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NEWS AND ANALYSIS OF ARAKAN ROHINGYA NATIONAL ORGANISATION (ARNO), ARAKAN, BURMA

MONTHLY

# ARAKAN

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**ON 12 FEBRUARY 1947 GEN. AUNG SAN AND ETHNIC LEADERS SIGNED  
9 POINTS PANGLONG AGREEMENT TO ESTABLISH FEDERAL UNION OF BURMA**



**ROHINGYAS BOAT PEOPLES ARRESTED AGAIN THAI-NAVY  
IN SOUTHERN THAILAND ON THEIR WAY TO MALAYSIA**

**STOP**

**ALL GENOCIDAL POLICIES  
AND PRACTICES AGAINST  
THE ROHINGYA PEOPLE**



ARAKAN 2 — 2012

**EDITORIAL****THE BURMA'S UNION DAY**

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

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

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

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

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

**OUTFLOWS OF ROHINGYAS FROM ARAKAN**

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

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

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

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

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

**Cont. P. 3**



## UNION DAY HIGHLIGHTS THE FUNDAMENTAL NEED OF THE ETHNIC NATIONALITIES AND DAW SUU KYI GRACES ETHNIC PARTIES' UNION DAY CELEBRATION BY M. A. ALAM

In Burma 12 February was designated as Burma's Union Day. On the very day in 1947, Bogyoke Aung San, the leader of Burma's independence movement, and representatives of the Chin, Shan and Kachin people met at the Panlong Conference in northeastern Shan state. They signed the 9 point Panlong Agreement to strive in unity for the country's independence from the then British colonialist rule.

The 9 points agreements are: -

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

Within one year, Burma won its independence from British and became a sovereign nation on January 4, 1948. But the agreement, which was never implemented, provided for the creation of a Federal Union, called for power sharing between the majority Burman and non-Burman ethnic nationalities, and granted the non-Burman ethnic nationalities autonomy in the administration of their territories.

In 1961, at the Taunggyi Seminar of Federal Union, the ethnic nationalities of Burma came up with a 5 point proposed outline for the amendment of the constitution:

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

Gauging the sentiments prevailing at that time, all the demands would not have sailed through the Parliament. But some

**FROM P. 2 EDITORIAL .....** formally recognised as refugees in Bangladesh, Malaysia and elsewhere.

Under extreme situation, tens of thousands of Rohingyas have sought out opportunities overseas, in the Middle East and increasingly in Malaysia, using Bangladesh as a transit country. Stateless and undocumented, they have no other option than relying on unsafe illegal migration channels, falling prey to unscrupulous smugglers and traffickers, or undertaking risky journeys on boats. ##

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

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

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

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

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

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

Held at M3 Hall in Maynigone Township of Rangoon, the ceremony was attended by over 300 guests, including the National League for Democracy party leader Aung San Suu Kyi as the most prominent guest. In a short speech, Suu Kyi stressed the importance of the Burmans and non-Burman ethnic nationalities working together for the sake of the Union.

**Cont. P. 4**



Burma's different Ethnic Party Leaders and NLD Leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at Union Day reception of five-party ethnic alliance groups in Rangoon. Photo: Chinland Guardian

## From P. 3 UNION DAY HIGHLIGHTS THE FUNDAMENTAL NEED .....

This was the first time the Nobel Laureate has met with the ethnic leaders since her release from house arrest in November 2010. The four hour-long ceremony also included cultural dance performances by various ethnic groups. During the last six decades, the celebration of Union Day, however, has been held largely without any historical significance or the original spirit with which the *Panglong* Agreement was signed. A background paper to the celebration says, "The ethnic nationalities of the Union Burma can work to strengthen the spirit of *Panglong* Agreement and its essence through education and awareness raising program in order to undo the deeply-entrenched misconception about the history of the founding of the Union of Burma. The celebration of the Union Day provides a perfect opportunity to start this important process."

65th anniversary Union Day was also celebrated at the headquarters of the NLD at 11 a.m. About 1500 people including NLD patrons U Tin Oo, NLD Central Executive Committee members Chairman Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Secretariat members, CEC members, veteran politicians, 88 Generation students' leaders including Ko Ko Gyi, diplomats, invited guests and NLD members attended the ceremony. NLD patron U Tin Oo conducted as the chair of the ceremony and Ma Kyi Pyar conducted as the master of ceremony.

Following the opening speech of the chair of the ceremony, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi made a speech. She urged her fellow Burmese to embrace the country's diversity and work toward establishing a peaceful union of states. Expressing her appreciation of Burma's ethnic diversity, she added that she doesn't like the slogan "*one blood, one voice, one command*," which she said "*smacks of dictatorship*." Union Day celebrates the signing on Feb. 12, 1947, of the Panglong Agreement, which not only provided a basis for a federal union but also guaranteed ethnic minorities the right to secede. Then NLD Shan State member U Sai Yee recited the statement of the 65th Anniversary Union Day.

The Bangkok-based Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma said, "Burma's democratisation has not touched the ethnic minority yet." Instead, conflict with ethnic armed groups continues with the Burma Army launching attacks against Kachin and Shan.

President Thein Sein, in a speech marking Union Day, pledge to seek "lasting peace" with armed groups and stated that the "[p]articipation of the entire national people is sorely needed to bring internal armed conflicts to an end and build lasting peace, and in nation-building endeavours."



Burmese president Thein Sein, right, sits along with Vice Presidents Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo, center, and Sai Mauk Kham, left, during a reception and dinner to mark the 65th Union Day in Naypyidaw on Feb. 12, 2012.



Daw Aung San Suu Kyi delivering her speech on Union Day Function at NLD Headquarters in Rangoon on 12 Feb, 2012

A political solution to the question of the future of the ethnic nationalities must be reached in order to create "lasting peace." "The entire nation will be overjoyed to see a democratic contest in the elections and equal participation in state affairs," Thein Sein further said. "It can be seen that the new government is showing respect to people's voices and fulfilling their aspirations."

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

A number of ethnic armed groups are seeking to recapture the spirit of Panglong Agreement on its 65th anniversary and are insisting that ceasefire negotiations be accompanied by political dialogue. The NMSP Chairman Nai Hta Mon stating that "[w]e have told the government many times that it must stop fighting in Kachin State and Shan State but it has failed to do so."

It is our sincere hope that Thein Sein's government will recognize this desire on the part of the people and move forward with genuine political dialogue such that next year, on the 66<sup>th</sup> Union Day, we can say that there is true peace and unity in Burma. ##



ETHNIC MPS ATTENDING 65 TH . UNION DAY FUNCTION IN NAYPYIDAW



**ROHINGYA BOAT PEOPLE ARRESTED AGAIN IN SOUTHERN THAILAND BY M. A. ALAM**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of concern to NGOs lately have been three capsized incidents involving four boats. Many men were picked up by local fishermen off the Bangladesh coast but it's believed as many as 200 may have drowned. The annual "sailing season" for Rohingya begins each November and does not end until the monsoon arrives, usually in April, when putting to sea in the kind of boats they pay brokers to use becomes even more dangerous. ## *Source: Phuketwan & Jakatapost*



*Rohingya Boat Peoples arrested in Satun, South of Phuket, Thailand*

**DISCREDITING PANGLONG INITIATIVE WILL NOT RESULT IN FURTHER REFORM IN BURMA****BY ZIN LINN, February 12, 2012, UTC**

Today is the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Union Day of Burma. It marks the signing ceremony of the 'Historic Panglong Agreement' between General Aung San and the leaders of Chin, Kachin and Shan ethnic groups guaranteeing a genuine federal union of Burma. However, Burma's successive decision makers have neglected the political contract between Burmese and the ethnic leaders of independence.

Even with the President Thein Sein government, the contract has been put aside since the cabinet is dominated by former generals. Besides, Burma's new 2008 Constitution distributes many problems for political parties, ethnic cease-fire groups and exiled dissident factions seeking some common initiative between ethnic groups and the current governments.

To address the interconnected ethnic problems, the current government must review the mistakes of past rulings and the political aspirations of the ethnic communities. The root cause of the nation's ethnic political mayhem is the consecutive governments' antagonism to a democratic federal union. The late dictator, Ne Win, who seized power in a military coup in 1962, opposed sharing equal authority in a series of heated debates in the then legislative body.

Ne Win supported a unitary state over a genuine federal union. The Military Council headed by Ne Win declared that the military coup had taken place because of the "federation topic," which he said could lead to the disintegration of the nation. Equality of ethnic minorities with the Burmese majority was to him out of the question. When Ne Win seized power, he demolished the 1948 Constitution. At the same time, the Panglong Agreement, which promised autonomy or self-determination of the ethnic groups, was broken and abrogated.

In actual fact, it is a fair demand for self-sufficiency among the respective ethnic minorities. No government should use guns to govern ethnic minorities. If one looks back to 1960-61, many leaders from ethnic states criticized the weakness of the constitution as well as the government's failure to take in the political autonomy of the ethnic minorities.

They pointed the finger at the central government for not allowing the representatives of ethnic states to manage their own affairs in areas of economy, judiciary, education, customs and so on. The central government ruled the ethnic areas as vassal states. Sen-Gen Than Shwe has followed the tradition of his predecessor Ne Win and Saw Maung, who both defended the single unitary state. "All the armed forces in the union shall be under the command of the Defense Services," says section 337 of the 2008 constitution. It means ethnic armed troops are under state control. Under the 2008 constitution, the junta-sponsored Nov. 7 elections, there are only 330 civilian seats in the 440-member House of Representatives whereas the remaining 110 seats are taken by military officials appointed by the commander-in-chief. In the 224-seat House of Nationalities, 168 Members of Parliament are elected and 56 representatives are appointed by the chief of the armed forces. As published in the state-owned newspapers, the list of military personnel to serve as military representatives in the 7 State and 7 Region parliaments totals to 222.

Moreover, the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won a landslide in the polls which declared seizing 882 out of 1154 seats in parliaments. Remarkably, 77 percent of the parliamentary seats have been seized by the military-backed USDP in the 2010 polls which were distinguished for vote-rigging.

Hence, several ethnic leaders asserted that they don't have faith in the planned 2010 election where they are likely to have

limited opportunities which is not may not go onto create a genuinely peaceful federal union; the Burmese armed-forces take 25 percent of all seats and also seize additional 77 percent through junta-backed parties in the latest parliaments as set by the 2008 Constitution. In such a parliament, dominated by the military and former military, ethnic representatives have little or no chance to press the self-sufficiency and equal status issues in parliament. Authentic ethnic representatives, who are willing to push ethnic issues forward, have no opportunity to occupy enough seats in the military faction monopolized-parliament to form an effective coalition.

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

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

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

**THE ROHINGYA CULTURAL GATHERING****By Foreda Begum, Rohingya Project**

Earlier this week, the Burma Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) held a cultural interchange gathering at the Burma Campaign Office in Old Street, London. Every month the Burma Campaign Office holds these gatherings for all the ethnic groups of Burma to come together and learn about the different cultures.

They believe that together the ethnic minorities of Burma are stronger, as Nant Bwa Bwa Phan (Burma Campaign Office volunteer) said at the start of the gathering "Burma is all of ours".

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

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

The conference was a break from the talks of the hardships of what the Rohingya people face, and instead the Rohingyans spoke of things which they are passionate about, the things which are at the very core of their culture beyond their sufferings. This undoubtedly makes one recognise them as a people rather than the most persecuted ethnic minority. All in all it leads to a great understanding of the Rohingya people. ##



## ROHINGYAS: A PEOPLE BOTH WITH, AND WITHOUT, AN ORIGIN

BY AMMAR SHAHBAZI

There are some three to four hundred thousands of them in the city, but, according to the law, they simply do not exist. The Burmese Muslims - known as Rohingyas - make up a sizable portion of illegal immigrants living in Karachi, and, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), are considered to be one of the most persecuted ethnic groups in the world.

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

### History

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

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

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

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

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

### Life in the city

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

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

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

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

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

Despite living in run-down shanty homes, where there is no access to electricity or clean water, the Rohingyas have managed

by the mainstream Pakistani, a fact that does not bode well with the Bengali community leaders.

### Political ambitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



A young Rohingya refugee carries firewood at the Leda refugee camp. Some 12,000 to 16,000 Rohingyas, a Muslim ethnic community from Burma's Arakan State, live in this "unregistered" refugee camp.

## UNION DAY OR DOMINION DAY ? REVISITING THE SPIRIT OF PANGLONG

12 February 2012, *Chinland Guardian*

Each year since the military coup of 1962, the Union Day has been celebrated in the Union of Burma without much substance or historical significance. As the nation turns 65 years today, we can expect yet another hollow celebration this year, despite the recent measures of reform introduced by President Thein

In political terms, the word Union means 'the joining together or being joined together' of different geographically-defined political units. The term itself implies the *voluntariness* and equality of the parties taking part in the Union – a partnership. This is exactly what the Panglong Conference achieved 65 years ago: different territories joining together on a voluntary basis and on equal status to build a modern independent country called the Union of Burma. This, in simplistic term, is the original *Panglong* spirit.

But that spirit unfortunately exists only in name today. For six decades, a single dominant group backed by the power of the guns, has dominated the majority of the founding partners of the Union of Burma through the use of constitutional, institutional and military means. This remains a reality post-2010 election and in a 'changing' Union of Burma.

The words of General Aung San best remind us of what the founding fathers of the Union of Burma originally envisaged at *Panglong* 65 years ago. Representing the Ministerial Burma, Aung San said:

"When we build our new Burma, shall we build it as a Union or a Unitary State? In my opinion it will not be feasible to set up a Unitary State. We must set up a Union with a properly regulated provision to set up the rights of the ethnic nationalities."

The collective experience of the majority of the partners of the 'Union' for the last sixty plus years, however, tells us that, in practical terms, February 12 means more of a Dominion Day than a true Union Day.

Yes, there have been a series of recent efforts by the new government to negotiate and enter into ceasefire agreements with several ethnic armed groups. However, the ceasefire agreements are only the first step towards further dialogue on more

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

*Union of Burma Flag (c.1948 to 1974) is reflect a Union of many ethnic constituent states*



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## **'BGB' ARRESTS MALYASIA BOUND VOYAGERS AND ROHINGYAS INFILTRATORS AND FLOATING DEADBODIES OF ROHINGYA BOAT PEOPLE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO COLLECT FROM NAF RIVER**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the same day, the BGB arrested another 10 Rohingyas from different vehicles at Whykong check-post after checking their identities, said an officer from BGB. The arrested Rohingyas are:- Shafiul Alam (22) son of Hossain Ali, Rahim Ullah (25) son of late Abdul Kuddus, Sabuj Meah (30) son of Karim Ullah, Rafique (27) son of Sadar Ali, Rabi Alam(20) son of Akkas Meah, Mufiz Alam (23) son of Shahed Ali, Monjur Alam (30) son of Abdur Rashid, Muslim Uddin (26) son of Towfiq and Sagar Ahmed (17) son of

Mohsen Ali. Later, they were pushed back to Burma from Lamba Bill border in the afternoon, said BGB officer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Source : Kaladan News*

## **NEW OIC BODY TO RESOLVE RIGHTS ISSUES**

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

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

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

The 18-member commission is required to have two regular

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

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

**ROHINGYA EXPRESS SOLIDITY WITH KACHIN PEOPLE****BY NURUL ISLAM ( UK )**

**SPEECH BY NURUL ISLAM, PRESIDENT OF THE ARAKAN ROHINGYA NATIONAL ORGANISATION (ARNO) ON THE OCCASION OF THE 51ST ANNIVERSARY OF KACHIN REVOLUTION DAY HELD ON 5 FEBRUARY 2012 , AT MONTAGUE PUBLIC HALL, HUNSLOW, LONDON, U.K.**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here, the regime is double standard. Rohingya are a people who exercised right of franchise, right to vote and to be elected in all Burma's elections. The elections of April, 1947 for the First Constituent Assembly, the first Parliamentary elections in 1951-52, the second in 1956 and the third, following eighteen months of military rule, in 1960, BSSP held Pyithu Hluttaw elections in 1974, SLORC held multi-party elections of 1990 and SPDC held general



**ARNO President Nurul Islam (2nd right) on the occasion of the 51st Kachin Revolution Day in London**

elections of 2010. On top of that they were allowed to participate in the SPDC's 2008 referendum for the adoption of its constitution. Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights on Burma Thomas Quintana said, "What is more significant than the possibility to vote for the Constitution of a Nation to show that one belongs to the Nation? If this population was considered apt to give its views on the adoption of the Constitution, then it should be granted all other privileges, including the citizenship, which recognized ethnic groups, citizens of Burma do enjoy in the Union." Is not it a 'systematic racism' and an international crime to call these Rohingya people non-nationals rendering them stateless in their ancestral homeland?

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

I would like to urge upon our fellow countrymen and all democracy loving people, please try to understand our problems, a problem of *ethnic, religious and political persecution*, deeply entrenched in the Burmese government's extremely discriminatory policies and planned extermination of the Rohingya people from their ancestral homeland of Arakan. In fact, this issue needs to be resolved first and foremost within Burma, where they are not recognized as an ethnic group and denied citizenship. Until these root causes are addressed the Rohingya will be in a permanent limbo. Please support the Rohingya cause, stand with them, speak for them, treat them equals in Arakan and help them integrate fully in the Family of the Union of Burma.

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