his cattle farm, had to reduce the number from his cattle list book or cattle/commodities possession book within three days. If anyone does not comply with the order, he will be fined Kyat 25,000. To reduce the number in the list from the cattle list book, he/she has to pay Kyat 5,000 per head, said a school teacher.

The price of the sacrificial cattle was between Kyat 300,000 to 800,000 each in the market. There are about 107 villages in Maungdaw Township and at least 50 to 60 cattle were sacrificed for Qurbani. So the authorities got a lot of money..

VILLAGERS FLEE TO AVOID FORCED LABOR FOR BORDER FENCE

Wednesday, 25 November 2009 17:10

Maungdaw, Arakan State: Villagers in Maungdaw Township are fleeing from homes to avoid being rounded up by Nasaka for forced labor in fence erection on the Burma–Bangladesh border, said a village elder on condition of anonymity.

A Burmese Army Sergeant U Sein who came to Maungdaw Township earlier and camped in Nagakura village for security and supervising the fence construction went to Wabeg village of Maungdaw Township on November 15 and mobilized 10 villagers to work in the fence construction by promising that they would be paid Kyat 3,000 a day each.
The villagers, believing the false promise went to the work site of Ngakura village tract with him. But, after four days, when the villagers demanded their wages they were not paid. The authorities were quoted as saying "We came here to suck Rohingyas' blood."

Hearing this, the villagers on November 19 evening fled from the wok site without getting money for their work, said another villager.

The following day, the Sergeant went to the Nasaka camp of Wabeg village and filed a case against the villagers, who fled the work site. The Sergeant filed a case saying the villagers fled from the work site after taking Kyat 100,000 each, said a Nasaka aide on condition of anonymity.

As a result, Nasaka personnel frequently go to their homes to arrest them, so the villagers have to keep fleeing from their homes to avoid arrest. They have been passing their nights without sleep. They are also unable to work to support their families. The family members are facing acute food crisis.

"How can the Rohingy people pass days and nights with such harassment towards the community?" a local trader asked.The ran away villagers are identified as Mohamed Khasim, Jalal Ahmed, Aman Ullah, Kori Mullah, Md Rofigue, Abul Shama, Md. Jubair, Jaffar Alam, Md. Eliyas and Md. Ismail.

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WISHES ALL ITS
MEMBERS, FRIENDS, WELWISHERS AND
THE ROHINGYA COMMUNITY
A
VERY HAPPY

EID MUBARRAK

1430H

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