



Monthly ARAKAN

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



ARNO President Mr. Nurul Islam, as special guest speaker gave speech in front of Burmese Embassy in London with Exile Burmese pro-democracy activists, Led by Burma Liberation Front (BLF) on 4th April 2010.

“The people living in northern Arakan are our national brethren. They are called Rohingyas. They are on the same par in the status of nationality with Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Mon, Rakhine, Shan. They are one of the ethnic races of Burma.” Burma's First Elected Prime Minister U Nu's radio announcement on September 25, 1954 at 8:00pm from BBS Rangoon.

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Prime Minister U Nu

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EDITORIAL

THE ELECTION OF BURMA

Thunder bolt and lightning usually occur before the storm and cyclone. Many bombs are exploded in several places of Burma before SPDC's promised elections to be held after 20-years of 1990 election. Senior General Than Shwe is lucky as the main opposition NLD, the winner of 1990 elections, is not contesting in the forth coming 2010 elections, which it condemned as unfair and undemocratic. The election is to be based on the SPDC's 2008 constitution, the referendum of which was held immediately after the devastating cyclone Nargis, while the people could still not be salvaged from its scourge. Till today, the victims of the cyclone Nargis are suffering in the Irrawaddy delta. Critics are accusing the NLD of irrational and inflexible for not registering with the election commission, thus not participating in the election.

All cease-fire groups of the ethnic minorities, including DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army) have rejected SPDC's plan to transform them as Border Guard Force (BGF), and the deadlines set time and again are already past. Chinese PLA troops have been deployed near the Sino-Burmese border. The Kachin Independent Army (KIA) is making preparation for the worst.

However, Senior General Than Shwe is going with his own agenda. The Prime Minister, Gen. Thein Sein, and Twenty two cabinet ministers gave up their uniforms, a move that was not unexpected in advance of the elections. They maintained their cabinet positions, however, perhaps, a foretaste of the civilian government to come. Thein Sein is going to register USDP party to contest the elections. They will be in addition to army's 25% quota ensuring an even greater role for the military in the legislature.

The army is now organizing the Rohingyas, with false promises, to vote for and to contest with USDP tickets. Having been subjected to 'policy of exclusion' and having become the scapegoats of the junta and oppressive functionaries, the Rohingyas have no alternative to oppose the proposal of the SPDC. But, still good sense does not prevail in the minds of the generals. The conditions of the Rohingyas remain unchanged. They promised to issue national registration cards or citizenship cards to the Rohingyas. Even the expenses on issuing cards are already collected from the Rohingya businessmen of Rangoon. But until now there is no sign of issuing such cards to the Rohingyas. The junta promised to appoint Rohingya teachers, but still no appointment. They also promised religious freedom, including permission to build new mosques and to renovate, repair and extend the existing mosques; but still there is no sign of ease, not to speak of permission. The existing humiliating restrictions on marriage, freedom of movement and education are not

lifted. Extortion from Rohingyas by the Nasaka, army, police, Sarapa (military intelligent) and other departments are intensified. Confiscation of land, Buddhist settlement, forced labour, rape, arrest, torture and extra judicial killing are in increase. Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO), in a press release, strongly condemned the SPDC's sham and undemocratic election. However, the Rohingya people still hope for better tomorrow.

The junta faces bitter opposition from the Wa, the Shan, the Karen and the Kachin, who are united in resentment against historical

domination by the Burmans. The Karen and the Shan, who have refused to sign truces, are engaged in intense fighting with regime's troops. These groups control large territories along the northern and eastern borders - along with the valuable trade in logging, jade, gems and gold that have helped finance their revolutions.

For SPDC the 2010 election is important as it has been a long-term project of the military junta to seek the legitimacy, at least in form, of an electoral mandate. The military will retain vast influence in all areas of life, no matter what shape the new government after

election takes. But the elections will not bring democracy, human rights and equality to the people of Burma. Instead, it will push the country and its people into the morass of despair, humanitarian crisis and civil war, causing outflows of refugees across the international borders, while posing regional instability and a threat to international peace and security. Nevertheless, an Indonesian situation, which ended the military rule since the overthrow of President Suharto in 1998, cannot be expected soon. ##

ROHINGYAS AND THE ELECTION OF BURMA

By SU Ahamed

The military regime of Burma known as State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) is poised to hold multi-party general election within a few months and rules and regulations to hold it have also been announced. Some small political parties have already registered with the election commission but the main opposition party National League for Democracy (NLD) has announced not to register with the election commission and to participate in it. As the election laws are designed in such a way that its leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will not be able to participate in it and the party itself has to expel her to exist as a legal political party they decided not to register. The election is likely to be in the later part of 2010.

The ruling Burma military and the subordinate Rakhines colluded each other to implement a Rakhine sponsored Muslim extermination plan. The plan was pursued until 1988 when a mass uprising occurred all over Burma demanding multiparty democracy. Students and entire population of Burma participated in it that led to the downfall of BSPP regime and multi-party democracy election was to be held in 1990. Rohingyas of Arakan were allowed to participate in that election by forming their own political parties and their MPs were elected.

As a matter of fact, a communalist Rakhine national organization based in Maungdaw prepared a most notorious memorandum dated 9th October, 1988, to be submitted to the then military regime called State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) led by Gen. Saw Maung. The regime later held the much talked 1990 democracy election in which NLD led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory. The memorandum submitted by the Rakhines of Maungdaw gave exclusive suggestions to the military how to discriminate the whole Rohingya community so that they voluntarily leave the land. The target according to the memorandum was that within decades, there would be no more Rohingyas in Arakan and Arakan would be exclusive dominance of Buddhist Rakhines and Burmans. Nasaka administration was brought in and all kinds of retractions, oppressions, persecutions leading to crimes against humanity have been committed. Because of all these inhuman treatments many thousands have to leave and seek refuge in other countries. But a total extermination was not possible half of the Rohingyas could be able to remain in Arakan counting their days in dismay and misery but another half of them are living abroad as Diaspora.

Facing the all kinds of ill treatments and

odd situation, millions of Rohingyas are now living scattered in Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Arab Gulf states; Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand and few others live in Europe and U.S.A. These overseas Rohingyas have become better educated and affluent while living abroad and they have become in valuable assets for their sense of Security and livelihood for the Rohingyas living in Arakan. The fanatic Rakhines and military policy makers could not have evaluated the potential characteristics of the Rohingya Diaspora that those Rohingyas could become boomerang for the anti-Rohingya campaign by the military regimes of Burma. It is now proved that Rohingyas living in Arakan and abroad are inseparable and will surely sharing weal and woe.

International pressure is intensified and crimes against humanity are being blamed in Arakan and inquiry commission is being suggested by the UN human-rights commissioner Mr. Quintana to probe all human-rights violations against Rohingyas of Arakan. Burma military regime (SPDC) is in need of support from all communities living in Burma who are eligible to take part in the next election. Support of the Rohingya community has become imperative. So all these unavoidable circumstances have taken the military to the point that there is no

way but to give in the demands of Rohingyas that their usurped ethnic rights shall be restored and all black laws should be repealed.

The situation is too different between Rohingyas and other national communities. Rohingyas are one step behind other communities as a well calculated conspiracy is in place to disqualify them as citizens of Burma. Rohingyas need to cooperate with any party which can re-establish the lost status thus now cooperating with SPDC by supporting the political process initiated for holding the next election.

As the confidence rebuilding and reconciliation process is under way vis-à-vis holding of the next election, the Rohingya community living in Arakan as well as in elsewhere Burma are keen to see something positive from the part of the government and work together for the mutual interest. It is noteworthy to mention that Rohingya entrepreneurs living in Yangon have given significant contributions to the Rakhine state regional developments which is unprecedented and no other ethnic community has ever given such contributions for the nation building activities. It is a clear message to all Burmese peoples that Rohingyas are ever ready to work for the development and welfare of Burma if ever reading to work for the welfare of the Burmese people and prosperity of the Union if they are integrated and given opportunities to do so. The Diaspora Rohingyas can also play

very constructive role in future political set up of Burma where inclusive of all Rohingya community is ensured. It can be hoped that Islamic world will also come forward in playing constructive roles as Rohingyas can play like a bridge between Burma and outside world. It can be some kinds of political advantage for Burma to have more advantageous relations with outside world.

When the wind started to blow in favor of the Rohingyas of Arakan, unscrupulous persons are bent on sabotaging it as there will remain no chances for them to commit crimes against Rohingyas in Arakan. Presently, loot, plunder, money extortions, arbitrary arrests, illegal confinements in jail and all other kinds of injustice are perpetrated against Rohingyas with no respite. Moreover, the last visit by UN Human-rights Commissioner Tomas Ojeh Quintana to northern Arakan had sparked anger to the inhuman perpetrators and they are now committing crimes with added momentum in Arakan. It is known that in Buthidaung jail, all inmate jailed heads are replaced from Rohingyas to Rakhines and torture of Rohingyas has increased and even pork contaminated food is supplied to Muslim inmates as punishment for Quintana's visit. Money extortion is unabated and Sarapa (military intelligence) in Maungdaw has intensified money extortions recently. The latest victims are Ziaul Haque, son of Jamal Hussein, 28 years, Hla Tha Ywa. He was taken to the camp on 10th of this

month (April) and extorted Kyats 300 thousands for alleged involvement in drug trade, Mohammad Elyas, son of Lapuya, 23years, ward no- 5 Maungdaw was charged for the same offence and kyats 70,000 was extorted and Yasin, son of Hakim Ali, Shweza Doliapara, age 50 years was taken to the camp and tortured and forced to pay kyats 750 thousand Kyats. The entire Shweza village tract is reeling under the Nasaka camp commander for extensive money extortions.

Rohingyas have been showing their faithfulness to the Union and dedication at the nation building activities. It is up to the military regime to create conducive atmosphere by restoring their ethnic rights and giving opportunities to utilize their potentials. Their overwhelming support at referendum of 2008 and present participation of electioneering is amply prove that they are loyal citizens and have stake in the Union. If they are oblivion at the instigation of racist, believe fiction instead of facts in the ground, it will be unfortunate sphere created by others where as Rohingyas got no role. The time has come for the military regime to shun symbolism and give substances at the new found trust and constructive engagement with proactive policies and pragmatic programmes to integrate and accommodate Rohingyas in mainstream Burmese society permanently, so that they can live peacefully and amicably at Arakan in Burma. ##

ARAKAN ROHINGYA NATIONAL ORGANISATION, ARAKAN, BURMA **Press Release (31 March 2010)**

ARNO supports the NLD's decision

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) fully supports the decision of the National League for Democracy (NLD) not to register as a political party rejecting the upcoming elections to be held under SPDC's strange and undemocratic constitution and unjust laws. This decision of NLD truly represents and translates the aspiration of the people of Burma despite regime's continued suppression and efforts to get rid of the NLD and country's democracy movement.

We would like to remind that now is the high time for all peoples of the country to resolutely march forward in solidarity, in order to complete the unfinished movement for democracy and human rights, to firmly establishing a peaceful, stable and prosperous Federal Union of Burma. Now the SPDC is trying to organize the Rohingya people of Arakan through false pretences while consistently confining them between the devil and the deep blue sea.

We urge upon the international community, UN and all member states, including US, EU, ASEAN countries not to recognize the results of the fake elections.

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ROHINGYA HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN BANGLADESH

The Rohingya refugees remain trapped in a desperate situation with no future in Bangladesh. These unfortunate people are caught between a crocodile and a snake: neither the xenophobic SPDC regime wants them back in Myanmar, nor does the Bangladesh government want them to stay because they are largely perceived as a burden on already scant resources, writes Dr Habib Siddiqui and Dr Nora Rowley

WHEN a widely circulated newspaper like the New York Times picks up the matter of ill-treatment of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, it is no small matter. It is a matter of grievous concern and shame to tens of thousands of Bangladeshi-Americans who live in and around the Big Apple state. In its February 20 publication the headline read, 'Burmese Refugees Persecuted in Bangladesh.' It said, 'Stateless refugees from Myanmar are suffering beatings and deportation in Bangladesh, according to aid workers and rights groups who say thousands are crowding into a squalid camp where they face starvation and disease.' It described the situation as a humanitarian crisis.

The NY Times report should come as no surprise to many of us who have been following the inhuman condition of the Rohingyas around the world for a number of years. In its special report, dated February 18, 'Bangladesh: Violent Crackdown Fuels Humanitarian Crisis for Unrecognized Rohingya Refugees', the Doctors without Borders (MSF) criticised the Bangladesh government for violent crackdown against the stateless Rohingyas in Bangladesh. It was a chastising report in which the MSF called for an immediate end to the violence, along with urgent measures by the government of Bangladesh and the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to increase protection to Rohingya refugees seeking asylum in the country.

Last month the Physicians for Human Rights issued an emergency report, 'Stateless and Starving: Persecuted

Rohingya Flee Burma and Starve in Bangladesh'. This report reveals a PHR emergency assessment of 18.3 per cent acute malnutrition in children. This level of child malnutrition is 'considered "critical" by the World Health Organization (WHO), which recommends in such crises that adequate food aid be delivered to the entire population to avoid high numbers of preventable deaths.' The extreme food insecurity causing this critical level of malnutrition is the direct consequence of Bangladesh government authorities' restricting movement and, therefore, income

up the squalid living conditions of the Rohingya refugees inside Bangladesh. In the last few years we have raised the Rohingya issue a few times with the Bangladesh government, but have failed to improve the deplorable condition.

Denied citizenship rights and subjected to repeated abuse and forced slave labour in their ancestral homes in the Arakan/Rakhine state of Burma by a xenophobic Buddhist government, where they cannot travel, marry or practise their religion freely, and betrayed and battered by their Magh Rakhine co-residents, many Rohingya

Muslims have hardly any option left for them to survive with dignity other than seeking refuge outside. The neighbouring Bangladesh to the north-west with her huge Muslim population and historical ties with Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, dating back centuries earlier during the Arakanese rule of those districts (1538-1666), provides a natural setting for seeking shelter. Thus, when the Burmese



Unregistered Rohingya women with their children outside the camp looking for foods

generation of the Rohingyas, and actively obstructing the amount of international humanitarian aid to this population.

Last week, the American Muslim Taskforce, an umbrella organisation that includes the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Islamic Circle of North America, amongst other Muslim organisations in the United States, hosted a press conference in the National Press Club, Washington DC to discuss human rights abuses in Bangladesh. In his inaugural statement, Wright Mahdi Bray of the AMT brought

genocidal campaigns - Naga Min (1978-79) and Pyi Thaya (1991-92) - forced eviction of some 300,000 and 268,000 Rohingya refugees, respectively, to seek shelter outside, it was Bangladesh where they ended up.

With the assistance of the UNHCR, Bangladesh repatriated most of those refugees back to Arakan. Still, however, tens of thousands of Rohingyas never returned, especially from the second batch of major exodus in 1991-92. The ongoing Nasaka operation and targeted violence by the Rakhine Maghs inside the Rakhine state have also forced many

Rohingyas to leave their ancestral land and return again to Bangladesh. Many of those refugees have often used Bangladesh as a transit point to seek better shelters elsewhere. Many of the Rohingyas have ended up in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, and also in Pakistan.

As noted recently by Syed Neaz Ahmad in a New Age article, the late King Faisal's kind gesture to offer the fleeing Rohingyas a permanent abode in Saudi Arabia is no longer respected by the new rulers who have restricted their employment and movement within the kingdom. According to him, some three thousand Rohingya families are in Makkah and Jeddah prisons awaiting their deportation. It is good to

hear that the Pakistan government has agreed to take these unwanted refugees. (Islamabad can also do a noble job, albeit a delayed one for the past four decades, in taking some 300,000 stranded Pakistanis - living a miserable life in camps in Bangladesh.)

There are some 13,600 Rohingyas registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Malaysia, an estimated 3,000 in Thailand, and unknown numbers in India. A small number of Rohingya refugees also live in Japan, Australia and the United States. The total number of Rohingya refugees living inside Bangladesh today is not known. The UNHCR stopped documenting the Rohingyas after 1991 as they shifted their focus to Africa and Eastern Europe. From my contacts within the Rohingya leadership, the estimate is around 400,000. Of these refugees, only 28,000 are recognised as prima facie refugees by the government of Bangladesh and live in official camps under the supervision of the UNHCR. The official camp has everything: primary schools, a computer learning centre funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, healthcare centres, adult literacy centres, supplementary

food centres for children and pregnant women.

Except a handful of wealthy Rohingyas who have been able to settle comfortably within the big cities, the rest of the refugees struggle to survive unrecognised and largely unassisted and unprotected, living in dire humanitarian condition with food



A Rohingya boy suffering from malaria with a high fever laying in his mother's lap

insecurity, poor water and appalling sanitation. They live mostly in and around Cox's Bazar and the Hilly districts of Chittagong. Some of the unfortunate refugees have also ended up living in slums of big cities like Dhaka and Chittagong. As reported by the MSF and the Amnesty International, these Rohingya refugees are treated as unwanted folks and have faced repeated beatings and harassment, including forcible repatriation to Myanmar. Many refugees, who had been repatriated to their country in the past, had entered Bangladesh again as they did not find any development and change in the attitude of the Myanmar authorities.

Some Rohingya refugees live at a makeshift camp in Kutupalong, south of Cox's Bazar. Last June and July the local authorities destroyed 259 homes in that makeshift camp to clear space around the perimeter of the official UNHCR camp at Kutupalong. There was a crackdown in October in Bandarban, east of Cox's Bazar, forcing many Rohingyas to take shelter in the makeshift camp in Kutupalong. In January 2010, another crackdown followed the refugees living in Cox's

Bazar. To add to the brutality of the authorities, the Rohingyas also suffer at the hands of the local population, whose anti-Rohingya sentiment is fuelled by local leaders and the media.

This was not the first time that this kind of problem emerged for the fleeing Rohingyas. In 2002 during the 'Operation Clean Heart' many Rohingyas were violently forced from their homes, which led to the establishment of the original Tal makeshift camp on a swamp-like patch of ground. This camp relocated, and in the spring of 2006 the MSF started a medical programme

at the new site, where at the time around 5,700 unregistered Rohingya lived in awful, unsanitary conditions on a small strip of

flood land in Teknaf in Cox's Bazar. After two years of providing humanitarian assistance, and following strong advocacy by the MSF, which ultimately gained the support of UNHCR and the international community, the government of Bangladesh allocated new land in Leda Bazar for around 10,000 people in mid-2008. Less than one year later, nearly 13,000 people were living in Leda Bazar Camp, their fundamental living conditions having changed little. According to the MSF, these people continue to struggle to survive without recognition and opportunities to provide for themselves inside an increasingly hostile environment.

With a total population of over 28,400, the unregistered Rohingyas at Kutupalong makeshift camp now outnumber the total registered refugee population supported by the UNHCR in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government has repeatedly stopped registration of those unfortunate refugees living outside the official camps. Without official recognition these people are forced to live in overcrowded squalor, unprotected and largely unassisted. Prevented from

supporting themselves, they also do not qualify for the UNHCR-supported food relief. And sadly, the UNHCR, which is mandated to protect refugees worldwide, makes little or no visible protest at the injustice of this situation.

According to the MSF, the UNHCR is guilty of not taking the return of the Rohingyas as a priority issue. The Office of the UNHCR must take greater steps to protect the unregistered Rohingya seeking asylum in Bangladesh. The UNHCR must not allow the terms of its agreement with the government to undermine its role as international protector of the Rohingyas who have lost the protection of their own state - Myanmar, and have no state to turn to. Any failure to protect the Rohingyas inside and outside Myanmar is simply not acceptable. We are told that as a poor country, Bangladesh faces a dilemma about the Rohingya refugees. If she shows too much flexibility a huge influx may occur, while being harsh creates concern among international community. Nevertheless, Bangladesh government's forced repatriation of the refugees against their wishes is simply inhuman and violates international humanitarian laws. It must be immediately stopped, failing which its international image may suffer terribly.

It must also stop all harassment against the Rohingyas. Temporary residency permits should be provided to the refugees so that they can earn their livelihood like any other Bangladeshi.



A Rohingya Girl in traditional Muslim dress

There is nothing worse than a forced poverty which leads to crime and other serious problems. Should the refugees choose to leave Bangladesh for a third country the government should not hinder that process either. It must also make all diplomatic efforts to find shelters for these stranded refugees in sparsely populated and prosperous countries of Europe and North America,

and the Gulf states.

The Rohingya refugees remain trapped in a desperate situation with no future in Bangladesh. These unfortunate people are caught between a crocodile and a snake: neither the xenophobic SPDC regime wants them back in Myanmar, nor does the Bangladesh government want them to stay because they are largely perceived as a burden on already scant resources. Outside China, none of the neighbouring countries of Burma has ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. This must change by ratifying those conventions.

As the Thai boat crisis of 2009 made clear, regional comprehensive solutions are needed to the situation of the stateless Rohingya. The international community must support the government of Bangladesh and UNHCR to adopt measures to guarantee the unregistered Rohingyas lasting dignity and well-being in Bangladesh. ##



NEW AGE Editorial April 11 2010, DHAKA

[Dr Habib Siddiqui is a human rights activist who has written and co-edited three books on the Rohingyas of Burma. Dr Nora Rowley is a medical doctor who as part of MSF worked with the Rohingya people inside Arakan. She is currently affiliated with the US Campaign for Burma.]

IS THERE ANY HOPE OF "FREE AND FAIR" 2010 ELECTION IN BURMA?

**Feature - Kaladan Press, Tuesday, 02 February 2010
Reported by Kyaw Hla**

A 70-year-old Arakanese Rohingya politician, Mr. AFK Jilani, the organizer of The National League for Democracy (NLD) for all of Arakan State, is calling for "free and fair elections in Burma in 2010 and transparency in the electoral process". But, he told Kaladan Press recently it will not be free and fair unless the military government ceases attacks against ethnic groups and reviews the 2008 constitution before the election is held. "Everybody wants democracy and to live peacefully, who dearly loves their country", he said. "It is a good chance to

vote in Burma again after 20 long years. Something is better than nothing, according to the common people." He believes over 50 percent of the eligible population will vote. Many registered political parties were banned by the ruling military junta. But, others, including the National League for Democracy (NLD), the National Unity Party (NUP) and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) were not banned, Mr. Jilani said.

"I hope that NLD party will participate in 2010 elections. They are very eager to

exercise their franchise right, but, the party has demanded the military regime to amend the 2008 constitution and to release all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi before the elections." But, he noted Senior General Than Shwe said that the 2008 constitution will not be changed. If that is the case, the NLD party may not participate in the election. And, he believes the junta is determined not to lose the elections and will use any means possible to win.

"Without the NLD party's participation,

the elections will not be free, fair and transparent. It is all depends on Sr. Gen. Than Shwe", he said. "Without amendments to the 2008 constitution, 25 percent of army personnel will automatically become members of parliament and other pro-government people will participate in the elections as well. Civilians will be forced to vote for the junta's supporting party and the President and Army Chief will become from army personnel or their supporters," he said.

"According to the 2008 constitution, the military regime wants disciplined democracy, but, power is going from the top down. An autocrat democratic government will not be able to solve the political issues going on in Burma and also the ethnic conflicts will continue," he added. He predicts the ruling military junta's National United Party (NUP) will nominate candidates from the government side. Some Independent parties will also nominate candidates.

"The Burmese military regime keeps information secret, but, exposes it to their supporters. We can get information from local people. We do not know exactly what the election law is, so far. The government does not want to be defeated again like the 1990 election", he added. "The situation on Burma could change if the military government does win, in that, the ruling party's power could decrease and some minority groups will get some concessions from the government side," he said.

"The 2010 election will bring a transition period in Burma. But, the new government will directly or indirectly be controlled by military. One significant implication will be that the 1990 general election result will become bygone history", he added. He said the previous election, held on May 27, 1990, was free and fair, but, the military regime learned a lesson from that election, in which it was completely defeated. Therefore, he feels the junta will not allow opposition parties the same freedom to campaign without restrictions in the upcoming elections. "Earlier, I voted for the NLD party. I was an NLD candidate from Maungdaw South constituency and am

still I am an active member of the NLD," he said.

"I voted in 1990 election with great hope for the restoration of democracy, human rights and rule of law in Burma. I



Kaladanpress

AFK Jilani

think more than 60 percent voted in the 1990 election. The NLD got 382 seats and won. However, the Burmese junta never handed over power to the winning party. They seized power from the elected government in 1962 under the pretext of ethnic nationalities demanding a federal system of government.

If the international community is sincere and serious about finding a solution to Burma's political problems, it should compel the junta to restore democracy, human rights and free and fair and inclusive elections in 2010. There are ways to bring down or convince the military generals. "An elder from Maungdaw Township said in mobile phone interview, "The 2010 election will not be free and fair because they organized the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC), with members including educated persons, religious leaders, Buddhist monks and villagers in Maungdaw Township. The concerned authorities also gave some advantages to these people. It is just for show to the international community. So, I think, the government will be successful in 2010 elections." In a brief entitled "2010 elections: A Recipe for Continued Conflict," a Regional Human

Rights Network, called Altsean-Burma, states that the regime's preparations for 2010 have already had serious human security impacts in the region-increasing crimes against humanity.

"The Burmese junta's proposed 2010 elections, the first step in activating the 2008 constitution, will have disastrous impacts on Burma and the region," ALTSEAN said in a Media Release in October, 2009. The eleven page brief reveals serious concerns over the possible conduct of the 2010 elections which are likely to disenfranchise an estimated 1.9 million voters. It also outlines the serious flaws in the 2008 constitution that will intensify the root causes of conflict that has plagued Burma. Some human rights advocates

fear that the 2010 elections will not be "free and fair" and just a way for the military to extend its power.

Mr. Aman Ullah (59), General Secretary of Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO), the main political party of the Rohingya people, said that the 2010 election is a mockery because the SPDC's plan is based on a constitution that will legalize dictatorship through a civilian front and a rubber-stamp Parliament to do its bidding. This Constitution reserved substantial blocs of seats in the national and local legislatures for the army, creating a strong new national defense and Security Council and vesting extraordinary powers in the Commander-in-Chief.

"It is only because they want to secure their rule, to immune their crimes and to protect their property acquired through illegal means. It is a clear indication that the military junta is not ready for change. The 2010 elections will lead nowhere; rather, it will further deteriorate the country's socio-economic and political situation. Moreover, a free, fair and inclusive constitution making process should be reflected the will of the people, which shall be the basis of the authority of government. But the constitution making process was controlled absolutely by that sham National Convention. No public meetings on the constitution were allowed, no

suggestions from the people were collected and no comments from the people were printed in the media. Criticism of the convention is banned by a 1996 order that carries a penalty of twenty years' imprisonment. Therefore, the 2010 election does not seem to be free and fair.

It is confirmed that 2008 referendum is the rehearsal for the 2010 election. The 2008 referendum was held in the midst of the humanitarian emergency created by Cyclone Nargis, in which those trying to organize a "No Vote" were harassed, arrested or beaten up. The rigged referendum delivered an unbelievable result of "92 percent" in favor. Freely voting for the people is still in question," he said.

"The SPDC may possibly try their best not to release the political prisoners including Daw Aung Kyi. The SPDC does not want Daw Suu to play a role in the election in 2010. Perhaps they may consider it when there is no alternative left for them. The SPDC never want to change and will never change the

constitution. Maybe some adjustment will be made. But it is not for some democratic provisions of the constitution or the holding of inclusive free and fair elections under international supervision. Rather it may be for their own purposes because in the 2008 constitution one of the biggest unanswered questions is what will happen to the current top leaders after the elections. To ensure their positions, their security and interests there may likely some alteration.

Most observers have felt that the elections will probably be held no later than May 2010, before the annual monsoon rains. I think it may be in November or December. The Laws and regulations on the elections and registration of political parties have not yet been promulgated. For the 1990 elections, the political party registration law was promulgated twenty months before the elections, and the election law twelve months before. If the same timeframe was to be followed this time, the political party law should have been

promulgated in April and the election law in December 2009 respectively, to meet a 2010 timeframe. Both laws are yet to be released. The longer this key legislation is delayed, the more plausible the argument that an "ambush" strategy is being considered. Much depends on when in 2010 the authorities plan to hold the elections. It seems likely they wish to have certain preparations in place, including candidate lists for their preferred party or parties, before issuing the electoral laws."

After analyzing these interviews, I am of the opinion the Burmese military ruling junta will prevent free and fair elections by using their own rules and regulations to their advantage. Therefore, I doubt the ruling junta will ever hand over power to any other party and the ethnic problems will not be solved and the Burma will go deeply into chaos. ##

[Kyaw Hla, reporter with Kaladan Press Network (KPN), based in Chittagong, Bangladesh.]

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND EDUCATION OF ROHINGYAS

By AFK Jilani

There is a separate Rohingya language, literature and civilisation, which emerged with the evolution of history. Rohingya language is a mixture of Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali and Rakhine. In the year 1429 C.E. General Wali Khan conquered Arakan from the hands of Burmese and Mons and introduced Persian as State language of Arakan and also introduced Qazi courts in Arakan which lasted till 1845 A.C. Muslim writers and poets used to write in Rohingya language since the early days in Arabic and Persian alphabets. The coin of Arakan was minted in Arabic and Persian and there are numerous Kyauksa (stone inscriptions) carved in Arabic.

The immigrant Muslims must have brought with them their own mother tongue, Arabic, Persian or Turkish, as the case might be, while the language of the local Muslims must have been

Bengali and Rakhine. While the immigrants learned the local language, the Muslim also must have learned Arabic and Persian.

The very fact is that without Arabic it was not possible to follow fundamentals of Islam like offering prayers. Similarly, if they accepted office, they must be conversant with Persian, the official language. The Arakanese Raj appointed large number of Muslims in the state-service. The Muslims monopolized the administration both military and civil.

There were orders in Persian in the D.C court at Akyab dated 1834 and also from T. Dickerson Esq. Commissioner of Arakan, to the effect that one Hussain Ally, the then Thugyi of Budamaw circle, was to have charge of the Buddermokan and to enjoy any sums that he might collect on account of alms and offerings. (Mr. R.B. Samart, Burma

Gazetter, Akyab District Pages 37-38, published in 1879 and 1957.)

After the annexation of Arakan by the British in 1825 it was administered by the commissioner of Chittagong Division and even the court language then used was Persian for a considerable number of years. The Rohingya literature is rich in ballads, love songs, folktales, legends, history, Baramasa (Twelve months songs), mystic songs, proverbs, riddles, lullabies (auli) and so on.

There are many Rohingya poets and writers who flourished in the court of Arakan kings. Some of them are: Abdu Minyo or Ahmedu Minyo, Shah Barid Khan, Daulat Kazi, Mardan, Shah Alawal, Quarishi Magan, Abdul Karim Khondkar, Abdul Karim and Qazi Abdul Karim. The Rohingya language was in use widespread during the era of Arakanese

kings (Moshe Yegar Page25), the Burmese invaders however, mainly destroyed their written language in 1784.

The Royal Library with rich collections on Muslim Civilisation, literatures, arts and other historical records were burnt down. Even a Burmese court poet U kala, lamented for the destruction of such rare library. The British government also used Persian as the official language of Arakan till 1845 C.E. Even Rakhines were well versed in Persian till British period.

Later on, the British replaced Persi with English and Urdu.

Thus written language of Rohingyas, Persi and Bengali almost disappeared from Arakan during the later part of British rule. During British India, Urdu language became popular among the students of higher education and it was widely spoken by the Allied Forces who came to Arakan. British introduced Urdu for their convenient of administration.



A Rohingya man

In 1894 there were only 9 Urdu schools, with 330 boys and 45 girls. These schools were then under the control of the Deputy Inspector of Burmese Schools. The appointment of a special Deputy Inspector of Muslim schools gave an impetus to Muslim education in Arakan. In 1902 the number of schools rose to 72 and that of boys and girls attending them to 1474 and 104

respectively. Muslim education began to retrograde as the Deputy Inspector neglected the North Arakan due to

High School at Sikdar para of Maungdaw Township. Mr. Farhat Ali, father of Mr. Umrah Meah was it Head

Master. After his retirement Mr. Hasmat Ullah was the Head Master. After his retirement Master Molvi Abdul Hakim, father of Mr. Faizi, Zahiruddin and Mr. Sufi M.A Waheed, was the Head Master. At Nurullah para of Maungdaw Township a Madarasa by the name of Jame Asharaf Uloom was established under the leadership of Mr. Gulam Kadar Wakil. At present day there are many madarasa mushroomed through Northern Arakan State. Now the entire Rohingya can read

Arabic but only a few can write it. If the syllabus of the University of Egypt or Sudan or Jordan or any other Arab country is introduced all higher madarasa of Arakan would turn to modern universities producing doctors, engineers, economics, lawyers and other professionals.



A Rohingya woman with traditional head-gear

Mr. Zainuddin of Kyauktaw town was the principal of Akyab National High School. National School education was an important factor in anti-colonial struggle. Haji Abul Khair shot to limelight among the Muslims of Arakan for his hardship to establish the High School of Maungdaw. Mr. Abdul Gaffar established Buthidaung Middle School. Mr. Sayed Ahmed of Kyauktaw was a longtime Head Master of it. Mr. Faizi and Mr. Foruk served as Head Masters of Maungdaw High School. Mr. Umrah



communication reason. The result was that both schools and pupils decreased year by year till 1912, when a Deputy Inspector of Muslim school was appointed for Arakan division. With appointment of this officer, a new life was given to Muslims' education. The number of schools rose rapidly to 68 and boys and girls attending to them to 1849 and 174 respectively. The year 1912 also witnessed the establishment

of two District Cess Muslim school at Maungdaw and Kaungdaw. In 1894 there were 187 private schools with 1055 pupils and in 1913 the return shows 175 schools with 2839 pupils. Two Anglo-Vernacular schools, one Government High School, another St. Anne's School were established in Akyab. The former was established in 1846 and a Roman Catholic Mission started the latter in 1890.

The number of girls attending school had risen from 335 in 1894 to 1047 in 1913. The progress though slow was steady and continuous. Female education had, however, been a comparatively less progressive because of early marriage and seclusion observed by the Muslim grown up students. Want of qualified female teachers was also a bottleneck.

In pre-war (the Second World War) there was a Vernacular board Mohammadan

Meah was the first Head Master and Mr Zahiruddin was his deputy of it. Mr. Sultan Ahmed was the first graduate of Maungdaw. He received B.A degree from the University of Calcutta in 1924 and BL degree from Rangoon University in 1929. Mr. Faizi was the second graduate of Maungdaw. He was a famous deputy Inspector of Schools, Head Master of High School and District

Education officer. He had done a lot for the development of education of Burma as he was the Officer-in-Charge at the Directorate of Education of Burma. Mr. Foruk was the third graduate of Maungdaw. He passed B.Sc from Calcutta University and BL from Rangoon University in 1930s. He was a walking English dictionary and encyclopedia. We wish and pray all

Rohingyas to be like above mentioned esteemed people of Arakan or like Dr. Abdul Hussein (Tin Aung) of Buthidaung, Imam Hussein and Bodi Alam of Maungdaw Kayandan and Bowli Bazaar respectively. It is to be regretted that Owing to the severe and subsequent persecutions Rohingyas are now the most illiterate section of Burma's population. ##

NASAKA DIRECTOR ATTENDS ANNUAL MADRASA MEETING IN MAUNGDAW

Kaladan News, April 30, 2010

Maungdaw, Arakan state: Burma's border security force (Nasaka) Director Lt. Col Aung Gyi of Nasaka headquarters in Kyikanpyin (Kawar Bill) in Maungdaw Township attended the annual Madrasa (religious school) meeting held on April 30, in Lakeya (Kumir Khali) village of the township, said a local businessman. The Director came along with 10 Nasaka officers including Deputy Nasaka Director, Nasaka commanders of Nasaka area number 1, 2, 3, and 4 of Maungdaw Township.

In the meeting, the Nasaka Director delivered a speech saying Arakanese Rohingyas will be issued National

Identity cards, so they need to stay peacefully and do not get involved in anti-government activities. We are all brothers who are living in Burma and should not back bite. The Nasaka Director donated Kyat 100,000 to the Madrasa. He was very happy to invite people. He also wanted to be present at such gatherings in future, said a local school teacher. The Nasaka Director also donated Kyat 100,000 to the Madrasa of Aley Than Kyaw of Maungdaw Township on April 19, 2010.

Some villagers say that it is a kind of campaign for the forthcoming elections for supporting government sponsored

Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) nominees and those of the National Unity Party (NUP). Some villagers still do not believe the SPDC authorities' words because they did not adhere to their promises earlier, said a local trader.

But, some Arakanese Rakhine community leaders including U Mra Aung of Maungdaw town in northern Arakan are jealous of facilities given to the Arakanese Rohingya community recently by the government, said an Arakanese Rohingya elder from Maungdaw Town. ##

NASAKA SETS UP NEW CHECK-POST IN MAUNGDAW

Kaladan News, April 30, 2010

Maungdaw, Arakan State: Burma's border security force, Nasaka set up a new check-post on April 27, in Maungdaw Township to harass the Arakanese Rohingya community, alleged a local elder on condition of anonymity. The Nasaka check-post is on the small river bank which flows to Naff River after crossing between the Kawar Bill village and Hootchali village under Nasaka area No. 6 of Maungdaw Township. With forced labour of nearby villages, the Nasaka built a dam across the small river two months ago. As a result, all the villagers of Mingalagyi, Darga Para, Zinpaingnyar, Kyaukhlaikhar (Darguadil), Thetkainenyar (Noundahkhali), and Hlapoekhuang (Sorfodinbil) villages have to cross the new check-post to go to Maungdaw.

Every day, at about 6 am, Nasaka personnel from Nasaka area No.6 of Maungdaw Township go to the check-post to check the villagers who cross the river dam to go to Maungdaw town. It checks the recommendation letters of villagers. If one of the villagers fail to show the recommendation letter, he/she has to pay Kyat 500 to 1,000 to the Nasaka. As a result, villagers have to take recommendation letters from the Village Peace and Development Council (VPDC) Chairmen after paying money. Maungdaw Town and their villages are at about 4 to 6 miles from town, said a youth from the town.

After raking in money from the check-post, the Nasaka personnel return to their camp at about 7 pm every day. They have built a temporary hut near

the dam and check the villagers. It will become a permanent check-post soon, said a businessman from the locality. The Nasaka told villagers that because of the rumour of issuing National Identity cards to the Arakanese Rohingya community in Arakan State, some of the Arakanese Rohingyas who fled before will re-enter Burma from Bangladesh. So, the restriction on movement has been increased for the Arakanese Rohingya people.

A local school teacher said, "No one enters Arakan State from Bangladesh, but they continue to flee from Arakan State. "In Maungdaw Townships, there are many Nasaka check-posts for restriction of movement of Arakanese Rohingyas and extortion, said a trader who declined to be named. ##

NASAKA TAKES MONEY FROM TABALIQUE MEMBERS

KALADAN NEWS, Tuesday, 06 April 2010

Maungdaw, Arakan State: Yesterday, Burma's Border Security Force, Nasaka personnel of Nasaka Headquarters Gate of Maungdaw Township collected Kyat 500 per head from a Tabalique group while they were going to Maungdaw north from Tabalique Center of Maungdaw town by bus across a Nasaka Gate, said a local from Maungdaw town.

The Tabalique (religious preaching) group consisting of 15 members led by Ismail of Gudu Sara Village of Maungdaw Township went to Maungdaw north from Maungdaw town together with recommendation letters from concerned authorities. But, they had no Identity

Cards so they were fined Kyat 500, per person.

They are restricted by the Nasaka within the township, from one village to another village. The Tabalique group number 109, and they were traveling at around 5 pm, said a youth from Maungdaw who declined to be named.

The Nasaka Headquarters Gate is established near Nasaka Headquarters of Kavar Bill of Maungdaw Township from which every Rohingya passengers or travelers to and fro Maungdaw town are halted and checked excluding non-Rohingyas.

Every Rohingya passenger has to show Nasaka their National Identity Cards, or photographs or recommendation letters from concerned authorities. If the documents are in order, he is allowed to pass the gate; otherwise he/ she will have to pay money to the Nasaka.

Many Rohingya travelers are humiliated at the Gate by the Nasaka personnel. All the passengers excluding non-Rohingyas have to get down from the bus or cars or rickshaw to pass the gate. If any one does not comply with the order, he/she will be punished or fined, said a businessman from the locality. ##

VILLAGER ARRESTED FOR RENOVATING HOUSE IN MAUNGDAW

KALADAN NEWS, Monday, 26 April 2010

Maungdaw, Arakan State: A villager was arrested and money extorted by Burma's border security force (Nasaka in Burmese) on April 22 on the allegation that he had renovated his house without permission from the authorities, said a close relative of the victim. The victim was identified as Ali Ahmed (52), son of Asharaf Meah from Kavar Bill (south) village in Maungdaw township.

The victim's house was built with bamboos and wood 20 years ago and needed renovation. Strong gusts of wind recently led to three pillars of the house collapsing. The authorities do not give permission for renovation without huge

money. So villagers are compelled to renovate their houses secretly, said a farmer from the locality.

The house owner, Ali Ahmed needed to replace the broken pillars because his family members were unable to sleep in the house. He replaced three pillars in his house without taking permission.

However, the Nasaka camp was informed by Nasaka collaborators. So, Nasaka personnel led by captain U Lwin from Nasaka Headquarters of Kavar Bill of Maungdaw Township went to the victim's house at about 2 pm on that day and arrested the house owner, said a local youth. However, he was released

after paying Kyat 250,000 to the Nasaka officer. The village elders Ali Zuher and Md. Harun were present while money was given to the Nasaka, said a school teacher who declined to be named.

The owner had to procure the money after pawning his wife's gold ornaments to neighbours.

In this way, the Nasaka finds faults of Rohingya of villagers only for extortion while non-Rohingya villagers are free of harassment. A local trade said, "Without renovation, how can the villagers live in the houses, which are made of wood and bamboo and the monsoons are approaching." ##

NATALA VILLAGERS HARASS ROHINGYA COMMUNITY

KALADAN NEWS, Monday, 05 April 2010 21:59

Maungdaw, Arakan State: Natala or model villagers steal cows, vegetables and commit robberies in Rohingya villages in Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships, said a trader from Buthidaung Town.

On April 2, at around 10 pm, a group of Natala villagers from Aung Thaya Natala village of Maungdaw Township went to

the Pawet Chaung village Tract of Maungdaw Township and stole three cows from Abdu Samat and brought them to their village. The next day, a tout of Natala villagers was sent to the owner to take his cows after paying money. The owner Abdu Samat (60) went to the Natala village and met the thieves for the return of the cows. The Natala villagers

released all the three cows after taking Kyat 100,000 for each.

After taking the cows, the owner along with three others returned home at night, but they were attacked by the Nasaka of Aung Mingala. However, all the villagers safely reached home together with the cows. But, this was informed to the Nasaka camp by a Natala villager. So, the

next day, the owner of the cow was arrested by the Nasaka and was sent to the Nasaka Headquarters of Kavar Bill. The owner has been detained in Nasaka Headquarters.

A relative of the victim said, "The owner's cows were stolen by the Nataka villagers and he had to pay money to the Nataka villagers for the cows' return, and they were attacked by the Nasaka on the way to home and finally he was detained in Nasaka Headquarters. What is the mistake of the cow's owner?"

Nataka villagers with the help of Nasaka or police or army steal vegetables from Rohingyas' farms; steal goats and cows

and chicken. They also rob Rohingya villagers at night armed with guns. For instance, on the third week of March, a robbery was committed at Moulvi Nezam's house, at around 11 pm, at Nan Yagoon village of Kwan Dyine village tract of Buthidaung Township by Nataka villagers of Dabro Chaung. They took away ornaments and cash. They fired in the air threatening the villagers. "Where did the Nataka villagers get guns?" asked a local elder from the village.

The next day, another robbery occurred in Lay Myo village tract of Buthidaung Township which is very close to Lay Myo Nasaka camp, said a village elder from the village. A trader from the village asked,

"How do the Nataka villagers dare to commit robberies close to the Nasaka camp? Is there any involvement of Nasaka or army? But, concerned authorities frequently tell villagers that Bangladeshi robbers enter Burma and commit robberies."

A youth said, "How could the robbers of Bangladesh enter Burmese territory (Buthidaung Township) to commit robberies after crossing barbed wire fencing, many camps of the army and Nasaka camps and the Mayu High Mountain, which demarcates the Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships. ##

RRC ORGANIZES MEETING IN COX'S BAZAR TO DRIVE THE ROHINGYA REFUGEES

KALADAN NEWS, Saturday, 17 April 2010

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh: The Rohingya Resistance Committee (RRC) held a meeting about Rohingya refugees on April 15 at Cox's Bazaar town, according to sources. At a Press Conference they said "We don't want more Rohingya people in our country (Bangladesh) and we don't want to settle Rohingya refugees on our land," said a member of the committee.

The committee members demanded that the government solve the Rohingya problem and gave a deadline of April 30 to the government or else they will start demonstrations. According to a local journalist Hamidul Haque of Ukhiya, Rohingya people are going abroad in their own interest. Over 400,000 Rohingya people live along the border area.

A Rohingya Refugee Committee member from Kutupalong makeshift camp said, "We are afraid of arrests, if RRC Committee members start demonstrations again against Rohingya people. We can't go outside the camp to work. It will be very harmful for us." Many unregistered refugees are facing starvation in the Kutupalong makeshift camp since January 2010 and many have died of hunger, he said.

Aid agencies in Bangladesh have warned that thousands of unregistered Burmese refugees are facing starvation because

of the government's move to drive them out of the country. The refugees, from a Burmese minority community called Rohingya, complain that they are the victims of a crackdown and that hundreds have been arrested and forced back over the border against their will, according to the BBC's Mark Dummett's report from south-east Bangladesh near the Burmese border.

initiate such new registration for Burmese nationals living outside designated camp in Cox's Bazar on April 10.

"We have categorically informed him (the regional coordinator) that this is not possible. We do not want to discuss about the rest of the Myanmar nationals living elsewhere in Bangladesh illegally. They must go back to their homeland," said the secretary, Quaye told reporters

at a press briefing at the foreign ministry.

He said Bangladesh was ready to work with the United Nations on giving access and protection to 28,000 Rohingya refugees in two camps - the Nowapara and Kutupalong The



Unregistered Rohingya refugees in Kutupalong makeshift camp praying in open sky seeking blessing from God

Foreign secretary Mohamed Mijarul Quaye told journalists at press briefing that Bangladesh has rejected the regional coordinator of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees recently suggested that the government should

secretary's comment comes in the wake of a campaign in the international media about alleged repression of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Some western diplomats and legislators recently visited Cox's Bazar to witness the poor living

conditions of the Rohingya people. The government has much international pressure to recognise thousands of illegal Myanmar nationals in Bangladesh as refugees. But Dhaka has been resisting that pressure saying that such a move would open a floodgate of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar's Rakhain (Arakan state).

Quaye, therefore criticised some international NGOs and media for presenting "untrue" stories about the Rohingya refugees. "We have not dumped them in concentration camps." "But that is not due to our weakness." Recognition as refugees would thus entail a government obligation to

provide them shelter, protection, food, health services and other needs. The local administration in Cox's Bazar says that most of the repatriated Rohingya have re-entered Bangladesh illegally due to a lack of system which oppressed them to leave from their homeland. ##

ROHINGYA: STATELESS, HOPELESS COMMUNITY OF BURMA

Misha Hussain *

IN Chittagong lives a very desperate community -- the Rohingya -- a religious and linguistic ethnic minority from Myanmar's northern Rakhine State, who have been fleeing state-sponsored persecution in their homeland since the late seventies. In 1991, when the population experienced widespread repression and abuse from security forces posted in Rakhine, a quarter of a million crossed the border to Bangladesh seeking asylum. Many of them still live here today.

Some 28,000 have been officially recognised as refugees and are living in a UN-run camp, waiting to be relocated to a third nation. Hundreds of thousands of others live outside these grounds, in the district of Chittagong or in unofficial camps such as Kutu Palong or Leda. Stateless and hopeless, these people carry on in dire conditions, often without food, sanitation and basic health care.

A European Parliament resolution passed only last month called on the Bangladesh government to "recognise that the unregistered Rohingyas are stateless asylum seekers who have fled persecution in Myanmar and are in need of international protection." However, in spite of such calls, the government still continues with its forced repatriation drive. In recent months, border authorities have launched an unprecedented crackdown in Bangladesh, pushing over 2,000 Rohingyas back across the border into Myanmar where they are likely to face arrest for leaving their villages without a travel permit.

Many here in Bangladesh though are

beginning to wonder if forced repatriation really works. Bangladesh already witnessed two mass exoduses in

the recent attacks on non-Bengalis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts) as we ourselves rely so much on donor aid. Isn't it time to

think of an alternative solution to the crisis?

Though half of the Rohingya who make their way to Bangladesh are taken in by sympathetic local families until they find their feet, it remains a fragile relationship. Many locals are competing for jobs with the



Stateless and hopeless children of Rohingya community in Kutupalong unregistered makeshift refugee camp

1978 and again in 1991, which were also followed by forced repatriation, but since then the refugees trickling in from Myanmar have never stopped and the numbers today living in the Chittagong Division are still in the hundreds of thousands.

A report commissioned by the Dutch Embassy in 2008 shows that 55 percent of those living in the Kutu Palong makeshift camp were previously registered as refugees and have returned, despite being pushed back. It also shows the number crossing the border into Bangladesh is not decreasing. Pushing back the Rohingya against their will is clearly not working. This heavy handed, ill-thought-out action only blackens Bangladesh's image in the public eye (especially considering

Rohingya (who are often willing to work for less than Bangladeshis) and this often fuels local tensions. Others worry that armed extremist gangs are radicalising the youth of this marginalised, leaderless community, and suspicions of drug smuggling and an increase in petty crime in the camps have been recorded in the local press. With a new round of elections slated for later this year in Myanmar, locals are increasingly concerned that another exodus from its neighbour state may ensue and the situation in Bangladesh might further deteriorate.

As a result, a xenophobic campaign is being orchestrated by anti-Rohingya committees formed and allegedly funded by the local political elite,

demanding that the government take action against them. Announcements have been disseminated, ordering the Rohingya to leave and also threatening locals harbouring them with arrest and prosecution. Meanwhile, violence against the Rohingya is spiralling. Médecins sin Frontières (MSF) doctors who attend to both refugees and locals in Kutu Palong say they have been treating Rohingya who have been beaten and raped. "[Border guards] broke my fingers and then they threw me into the river and told me to swim back," says Ziaur Rahman, a 23-year-old who managed to escape and walk for three days to get medical care at the MSF clinic.

If the Rohingya are willing to suffer such ill treatment here in Bangladesh, one can imagine how terrible the life they left behind must have been. An Amnesty International report from 2009 described the situation in Myanmar: "[The Rohingya] movement is severely restricted, they need permission to marry and they are subject to forced labour and coercion." Failure to comply may result in up to 7 years' imprisonment. "They taxed us 15kg per 20kg of rice and we needed a permit to travel. If we didn't listen they beat us and raped our women," 25-year-old Robiul Aktar told me. "I'd rather die of starvation [in Bangladesh] than live in Myanmar." Is this not enough to awaken our empathy? Were we too not refugees once? It took us 35 years to recognise the injustice suffered by the Biharis before we came to our senses. Must it take a similar period of time and suffering before we come to terms with the plight of the Rohingya?

Yes, Bangladesh, like India, Thailand and Pakistan, didn't sign the 1951 Refugee Convention (the global treaty that defines who is eligible for refugee status and what rights they are guaranteed) and cannot be expected to take on such a massive challenge single-handed. As one of the poorest nations in the world, it doesn't have the financial resources to cope with such a huge influx of people. However, the Thai boat crisis of 2009

should have made clear that regional solutions are needed to solve this issue. There has to be sustained regional pressure (including from India and China) on Myanmar to stop the ethnic cleansing and to recognise the Muslim Rohingya alongside the other 146 non-Muslim ethnic minorities.

The international community must also help relieve the pressure on Bangladesh by accepting some of the refugees that have already been registered. Since 2006, the UNHCR has resettled as few as 749 Rohingya from the registered camp. Five hundred were relocated in 2009 and another 190 are pending departure for the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the US. It's a rate of departure that barely covers the

tackle the issue, and must not let the terms of its agreement with the government undermine its role as international protector of those who have lost the protection of their state, or who have no state to turn to.

Of course, recognising these stateless people comes at a high moral price. With accepting that the Rohingya are indeed asylum seekers also comes the admission that every single government up till now has been wrong. Making such a statement would ultimately stain the hands, and the conscience, of all those before who had the power to take action and didn't. As such, a law may prove harder to push through than would seem. Our politicians must accept the responsibility and ensure that human ethics is never weighed against personal pride.



Arafa Begum, an unlisted Rohingya refugee, with her newborn daughter at a makeshift camp at Domdomia, three kilometres off Teknaf. Photo: STAR

population growth of 2.9 percent within the registered camp; right now, the system is simply paying off the human interest.

In the meantime, it's imperative that our government act immediately to stop the violence and provide these people with the protection they require. The UNHCR needs to take greater steps toward developing a clear policy to

Few reading this editorial will ever come into contact with a Rohingya. Even fewer will ever see the dreadful conditions they live in. I write this article partly so you don't ever have to hear the cry of rape nor stomach the pain of hunger. So you don't have to watch babies die from curable diseases nor wade through stagnant water and human faeces in the monsoon season. I write this article so you don't ever have to endure the guilt which consumes me.

These words are not meant to name names or point fingers; simply to raise awareness that nobody chooses to live like this.

Nobody chooses to leave behind everything they know and understand; their loved ones, their livelihood, their language and their culture. As a nation we need to set an example to other countries in the region and take a collective stance to ensure that the Rohingya are treated with dignity. Who will join me and speak out against the appalling conditions that these wretched people live in? ##

** Misha Hussain is a freelance journalist - The Daily Star, Dhaka*



NARINJARA.COM

UNHCR recognized Rakhine urban refugees enjoying water festival in Dhaka



UNHCR recognized Rohingya refugees facing water crisis in Refugee camp



ARNO members demonstrate in front of Burmese Embassy in London

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