

# ROHINGYA CRISIS IN BANGLADESH: SEARCHING FOR A DESTINATION

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**DEDICATED TO**

**ALL THE REFUGEES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD WHO ARE  
REMAINING SCAPEGOATES OF VARIOUS INTEREST  
GROUPS BUT STILL DREAMING  
FOR A BETTER LIFE.**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to our honorable course teacher Mr. Tanzimmuddin Khan, who had helped and co-ordinate us throughout our work. We are profoundly grateful to Mohammad Atique Rahman and Md. Azmal Mahmud Khan, two of our older brothers in the department of International Relations who graciously contributed their comments and suggestions to our work. We are particularly grateful to RMMRU (Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit), SHED(), MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) Holland and some moulovis of Nayapara Refugee camp from whom we have been benefited a lot and without their help we could not be able to bring out the actual scenario of the Refugee camps.

## **ABSTRACT**

We who are presently studying in third year of the Department of International Relations of the University of Dhaka were assigned to submit a research paper on course number 304: Refugee, Migrants and the Displaced. In this regard our prior theoretical studies compelled us to work on the refugee crisis of our country. We decided to work on Rohingya refugee crisis of Bangladesh after completing pre-research. We identified that, Rohingyas are in deep trouble in their homeland Myanmar where an unhealthy political situation is existing. But the Rohingya Refugees created a 'Tight-Rope' situation prevailing in front of the Government of Bangladesh as day by day it is becoming a long lasting problem for us.

Being persecuted by the local government, the indigenous Rohingyas had fled to Bangladesh several times. The involvement of UNHCR and other international agencies gave a new dimension to the affair which was being tried to be solved by bilateral agreements between Bangladesh and Myanmar. In this paper we have shown the history of the Rohingyas, reasons that led them to come in Bangladesh, how the international community has become involved in this crisis and how this crisis is going to affect Bangladesh permanently. After stating their troublesome present condition, we have tried to recommend some initiatives to ameliorate the destitution of the Rohingyas.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Social science is different from natural science. Every hypothesis of social science has an anti-hypothesis, for this reason it is difficult to give any definition or prediction of any issue. So, there is no specific method that contains the perfect result of any research. We think use of one single method in our work is not enough to respond to the research need rather a combination of methods is more useful to bring our desired level of methodological sophistication. For that we have followed survey method and observation method which include focus group discussion (FGD), participatory research appraisal (PRA) for our field work. We have interviewed approximately 40 persons of Teknaf. Significant interviews those represent various points of view, have been given at the end of this paper in the Appendix. Lastly historical method and descriptive method were followed for report writing.

## **LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH**

We all know that social science research in general does not produce results as precise as of the natural sciences. Much of the subject matter of social science consists of verbal behavior, which is totally different from laboratory works. While the research process is going through “Conspiracy of silence” involves conventions that often block social research of implementation of evidence, on the other hand the researcher himself is a part of the social process he tries to observe. So while working, we also faced these limitations. We have some other limitations of our research. As we are students we have lack of experiences. It was our first formal research work. As we are students, we could not effort much money. We could not stay at the spot for a long time. We have gone to the camps as students, not as officials from development agencies. So, we did not get full access to the government registered camps which may keep us away from the accurate findings. So, except the field works, we mainly depended on secondary information. We hope that our unintentional limitations will be considered.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ABMU	All Burma Muslim Union
ARIF	Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front
BBS	Burma Broadcasting Service
BDR	Bangladesh Rifles
BDRCS	Bangladesh Red Crescent society
BIA	Burma Independence Army
BSPP	Burmese Socialist Program Party
BTF	Burma Territorial Force
CiC	Camp-in-Charge
DAB	Democratic Alliance of Burma
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
GOM	Government of Myanmar
IIRO	International Islamic Relief Organization
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
RC	Revolutionary Council
RRRC	Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission
RSO	Rohingya Solidarity Organization
RTI	Respiratory Tract Infection
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Program

## **MAIN EVENTS INVOLVED WITH ROHINGYA REFUGEES**

1937	British separated Burma from India and made Arakan apart of it.
March 1942	the Rakhine communalists at the connivance of the Burma Independence Army (BIA) led by Bo Rang Aung brought a pogrom massacring about 100,000 innocent Rohingya Muslims, driving out 80,000 of them across the border to East Bengal, devastating their settlements and depopulating the Muslims in some parts of Arakan.
June 1942	Rohingya Muslims declared North Arakan as Muslim State and a Peace Committee was entrusted for administration of the area.
December 1942	British Military Administration declared the former Muslim State as “Muslim National Area”.
December 1947	Hundreds of armed Rohingyas flocked to demand for a Muslim Autonomous State in north Arakan.
January 1948	Burma became independent on 4 <sup>th</sup> and was rocked by political violence
1948 to 1999	More than 20 major operations of eviction campaigns against the Rohingyas carried out by the Governments of Burma.
1950's	Rohingyas armed resistance movement gained momentum, the Burmese government appeased the Rohingya public by offering some governmental positions and a special district called “Mayu Frontier District”.
May 1961	Burmese government created the Mayu Frontier District covering Maungdaw, Buthidaung and the Western part of Rathidaung townships.
March 1962	A military coup occurred and the new military regime led by General Ne Win cancelled the plan to grant statehood of Arakan.

February 1963	Military regime nationalized entire banks and business enterprises all over the country. Most of the major business establishments were in the hands of Muslims.
February 1964	Military regime abolished the Mayu Frontier and put it under the jurisdiction of the Home ministry. All Rohingya welfare and socio-cultural organizations were also banned.
1978	Approximately 200,000 Rohingya Muslims fled for the Burmese army's Operation Nagamin (Dragon King). About 10,000 refugees remain in Bangladesh, 10,000 died in the camps, and 180,000 are forcibly repatriated.
May 1990	The opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi won 392 of the 485 seats in national parliamentary elections.
July 1990	The SLORC announced that the recent election was only intended to produce a constituent assembly, which is to draft a constitution providing a strong government, under the direction of a national convention to be established by the SLORC.
August 1990	Troops killed four protestors at an anti-government protest at Mandalay, commemorating the deaths of thousands of demonstrators at the hands of the armed forces in 1988.
December 1990	Opposition politicians agreed with the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), a 21-member organization uniting ethnic rebel forces with student dissidents and monks, to form the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).
May 1991	Two Muslim groups, the All Burma Muslim Union (ABMU) and the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) said they were ready to join forces with the DAB
June 1991	Thousands of Burmese Muslims known as Rohingya were entering Bangladesh illegally each month to escape alleged persecution by the Rangoon authorities.
July 1991	At a secret camp deep in the jungle, run by the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), young Muslims were



training to make war on the Buddhist military government of Burma.

- December 1991      Burmese soldiers, massed at the border with Bangladesh, had gunfire with Muslim rebels and reports indicate that at least 15 people were killed. Meanwhile, Muslim rebels belonging to the RSO attacked a Burmese customs forward port and kidnapped eight guards. Relations between Bangladesh and Burma deteriorated after the influx of about 50,000 Muslim refugees into Bangladesh. The Burmese government claims that those were Muslim insurgents operated by Bangladesh, Dhaka denied.
- 1991- 1992      Influx of approximately 250,000 Rohingya Muslims due to forced labor, land confiscation, religious intolerance, rape, and other forms of persecution by the Myanmar military regime.
- February 1992      UNHCR and international humanitarian organizations established a broad relief operation in 19 to 20 camps along the Teknaf - Cox's Bazaar Road.
- March 1992      According to Amnesty International, more than 200,000 Muslims have fled Burma to Bangladesh since 1991 when the anti-Muslim campaign began.
- April 1992      Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar, setting the terms of the repatriation program and allowing limited UNHCR involvement.
- May 1992      Nutrition survey conducted by Helen Keller International finds famine-like rates of acute malnutrition among Rohingya refugee children under five (20 to 49 percent). The GOB closed the camps to additional Rohingya arrivals.
- Sept-Dec. 1992      The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) carried out repatriation without UNHCR involvement, which was reported to be forced. The international community protests, including the UNHCR, which withdrew from the process until private interviews with the refugees are allowed.

May 1993	MOU signed between the UNHCR and GOB, guaranteeing protection of the refugees in the camps and voluntary repatriation through private interviewing of refugees.
November 1993	MOU signed between the UNHCR and Government of Myanmar (GOM), allowing the UNHCR access to the returnees, the issuance of identity cards, and freedom of movement for the Rohingyas.
January 1994	The police reported that Muslim refugees battled villagers with spears and knives near their camp in southeast Bangladesh, leaving at least 20 people injured. The fighting erupted after villagers chased a refugee, suspected of being involved in robberies.
February 1994	UNHCR established a limited presence in Rakhine State, Myanmar.
July 1994	UNHCR announced promotion sessions and mass registration (in place of information sessions and individual interviewing) for repatriation.
August 1994	UNHCR began mass registration sessions, and stated that out of 176,000 registered, 95 percent were for voluntary repatriation. December 1995 was set as the deadline to return the remaining 190,000 refugees.
February 1995	The repatriation of some 250,000 Burmese refugees had been gaining momentum and was expected to end shortly.
March 1995	MSF led an awareness survey among refugees, and found that 63 percent did not want to return to Myanmar, and 65 percent were not aware of the right to refuse repatriation.
April 1995	Another 1470 Rohingya Muslims had left Bangladesh to return home
October 1995	Around 200 Rohingya Muslims returned home from Bangladesh, bringing the total to 193,000 out of an estimated 250,000.
December 1995	205 Muslims returned home from Bangladesh. So far, more than 195,000 of the estimated 250,000 Muslims that fled Burma in 1991 returned home.

March 1996	Reports of influxes of Rohingya new arrivals, and GOB 'push-back' policy at the border.
January-May 1997	Reports again of influxes of Rohingya new arrivals from Myanmar.
June 1997	More than 3,000 Burmese Muslims have crossed the border into Bangladesh, alleging that Burmese authorities are engaging in a fresh wave of atrocities against minority groups.
August 1997	Canada and the US imposed economic sanctions against Burma due to its human rights record.
October 1997	Amnesty International called for fresh international support for Bangladesh to help look after the Burmese Rohingya refugees.
January 1998	3 people were killed in a clash between the RSO and Burmese security forces near the border with Bangladesh.
April 1998	Myanmar and Bangladesh agreed to set up a joint commission to bolster political and economic ties between the two neighboring countries.
June 1998	Germany provided \$350,000 as aid for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.
October 1998	many male refugees were arrested. During the previous 15 months, repatriation exercises were halted.
November 1998	Repatriation resumed, but the GOM issued bureaucratic obstacles and refused to accept 7,000 previously cleared refugees.
August 1999	UNHCR announced food for work plans for the refugees, but the GOB blocked implementation.
January 2000	Formal education programs in Nayapara camp were allowed.
July 2000	The WFP/UNHCR vulnerability survey (conducted in October 1999) was released and it found 63 percent of the under-five children and 56 percent of the adult women were chronically malnourished, due to a shortage of food and other reasons.

October 2000	A large number of newborns are discovered whose birth were not registered, therefore not entitling them to food or medical care. The issue was raised to the UNHCR and RRRC.
November 2000	An MSF nutrition survey found 62 percent of the Nayapara refugee population, irrespective of age and sex, suffering from chronic malnutrition.
February 2001	Violent clashes between Buddhists and Muslims were reported in Rakhine State, Myanmar.
March 2001	UNHCR listed 200 unregistered children dating back at least two years. The Kutupalong Camp in Charge began officially registering without problem, while the Nayapara Camp in Charge agreed to give food rations and medical care, but not registration.
December 2001	An outbreak of typhoid at Nayapara camp compelled the UNHCR and camp officials with MSF to conduct an investigation of the water supply system. After acknowledging that the system was not optimally operated at full capacity, agreements were made to improve the supply to meet international standards.
January 2002	UNHCR announced plans to revive repatriation, with information and counseling sessions, among other measures.
February 2002	Draft nutrition survey conducted by Concern on the request of UNHCR showed again unacceptably high rates of chronic malnutrition: 53 percent of the adults and 58 percent of the children.  UNHCR and the GOB announced plans to move 5,000 refugees 'cleared' by the GOM from Nayapara to Kutupalong to reduce the costs of transporting water to Nayapara and to separate the cleared refugees from 'anti-repatriation' elements.
May 2005	A Rohingya family containing two members was repatriated in Myanmar. After that, no repatriation held till now.

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	<b>page no</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	01
<b>2. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF ROHINGYA PROBLEM</b>	02
<b>3. REPATRIATION PROCESS OF THE ROHINGYA</b>	20
<b>4. PRESENT CODITION OF ROHINGYAS</b>	30
<b>5. VARIOUS INTERESTS OF VARIOUS ACTORS</b>	42
<b>6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION</b>	47
<b>7. APPENDIX</b>	51
<b>8. BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	60

# 1. INTRODUCTION

A number of exoduses of Rohingyas as refugees to Bangladesh from Myanmar occurred due to the Myanmar government's discriminatory policy to them. At first Bangladesh government treated this as a short-term problem. And the governments of these two states tried to solve this crisis bilaterally. At the beginning of the '90s, UNHCR involved in this crisis and it was followed by many NGOs, which invited beurocratic complexities and procrastination. Our paper examines whether this crisis is going to be a permanent problem for Bangladesh or not and whether the ongoing initiatives are enough to give the Rohingya refugees permanent salvation from all persecutions or not.

Rohingya is an ethnic Muslim group of Arakan a western province of Myanmar. They have been residing in this region for more than thousand years. Their ancestors were from the north-western China. Their present language is an eastern Indic language of the Indo-European family. It is mutually intelligible with Chittagonian, the language of south eastern Bangladesh and it contains many Arabic and Urdu words which have come from the ancient traders who have came to this region. After having influence of Muslim kings and poets in last 600 years, the Rohingyas are Muslim in religion. About 50 years ago, Rohingyas once used to dream for an independent separate Arakan. In last 50 years, Burmese governments have been persecuting them successively which compelled lots of Rohingyas to take refuge in neighboring states. According to international law, they became refugees.

A refugee is above all a victim. The 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol define a refugee as a person, who owing to well- founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.. Some feature are absent in this definition which might be potential causes of refugee influx. Afterwards many attempts were made to redefine the short comings of the definition. Natural disaster, war, political or economic turmoil, external aggression, occupation, foreign domination, civil disturbance are very common in African and Asian third world countries, which led them a huge number of refugee influxes. In 1967 Protocol though the temporal and geographical limitations were removed, but these features were not included. Even though, this definition is the most acceptable one to the world community.

We have carefully scrutinized the present situation of this crisis. Many agencies and organizations have been working here not only for Rohingyas but also for their vested interest. The purpose of this paper is to prove that this crisis is going to be a constant problem of Bangladesh by opening the door to economic, environmental and social imbalance. In doing so, we have submitted the analytical history of the Rohingyas to show the relevance of their demand for citizenship of Myanmar. We have discussed the repatriation process to inform the interactions among the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar and the UNHCR. Then we have discussed about the present condition of the Rohingyas and the activities of various actors to examine whether the ongoing process is enough for them or not. At last we have some recommendations to give a viable solution for the Rohingyas without any interest of others. Having such approaches, we will try to prove that, only repatriation to Myanmar except reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction will not be able to remove the threat of being this crisis a permanent one.

## **2. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF ROHINGYA PROBLEM**

The former name of Arakan is Rohang. It is western province of Burma and one of the most resourceful areas of this country. From the pre-Islamic period it was very known region to the Arab seafarers. Different groups of people like Arabs, Moors, Turks, Pathans, Moghuls, Central Asians, and Bengalis came here as traders, Warriors, preachers and captives overland or through the sea route or land route. Many of them settled there and mixed with the local people of Arakan. They developed the present stock of people known as Rohingya and they are Muslims also. Rohingya Muslims first settled from many where in Arakan date back to 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Although they are Muslims by religion but they have distinct culture and civilization of their own. They are one of the ethnics groups of Myanmar but they have a vast difference with other ethnic groups of Myanmar and that is they are not such kind of ethnic group, which developed from one tribal group affiliation or single racial stock.

They have physical differences from other peoples of Myanmar. Rohingyas are basically mixture of many kinds of people, their cheekbone is not so prominent and eyes are not so narrow like Rakhine Maghs and Burmans. Their noses are not flat and they are a bit taller in stature than the Rakhine Maghs but darker in complexion. They are some bronzing colored and not yellowish. Interesting thing is Rohingyas of Arakan still carried the Arab names, faith, dress, music, and customs. So, the Rohingyas are nationals as well as an indigenous ethnic group of Burma. They are not new born racial group of Arakan rather they are as old an indigenous race of the country as any others.

## **2.1 The Origin of Rakhine**

A Tibeto-Burman invasion and migrations swept over Vesali and as well as the Pala Dynasty. The invaders cut Arakan away from Indians and mixing in sufficient number with the inhabitants of the eastern side of the present Indo-Burma divide, created that stock of people now known as the Rakhine Arakanese. This emergence of a new race was not the work of a single invasion. However, the date 957 AD may be said to mark the appearance of the Rakhine in Arakan, and the beginning of fresh period.

The Maghs of Arakan and Bangladesh were mainly sea pirates in 15-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. They earned such a bad name that their ascendants later named themselves as Rakhine. The name Magh originated from the ruling race of Magadha and it is worth mentioning that the kings of Arakan once belonged to Magadha dynasty and was Buddhist by faith. Ethnically most of the Arakanese Maghs belong to the Mongoloid race. Their earliest home was north-western China, the cradle land of mankind between the upper courses of the Yang-Tse-Kiang and of the Hoang-Ho rivers. They entered the area, now known as Burma. In making this entry they encountered the local Mon-Khmer and by defeating them they settled in Burma. Arakan Yoma Mountain separates the Maghs from the parent stock. Though descended from the same stock, worshipping the same faith and speaking the same language as the Burmese, the Arakanese Maghs have a distinct culture and have preserved a distinct dialect. Hence the Arakanese Maghs of the northern section, close to Bangladesh, exhibit the original Mongoloid features in lesser and subdued degree than their southern brethren. Whether these ethnic differences are due to the intermixture of race or ecological and other factors it is not known. The Arakanese Maghs are short in stature, whose height rarely exceeds five feet six inches. The body seems to be stocky with relatively short legs and body; cheekbone is high and broad. Females are flat chested with thin lips. Black straight hairs, brown small eyes and flat nose are common features of the present-day Rakhine Magh population. King Anawratta of Pagan (1044-77AD) conquered North Arakan, but it was not incorporated in his kingdom. It remained a semi-independent feudatory state under its hereditary kings. When Pagan fell in 1287 AD Arakan asserted its independence under the famous Minhti, whose regime, according to the chronicles, lasted for the fabulously long period of ninety-five years (1279-1374 AD).

## **2.2 The Emergence of Mrauk-U-Empire**

The Islamic influence grew in Arakan to extent of establishing Muslim vassal state beginning in 1430 AD. Muslim rule and influence in Arakan lasted for



more than 350 years until it was invaded and occupied by Burmans in 1784 AD. In 1404, Naramaikhla, the king of Arakan, deposed by the Burmans, Then Naramaikhla pleaded help from the king to regain his lost throne at Launggyet in Arakan. According to Rakhine Razawin (Rakhine History), the Sultan of Bengal agreed to do so when Naramaikhla agreed to abide the following 6-point conditions. They are: - (a) To return the twelve towns of Bengal. (b) To receive Muslim title for the kings of Arakan from Bengal. (c) The court emblem must be inscribed with Kalima Tayuba in Persian. (d) The coins, medallions must be inscribed with Kalima Tayuba in Persian and to mint them in Bengal. (e) To use the Persian as court language of Arakan. (f) To pay taxes and presents annually.

### **2.3 The arrival of Pathan army in Arakan**

In 1429 AD, Sultan Nadir Shah sent Gen. Wali Khan as the head of 20,000 Pathan army with Naramaikhla to restore the throne of Arakan. They conquered Arakan from the control of Mon and Naramaikhla ascended the throne. But Naramaikhla and Wali Khan soon had a dispute over the number 5 condition. Wali Khan arrested king Naramaikhla. He ruled Arakan for one year and introduced Persian in his court which continued as state language up to 1845 AD and appointed Qazis. But sometimes after that Naramaikhla re-conquered Arakan with the help of a second army supplied by Nadir Shah. Naramaikhla founded a new city, Mrauk-U on the bank of the Lembro River, now known as Mrohaung, which remain the capital until 1785 when Arakan was conquered by Burma. Naramaikhla's Muslim soldiers, who came with him from Bengal, settled in villages near Mrohaung and built the Sandi Khan Mosque, which still exists today. Muslim influence in Arakan, they may be said to date from 1430, the\_year\_of Naramaikhla's return. As a result of the close land and sea ties between the two countries, which continued to exist for a long time thereafter, the Muslims played a decisive role in the history of Arakan Kingdom.

### **2.4 Mrauk-U Sultanate**

Naramaikhla ceded certain territory to the Sultan of Bengal and recognized his sovereignty. He introduced Nadir Shah's system of coins bearing the Kalima as used in Bengal since Muslim conquest of 1203. Later on he struck his own coins which had the name of the king in Arakanese letters on one side and his Muslim title in Persian on the other. It took the Arakanese a hundred years to learn that doctrine (Islam) from the Moslem-Mongolians. For hundred years 1430 to 1530 AD, Arakan remained feudatory to Bengal, paid tribute and learnt history and politics. Twelve kings followed one after another at Mrauk-U in undistinguished succession. In this way Arakan became definitely oriented towards the Muslim State.

In 1434 AD, at the age of 53, Min Sawmon died leaving his kingdom at the hand of his brother Min Khari as Ali Khan (1434-1459 AD) as his successor. Min Khari was succeeded by his son Basawpru as Kalima Shah (1459-1482 AD). Taking advantage of weakness of Sultan Barbak Shah of Bengal Kalima Shah occupied Chittagong in 1459 AD. Kalima Shah was murdered in 1482 AD and his kingdom plunged into chaos and disaster. Eight kings came to the throne in succession but most of them were assassinated. At last in 1531 AD a capable young king name Min Bin as Zabuk Shah (1531-1553 AD) ascended the throne of Arakan and declared himself as a full independent monarch. During his rule stability came back in Arakan. Even after becoming independent of the Bengal Sultans, the Arakan kings continued the custom of using the Muslim titles in addition to the Arakanese or Pali title. The fact that this practice continued even after they had shaken off the yoke of Bengal Sultan, goes to prove that there were some cogent reasons for this other than merely compulsion or force. The king had already a large number of Muslim subjects holding important posts in the court as well as in the field of trade and commerce possessing a far superior culture and civilization compared to those of his own people. Court ceremonies and administrative methods followed the customs of the Gaur and Delhi sultanates. There were eunuchs, harems, salves and hangmen; and many expressions in use at court were Mogul. Muslims also held eminent posts in the court of Arakan. With the ever increasing Muslim influence in the court of Arakan and the subsequent subservience of the administration Sonargaon, Muslims of Gaur and particularly those from Chittagong infiltrated into Arakan in large numbers in search of fresh lands and new pasture. Henceforth Arakanese administration continued to bear definite Islamic stamp.

Dr. Muhammad Enanmul Haq and Abdul Karim (1869-1953) in their work Bengali Literature in the Court of Arakan 1600-1700 state that “the Arakanese kings issued coins bearing the inscription of Muslim Kalema (the profession of faith in Islam) in Arabic script. The State emblem was also inscribed Arabic word Aqimuddin (establishment of God’s rule over the earth).” The Arakanese court also adoption of many Muslim customs and terms were other significant tribute to the influence of Islam. Mosques including the famous Sandi Khan Mosque began to dot the countryside and Islamic customs, manners and practices came to be established since this time. For about two hundred years Muslim domination seemed to have been completed.

The kingdom of Arakan had come in close cultural contact with the Muslim Sultanate of Bengal since 15<sup>th</sup> century so much that many of the Buddhist rulers of that country adopted Muslim names. They appointed Muslim officials in their courts and inscribed the Kalima on their coins. It was a renaissance. From this time onwards the relation of Muslims with the Arakanese became more intimate

and for about two centuries Arakan was united in a bond of friendship with Islamic lands. The end of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century were a period of political instability and transition caused by the break-up of the Afghan state in Bengal and gradual advance of the Moghuls. One of the social and demographic effects of this political change was the flight of a large number of Afghan nobles and other Muslims rank and position towards the easternmost districts of Bengal. Quite a few of these people found shelter at the Arakan court where they filled up important positions in the government. In this way Arakan became definitely oriented towards the Muslim State. By the end of 1500 AD Arakan region was Islamized and stood as an independent Muslim kingdom. It was later absorbed by the Burmese king in 1784 AD.

## **2.5 The conquest of Chittagong and the influence**

Arakan was neither a Burmese nor an Indian Territory till 18th century of the Christian era. Shut off from Burma by a hill range, it is located far away from the Indian capitals. Chiefly for its location, it had not only remained independent for the most part of its history, but also endeavored to expand its territory in the surrounding tracts whenever opportunity came and Chittagong was the first country to be the victim of the territorial ambition of Arakanese monarchs. The relation between Chittagong and Arakan is influenced by geographical, ethnological, cultural, and historical considerations. From 1575 till 1666 AD, nearly a century, Chittagong was under almost uninterrupted Arakanese rule.

After Min Sawmon, the successive kings of Arakan took initiative to evolve administration on the model of Gaur and the Muslims were given high posts in the government offices. A large number of Muslim officials were employed in the civil as well as military establishments, who were mostly from Chittagong. As a result of the royal patronage, settlements of the Muslim community also grew upon the south-eastern neighborhood of Mrauk-U. A trading port named Bandar was developed. In Bandar there lived qazis, muftis, ulama, religious fakirs and darvishes. Those high ranking Muslims living there used to converse with the king on equal and friendly terms. At that place the Muslims crowded for business. Most of the Muslim settlements are found on the both sides of the major rivers namely Naaf, Mayu (Kalapanzi), Kaladan and Lembro (Lemro). The impact of Muslim culture on the life of the people of Arakan had profound effect on the subsequent course of the history of Arakan. Like the Pathan Sultans of Bengal, the kings of Arakan patronized the cultivation of Bengali literature and many talented poets and writers from different regions thronged the court. With the royal support Bengali literature developed; learned men and

men of high caliber received patronage from the kings due to the liberal policy. Many Muslim Bengali poets dominated the court life.

Bengali became a favorite language and the Arakan kings encouraged the writing of a number of Puttis, which was then the only form of literature. One of those is Shah Alaol's Padmabati. Thus Arakan opened up a new field for expansion and exploitation for the Muslims of Chittagong. Except for the political barriers Chittagong and Arakan became one in all other respects and this continued for well over a century and to some extent lingered even up to the first half of the last century.

## **2.6 The Arakanese Kings with Muslim Names and Titles**

Min Sawmon as Solaiman Shah, the founder of Mrauk-U dynasty and his successors were greatly influenced by Islamic culture. The practice of adopting a Muslim name or title by the Arakanese kings continued for more than two hundred years (1430 – 1638).

### ***Names of the Kings Muslim Names reigning period<sup>1</sup>***

- Narameikhla as Sawmon Solaiman Shah. (1430-1434 AD)
- Meng Khari as Naranu Ali Khan (1434-1459 AD)
- Ba Saw Pru as Kalima Shah (1459-1482 AD)
- Dawlya as Mathu Shah (1482-1492 AD)
- Ba Saw Nyo as Mohammed Shah (1492-1493 AD)
- Ran Aung as Noori Shah (1493-1494 AD)
- Salimgathu as Sheik Abdullh Shah (1494-1501 AD)
- Meng Raza as Ilias Shah-I (1501-1513 AD)
- Kasabadi as Ilias Shah-II (1513-1515 AD)
- Meng Saw Oo as Jalal Shah (1515 AD)
- Thatasa as Ali Shah (1515-1521 AD)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rohang.blogspot.com>, accessed on June 24, 2007.

-Min Khaung Raza as El-Shah Azad (1521-1531 AD)

-Min Bin Min Pa Gri as Zabuk Shah (1531-1553 AD)

-Min Dikha as Daud Khan (1553-1555 AD)

-Min Phalaung as Sikender Shah (1571-1591 AD)

-Min Razagri as Salim Shah-I (1593-1612 AD)

-Min Khamaung as Hussain Shah (1612-1622 AD)

-Thiri Thudama as Salim Shah-II (1622-1637 AD)

## **2.7 The arrival of Portuguese in Arakan**

The Portuguese arrived in the Eastern waters about the year 1500 AD in search of trade. They were mariners and seamen of unique characters. An agreement with Portuguese was reached. When Min Bin as Zabuk Shah came to the throne he turned Mrauk-U into the strongest fortified city of the Bay, employing the Portuguese to lay out his walls and moats and to forge mount his cannon. He appointed them as military officers to train and equip a mercenary army of heterogeneous races, foreign and domestic; and he built with their aid, a large fleet manned with his own men, who were hardy boatmen, but guided and stiffened by Portuguese. King Min Bin in this way became master of a powerful modern weapon.

In July 1538 AD, the Mogul king Humayon entered Gaur and displaced the Independent dynasty of Arab Hussein Shahi dynasty. The pretender was Sher Shah. During the whole of Min Bin's reign the administration of Bengal was interrupted by that struggle and Eastern Bengal lay defenseless. For Min Bin, this was an opportunity. With a combined fleet and army movement he occupied Eastern Bengal. That province remained to Arakan for the next hundred and twenty years, till 1666 AD. Its administration was left in the hands of twelve local rajahs, who paid an annual tribute to the Arakanese king's viceroy at Chittagong. After conquest of Chittagong Min Bin struck coins on which Chittagong King and his Muslim name Zabuk Shah were inscribed.

## **2.8 The activities of Magh and Portuguese pirates**

The capture and enslavement of prisoners was one of the most lucrative types of plunder. Half the prisoners taken by the Portuguese and all the artisans among them were given to the king. The rest were sold on the market or forced to settle in the villages near Mrohaung. A considerable number of these captives were

Muslim. In addition to the Muslim prisoners and slaves brought to Arakan from Bengal and even from north India, many more came to serve as mercenaries in the Arakanese army, usually as the king's bodyguard.

Early in the 17th century the Portuguese reached the shores of Bengal and Arakan. At that time too, the raiding Arakanese ships reached the source of Ganges. They came into contact with the Portuguese and permitted them to establish bases for their operations and also granted them commercial concession. In return, the Portuguese helped to defend the Arakan boundaries. In 1576 AD, Akbar the Great, Emperor of Delhi, was efficiently ruling Bengal so that Arakan was now facing the Mogul Empire itself and not only Bengal. The Portuguese knowledge of firearms and artillery was more advanced than that of the Moguls, and Arakan profited much there by. Joint Arakanese-Portuguese raids on Bengal continued until the end of the 18th century and ceased entirely with the strengthening of the British naval force in the Bay of Bengal.

King Salim Shah-I, called himself king of Bengal and Tippura, issued trilingual coins from Chittagong in Arabic, Nagari and Devanagri with his Pali and Muslim titles in 1601 AD. For a short period during the reign of Salim Shah-I Arakan extended from Dacca and the Sundarbans to Moulmein, a Coastal Strip of a thousand miles in length and varying from 150 to 20 miles in depth. This considerable dominion was built up by means of the strong cosmopolitan army and navy organized by king Minbin as Zabuk Shah. King Salim Shah I was succeeded by his eldest son Meng Khamaung as Hussain Shah (1612-1622 AD). In 1609 AD the Portuguese occupied Sandip and established their independent base. From this base they conducted several hostile incursions in different parts of the Arakanese kingdom. So the Arakanese king decided to destroy the Portuguese bases. In early 1615 AD the Arakanese laid siege to the island of Sandip and later they occupied the island with the help of Dutch. The Arakanese capture of Sandip in 1615 AD shattered the Portuguese dream of establishing a maritime and religious empire in the region. King Hussein Shah proved to be a great and most successful king of Arakan.

For nearly half a century, Chittagong was a breeding ground of the pirates who ravaged the whole of lower Bengal, depopulated it and turned it to wilderness. During the four years from 1621 AD to 1624 AD the Arakanese Maghs in alliance with the Portuguese pirates brought to Chittagong then in possession of the king of Arakan, 42,000 slaves captured in the various districts of Bengal. Only Portuguese sold their captives but the Maghs employed all of them they had carried off in agriculture and other services.

In 17th century the Maghs and Portuguese pirates brought Bengali captives, both Muslims and Hindus, and sold at the ports of Arakan and India.

With the Arakanese, Portuguese pirates made a dire combination, holding Sandwip Island, Noahkali and Backergunge districts, and the Sunderbands delta south of Calcutta, and raiding up to Dacca and even Murshidabad, while Tippura sent them propitiatory tribute. In a single month, February 1727 AD, they carried off 1,800 captives from the southern parts of Bengal; the king chose the artisans, about one-fourth, to be his slaves, and the rest were sold at prices varying from Rs. 20 to Rs. 70 a head and set to work on the land as slaves. This continued throughout the eighteenth century, decreasing when the English began to police the coast. They had forts at Jagdia and Alamgirnagar in the mouth of the Meghna River, and here and there a few of them settled in the delta. They had also a little colony of 1,500, speaking Burmese and wearing Burmese dress, still survive on four or five islands in the extreme southeast of Backergunge district.

The Arakan pirates, both Magh and feringshi, used constantly to come by the water-route and plunder Bengal. They carried off the Hindus and Mahomedans. On reaching home the pirates employed some of the hardy men. The others were sold to the Dutch, English, and French merchants at the ports of the Deccan. Only the feringshis sold their prisoners. But the Maghs employed all whom they had carried off in agriculture and other services. Many highborn persons and Saiyads, many Saiyad - born pure women, were compelled to undergo the disgrace of slavery or concubinage to these wicked men. As they continually practiced raids for a long time, Bengal daily became more and more desolate and less and less able to resist them.

## **2.9 Shah Shuja in Arakan**

Prince Shah Shuja, brother of the Moghul Emperor Aurangzib of India, being defeated in his struggle for the throne was forced to seek shelter with the king of Arakan. The Arakan King Sandathudamma (1652-84) consented, and Shah Shuja with his family and followers were brought to Mrauk-U, the capital city of Arakan, in Portuguese gallies from Teknaf. He arrived in Mrauk-U, the capital of Arakan on 26th August 1660 AD and was favorably received by the king who assigned him a residence near the city. Shah Shuja came to Arakan as the king promised to provide him with some of his famous ships to take him on the way to Mecca; he wished to die in retirement at that holy spot. But when he arrived in Arakan with beautiful daughters and half a dozen camel loads of gold and jewels, the temptation was too great for King Sanda Thudamma. Such wealth had never been seen in Arakan before. The king in order to seize all Shah Shuja's treasure had to find out a lame excuse. So, King Sanda Thudamma

asked the hand of Shah Shuja's daughter Ameena, though he knew very well that Sultan Shah Shuja would never consent. As Shah Shuja refused the suit, the king ordered him to leave his country within three days. So, on 7th February 1661 AD, Shah Shuja fled to forest with some of his followers. The Maghs chased them and caught Sultan Shah Shuja and chopped him into pieces. The king seized all his treasure, took his daughters into the harem, and imprisoned the rest of the family.

## **2.10 The Decline and Fall of Arakanese Empire**

In 1665 AD Moghul Empire Aurangzib ordered Shayista Khan, the viceroy of Bengal to build a fleet of boats. In 1666 AD Shayista Khan's force of 6,500 men and 288 boats took Chittagong in 36-hours and occupied Ramu. It was a terrible blow to the prosperity of Arakanese and with it their century of greatness came to an end. Sanda Thudhamma's death is followed by century of chaos. In 1685 AD the units of Muslim archers serving the king of Arakan, got upper hand and continually reinforced by new forces from upper India. From 1685 to 1710 AD (for 25-years) the political rule of Arakan was completely in the hand of Muslims.

## **2.11 Arakan under Burmese occupation**

In 1784 AD Burmese king Boddawphaya sent 30,000 soldiers to conquer Arakan at the request of Rakhine noble Nagasandi and returned in February 1785 AD with the royal family and 20,000 inhabitants as prisoner. Thousand of Arakanese Muslims and Arakanese Buddhists were put to death. The Burmese soldiers destroyed mosques, temples, shrines, seminaries and libraries, including the Mrauk-U Royal Library. As for Arakanese Buddhists, their revered Mahamuni Image of Lord Buddha was taken away to Burma. The fall of Mrauk-U Empire was a mortal blow to the Muslims for every thing that was materially and culturally Islamic was razed to the ground. During 40-years of Burmese rule (1784-1824 AD) rule two third or two hundred thousands (200,000) of the inhabitants (Rohingyas and Rakhines) of Arakan were said to have fled to Bengal (India). The then British East India Company Govt. made no objection to the settlement of those people in the Southern parts of Chittagong region. The Mrauk-U City (Patriquilla) left in ruins. Today the indigenous Muslims found in and around Mandalay and Central Burma are descendants of those Rohingyas of Arakan. Similarly ethnic Inthas living in the Inle Lake in Shan Plateau are descendants of the Rakhines. However, before Burmese could consolidate their power over Arakan British occupied the Burma colony in 1824.



## **2.12 Arakan under British rule**

In 1826 AD Arakan was annexed to the British India and it was almost depopulated. The population of Arakan was 100,000 (Maghs 60,000, Muslims 30,000 and Burmese 10,000). So on the date of conquest of Arakan by English, there had already been living thirty thousands Muslims which was 30 percent of the total population of Arakan. Arakanese Muslim who entered and settled in Chittagong region during 1784–1824 AD is known as Roai in Chittagong. When peace arrived in Arakan they started to return to their forefather's homes in Arakan. Actually, Chittagonians dared not to go to Arakan because they knew that Arakan was a “Mugher Mulluk”—the lawless country. The British completed the occupation of whole of Burma in 1885 and made it an administrative part of India.

There was large-scale conversion of Buddhists to Islam during 15th to 18th centuries. It may be mentioned that when the Dutch industrialists were ordered to quit Arakan they were also not a little worried because their children left in Arakan were brought up to be Muslims. Muslim influence was also intensified when Moghul prince Shah Shuja, brother of Aurangzeb, fled to Arakan in 1660. King Sandathudama murdered Shuja, but his followers were retained at the court as archers of the royal guards in which role they frequently intervened as king-makers. The Rohingya population went on increasing from centuries to centuries and they were in clear majority in 1942.

Eventually, during the Second World War an estimated 500,000 Indians and Muslims fled Burma. Some were clearly following in the footsteps of the British government, but others allege that they were brutally chased out by the nationalists of Burma Independence Army or BIA. Thousands are reported to have died of starvation, disease or during sporadic military attacks in one of the darkest but least reported incidents in modern Burmese History. At that time in Arakan, many local Muslims and Buddhists said that, initially there was not really any serious trouble between two religious communities, but that it only flared up when the first BIA (Burma Independence Army) units entered the area (Arakan) with the Japanese Imperial Army. The BIA immediately began giving speeches about the on going expulsions of Indians and other alleged British supporters from the central Burma and asked why Rakhine nationalists were not doing the same. As a result, there was an outbreak of the first serious communal clashes from 1942 onwards.

## **2.13 The Muslim massacre of 1942**

On 8th December 1941, Japan declared war against British Government. On 7th March 1942, the Japanese invading forces occupied Rangoon, the capital city of

Burma. On 23rd March 1942 Japan bombed the Akyab City of Arakan. The Japanese fighter planes again bombed Akyab on 24th and 27th March respectively. So, the British administration was withdrawn from Akyab by the end of March 1942. There was an administration vacuum in Arakan following the withdrawal of British troops from the area. The Rakhine communalists in connivance with Burma Independence Army (BIA) led by Bo Rang Aung brought about a pogrom massacring about 1,00,000 innocent Rohingya Muslims, driving out 80,000 of them across the border to East Bengal, devastating their settlements and depopulating the Muslims in some parts of Arakan.

Some historians refuse to accept that there was a communal riot in Arakan in 1942. According to them it was a pre-planned cold-blooded massacre. On March 28, 1942 a group of 37 soldiers who were trekking their way to Burma, were intercepted, persuaded and prevail upon attack and loot the Muslim villages. Maybon Township in Kyaukpuru District and the six townships of Minbya, Myohaung, Pauktaw, Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun and Rathidaung in Akyab district were depleted of Moslem by murder and massacre and those who escaped evacuated through long tortuous and hazardous routes across mountains to Maungdaw. Twenty Two thousand Moslem reached Subirnagar Camp in Rangpur District in India but very large number had stay behind in Maungdaw owing to lack of facilities, disease and destitution. These refugees in Maungdaw who had lost their dearest one and all their property now turned against the Rakhine and fell upon them in retaliation. Total 294 villages in Buthidaung Township were re-occupied and rehabilitated by the original inhabitants and refugees after the War but not a single one in other townships. Soon the Rakhine Buddhists were streaming in droves from the north as the Rohingya Muslims were streaming from the south, and Arakan stood divided into two distinct territories, a Muslim north and a Buddhist south one. Since then, the traditional relation between the two sister communities deteriorated.

## **2.14 Muslim State and Peace Committee**

On 9th June 1942 the Rohingya Muslims of Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung area drove the BIA and Rakhine communalists from north Arakan. On 10th June 1942 the Rohingya Muslims declared North Arakan as Muslim State and Peace Committee was entrusted for administration of the area. In December 1942 Brigadier C.E Lucas Phillips of British 14th Army came to Maungdaw to contact the leaders of the Rohingya Muslims. After hard negotiation, the Peace Committee formed by the Rohingya Muslims headed by Mr. Omra Meah and Mr. Zahir Uddin Ahmed allowed the British 14th Army re-entry through the Naaf border town of Maungdaw. As per Public Notice No. 11-

OA-CC/42 dated, 31st. December 1942, the British Military Administration declared the former Muslim State as “Muslim National Area”. During the Second World War, Rohingya Muslims helped the Allied Forces against the invading Japanese in Arakan Front. The Rohingya Muslims generally stayed loyal to the British and work with the under ground V-force, most Rakhine nationalists jointed either with the BIA or under ground Communist movement. The Rakhines only turned against the Japanese when the British re-invaded Burma in 1945. On 1st January 1945 Brigadier C.E Lucas Phillips became the Chief Administrator of the area and appointed members of Peace Committee as administrative officers of the area. This represents a landmark in the history of Burmese independence. The British recognized the Rohingya Muslims as a distinct racial group and the British officer-in-command promised the Rohingyas to grant autonomy in North Arakan.

## **2.15 Arakan after Independence of Burma**

After 40 years of Burmese king Bodaw Phaya’s tyrannical rule, the British colonialists annexed Arakan to British India. In 1937 the British separated Burma from India and made Arakan apart of it. A significant measure of “Home Rule” (internal self-administration) was given to her. The territory of Arakan became merely a division of the central government dominated by Burmans in 1948 under a plan pre-arranged before independence between Burmese leaders and the opportunists and self-seekers in Arakan. Thus Arakan remained under colonial rule forever, with a change in her masters from the Burmese to the British and then again to the Burmans. According to the London Agreement of October 7, 1947 power was handed over to the government of the Union of Burma on 4th January 1948. From independence in 1948 Arakan – like many other regions of Burma – was rocked by political violence. The political demands of both Muslim and Buddhist communities were both over looked by the Burmese central government in Rangoon and Arakan was not even granted ethnic statehood – although, as evidence of strong constituency support, four Muslims did win seats in elections to the new parliament. As a result, while the communists and armed Rakhine nationalists seized control of many of the towns throughout Arakan, hundreds of Rohingya armed supporters flocked to joint the popular Muslim singer, Jafar Hussain (Jafar Kawal), who had formed the first Mujahid Party in Buthidaung Township in December 1947 to press for a Muslim Autonomous State in north Arakan. When the Rohingyas armed resistance movement gained momentum in 1950’s against the tyranny of the Burmese regime, the Burmese government appeased the Rohingya public by offering some governmental positions and a special district called “Mayu Frontier District”.

On 1st May 1961, the Burmese government created the Mayu Frontier District covering Maungdaw, Buthidaung and the Western part of Rathidaung townships. It was a military administration, not autonomous rule, but as it did not involve subordination to Arakan authorities, the arrangement won the support of the Rohingya leaders, particularly since the new military administration quickly succeeded in restoring order and security to the area. When, early in 1962, the government drafted a bill for Arakan statehood, the Mayu Frontier District was not included in the territory of the projected state. After the military coup of March 1962, the new military regime led by General Ne Win cancelled the plan to grant statehood of Arakan, but the Mayu Frontier District remained under its separate Military Administration.

## **2.16 Arakan under Military Rule**

The military regime called them the Revolutionary Council (RC) and abolished the Constitution and dissolved the Parliament of Burma. All powers of the State-legislative, judiciary and executive had fallen automatically under the control of RC. In February, 1963 the RC regime nationalized entire banks and business enterprises all over the country. In Arakan, most of the major business establishments were in the hands of Muslims. The Rohingya Muslims of Arakan were hardest hit in the economic crackdown by the new military regime. In Arakan even small grocery and rice shops of Muslims were not spared. The RC banned all political parties and floated a new political party known as Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). In Arakan only Rakhine Maghs were inducted to new political party. Notifications were sent by RC to Arakan Division authorities to restrict the movement of Rohingya Muslims. On 1st February 1964, the Revolutionary Council of Burmese military regime abolished the Mayu Frontier District and put the area again within the jurisdiction of Akyab District under the Home ministry. All Rohingya welfare and socio-cultural organizations were also banned in 1964. The military regime cancelled the Rohingya Language Program broadcasted from Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS), Rangoon in October 1965. In 1974, the BSPP Government convened the first Peoples Congress (Pyithu Hlut Taw) which ratified the constitution drawn by BSPP. The new constitution granted State to Arakan in the unitary structure. The new name of the state was Rakhine State and was manned by hundred percent Rakhine and Burmese Buddhists.

Since 1948, up to 1999, there have been more than 20 major operations of eviction campaigns against the Rohingyas carried out by the successive Governments of Burma. Naga Min or King Dragon Operation of 1978 was the largest, the most notorious and probably the best-documented operation. The operation started on 6th February 1978 from the biggest Muslim village of

Sakkipara in Akyab, which sent shock waves over the whole region within a short time. News of mass arrest of Muslims, male and female, young and old, torture, rape and killing in Akyab frustrated Muslims in other towns of North Arakan. Terrified by the ruthlessness of the operation and total uncertainty of their life, property, honor and dignity a large number Rohingya Muslims started to leave their hearths and homes to cross the Burma-Bangladesh border. Within 3 months more than 300,000 Rohingyas took shelter in makeshift camps erected by Bangladesh Government. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognized them as genuine refugees and started relief operations. The presence of large number of Rohingya Muslim refugees attracted the attention of the world, particularly the Muslim countries. Although Burma denied, initially to accept back her people she was bogged down under international pressure. A bilateral agreement was signed on 9th. July 1978 in Dhaka between the two countries paving the way for return of the Rohingya refugees in 1979 after more than 9 months stay on the soil of Bangladesh. About 200,000 refugees returned home while 40,000 died in the refugee camps. According to Human Rights Watch/Asia reports about 30,000 Rohingya refugees were integrated locally in Bangladesh and the rest left for Middle East countries.

A vicious blow came to the Rohingyas in 1982, when the Burmese government created a new citizenship law/act to obviously deny their nationality. The law was totally discriminatory. Creating three classes in the citizens, it defies the equal right of all. The 1982 Law establishes a government-controlled Central Body, with wide powers to determine specific citizenship issues. It is at liberty to determine what rights associate and naturalized citizens may or may not enjoy and has wide discretion to revoke such citizenship on grounds that include disaffection or disloyalty to the state by any act or speech or otherwise or moral turpitude. The Central Body has no accountability and a vast majority of Rohingyas fail to qualify for any of the categories of citizenship.

-The Rohingya are not considered to be a national ethnic group as provided by sec. 3 of the 1982 law, and members of the Rohingya population are therefore ineligible for full citizenship

-Few Rohingyas were both eligible for citizenship under the 1948 Act and had applied for citizenship under that Act, as required for the grant of associate citizenship under the 1982 law. Most were reportedly unaware of the Act or did not understand its importance at the time.

-As to eligibility for naturalized citizenship, few Rohingyas are in possession of the necessary documents that would provide “conclusive evidence” of entry and residence prior to 4 January 1948 or could establish the necessary bloodlines as

required by the law. While to prove their residence they can use their family list, which names each member of the household, the family list only indicates names of family members and date of birth. It does not indicate place of birth, which in effect prevents people from “furnishing conclusive evidence” of birth in Myanmar as required by the 1982 law.

## **2.17 Arakan under SLORC/SPDC Military Rule**

On September 18, 1988 in dramatic turn of events a Ne Win orchestrated so-called military coup removed civilian BSPP Govt. President Maung Maung. The military in the name of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) headed by Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Saw Maung, took over power. The SLORC massacred more than 3000 pro-democracy demonstrators before gaining full control of the situation. Students and political activists were hunted down and either thrown into torture cells or killed. A large number of them fled across the border into neighboring countries or joined anti-government revolutionary groups based along the border. The Rohingya Muslims of Arakan have to bear the brunt of SLORC’s wrath. The SLORC started to take vengeance on the Rohingya Muslims. SLORC held a General Election on May 27, 1990. The opposition NLD won bulk of the seats. So, SLORC refused to recognize the results of the General Election. When the masses are becoming restive as a result of the refusal to hand over power, the SLORC employed the old method of diverting the attention of the masses from the real burning issues by creating a new Rohingya drive campaign.

State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) denies the existence of the ethnic group named Rohingya. A vast majority of them are not treated as the citizens of Burma. The statement of the Myanmar government is: “Although there are 135 individual ethnic groups in Myanmar, the so-called Rohingyas do not exist among them. Historically, no nation named Rohingya was ever in Myanmar. It is the created name of a group of insurgents from the Rohingya Province. At the time of Anglo-Myanmar war of 1824, some Muslim rebels enter into the Rakhine Province from the neighboring countries. They are illegal here and they do not have any papers related to immigration.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1991-1992 a more dreadful Rohingya drive extermination campaign code named “Pyi Thaya”, had been launched on 18th July 1991 by deploying thousands of brute troops by SLORC in Arakan. A new wave of violence and persecution fell upon the Rohingyas such as killing, raping of women,

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<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International. (May, 2004) *The Rohingya Minority: Fundamental Rights Denied*. AI Index: ASA 16/005/2004. p.3

destruction of Muslim settlements, holy places of worship, religious institutions, and Muslim relics, confiscation of land, detention, slave labor and various other atrocities rose sharply in early 1991. As a result, again Rohingyas began to leave their homeland in the thousands to seek asylum as refugees in neighboring Bangladesh. The Rohingya refugee crisis that began in September 1991 with 10,000 refugees entering Bangladesh had reached its peak by mid-1992 when the refugee population rose to more than 268,000. Rohingya Muslims who fled into Bangladesh as refugees were mainly sheltered in 20 camps with a few residing outside the camps. The camps are located mainly on both sides of the Cox's Bazaar-Teknaf highway, popularly known as the Arakan road. Despite its meagre resources, Bangladesh provided food and shelter to the Rohingya refugees. This time the refugees came mainly from Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathidaung and Akyab townships of Arakan State. International agencies and NGOs later on came to their help. Under Bangladesh-Burma bilateral agreement signed on 29th April 1992 a total of 229,877 Rohingya refugees were repatriated to Arakan. The main persecutions by the Myanmar government in early '90s are given below:

***Denial of citizenship:*** The Rohingyas have been absolutely denied their citizenship though they are one of the recognized nationalities of the Union of Burma. They are not issued any national identification card which is crucial in daily life particularly in Arakan. The Burmese Citizenship Law of 1982 has deprived the ethnic Rohingyas of "Statelessness" in their ancestral land. As a result, half of the total Rohingyas have been displaced around the world.

***Restriction of movement:*** The movement of Rohingyas within the country is totally banned which is a crime punished long term imprisonment. They even can't move from one village to another village without local authorities' permission which hardly obtainable. Thus the Rohingyas area of Northern Arakan has been turned into a concentration camp.

***Restriction of business and economy:*** The authorities have stopped giving permission to run even petty business to the Rohingyas. They are imposed high tax for their agriculture products which are locally produced. Most of the fertilized lands, shrimp culturing dams, business places owned by Rohingyas have been confiscated from Rohingyas.

***Restriction of accessing higher education:*** Rohingya students are not permitted to access higher education of technology, medicine, computer science in the universities. They are unable to obtain travel pass and required permit solely imposed on Rohingyas to join their respective institution.

***Indiscriminate killings, arrests and tortures:*** Uncountable Rohingyas are whimsically killed and hundreds of others are conscripted on false and imaginary charges and they are subjugated to inhuman torture. Today' Arakan is a silent killing field and torturing center for innocent Rohingyas.

***Forced labor and expulsion:*** Rohingyas are press-ganged to worksites and forced to work for days together without any wage. Many people are killed by the securities forces while working as porters in remote forests and jungles. Rohingyas are also obligated to supply food and construction materials for the army and security forces free of cost. As such Rohingyas are compelled to flee their mother land Arakan.

***Defacing age-old Rohingyas settlement:*** A number of new Buddhist settlements have been established on the confiscated of Rohingyas lands with a view to changing the demographic position of Arakan and turning the Rohingyas into non-existence.

***Dishonoring women folk and barring marriage:*** Law enforcing agencies and Buddhist ruffians often enter in the local Rohingya houses in the dead hour of the night and dishonor womenfolk under the threat of lethal weapon. Rape is not even felt as a crime in the least as such offences bring no practical punishment to the culprits. Even those Rohingyas who report such cases are arrested and subject to long term imprisonment. Additionally Rohingyas girls and women are severely restricted for marriage.

***Anti-Rohingyas riots:*** The authorities premeditatedly create frequent outbursts of rebellion against Rohingyas in different part of Arakan that results the death of hundreds of thousands of unprotected Rohingyas and plunder of their properties.

***Desecration:*** A large number of religious sites and schools including mosques have been demolished, uprooted or burnt down. Holy scriptures are often tore down or used as packing materials. A number of restrictions have been imposed on performing religious duties.

Meanwhile, there has been intermittent outflow of Rohingya Muslims and in 1996 when the GOB was actively promoting the repatriation, there began entry of large scale Rohingya Muslims citing forced labor and other maltreatment. Although the new arrivals were not accepted as asylum seekers and denied access to the UNHCR, these people never return home and since have been residing in different areas of the border. These unofficial refugees have been passing an uncertain life.



### **3. REPATRIATION PROCESS OF THE ROHINGYA**

At the time of the exodus of 1978, more than 300,000 Rohingyas took refuge in Bangladesh within 3 months. They took shelter in makeshift camps erected by Bangladesh government. UNHCR recognized them as genuine refugees and started relief operations. Presence of large number of Rohingya Muslim refugees attracted the attention of the world, particularly the Muslim countries. Although Burma denied, initially to accept back her people she was dogged down under international pressure. A bilateral agreement was signed on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1978 in Dhaka between Bangladesh and Burma. On the other side, Bangladesh appealed to the international community for assistance. A major international fund raising operation was mounted for the assistance of the Rohingya refugees at Bangladesh. The figures on the number of refugees presented by Bangladesh and Burma varied considerably. The Bangladesh government claimed 252,000 persons sought refuge in Bangladesh, while the Burmese sources stated that 143,900 persons absconded to Bangladesh in order to escape the Nagmin Project. However, in the negotiations conducted between Bangladesh and Burma during June and July 1978, an agreement was finally reached on the repatriation of refugees to Burma. The operation commenced on 31st August 1978 and ended on 29th December 1979 and involved repatriation of a total of 187,250 refugees to Arakan.

Another exodus took place in 1991-1992 in Burma. 1000 Rohingyas came to Teknaaf, ramu, ukhia, cox's bazaar of Bangladesh, crossing the Naaf River. This number of the rHINGYA refugees became 268,000 at the mid of 1992. They started to reside in 20 camps and a few of them were staying outside these camps. These camps were along the two sides of the cox's bazaar-teknaf road, which is also known as the Arakan road. Despite its meager resources Bangladesh provided food and shelter to them. Later the international agencies and NGOs came forward to help these poor Rohingyas. In 1997, approximately 229,877 refugees were repatriated according to the bilateral treaty between Bangladesh and Burma, which was signed on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1992. After that, the repatriation procedure became sloth. And it is stopped for last 2 years. 20,000-30,000 are still in Bangladesh. Last news is, 2 people of the same family had returned home on the 5<sup>th</sup> May of 2005.<sup>3</sup>

#### **3.1 Bangladesh Government's Response**

Bangladesh government has provided the Rohingya refugees with shelter and food from the very beginning. And several NGOs (both national and international) and the UNHCR have given crucial support. In spite of these

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<sup>3</sup>. Rana, Abdul Kuddus, *Daily Prothom Alo*, 20/06/2007.

humanitarian assistances, a major policy consideration of the Bangladesh government has been their 'quick and safe return' to Myanmar. The Bangladesh government allowed the refugees to enter its territory and provided them shelter and relief. Initially it tried to solve the issue on a Bangladesh/Myanmar bilateral basis and to manage relief efforts on its own, but increasing number of refugees and strong intervention from donor countries led the GOB to seek international assistance. UNHCR was invited to provide assistance to the refugees in mid- 1992. UNHCR's involvement facilitated the work of international NGOs to complement the work of the national NGOs.

Bangladesh viewed the refugees as a short-term problem. It is on this premise the government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Myanmar on 28 April, 1992 under which Myanmar agreed to the return of those refugees who could establish their bona fide residency in Myanmar prior to their departure for Bangladesh. (In depth assessment of the MOU is presented in detail in Part Three on Repatriation).

In spite of the initial hospitality and cordiality extended to the refugees, the mood of the Bangladesh government changed after the signing of the Joint Statement with Myanmar. During 1992 and 1993 human rights groups and UNHCR raised concerns over coercion and forceful repatriation of refugees by the Bangladesh authorities. Certain international NGOs confirmed that such allegations were well founded.

Following UNHCR/NGOs' protests about alleged forcible repatriation and their demand for a halt to such process the Bangladesh government blocked their access to the camps, irrespective of the Agreement signed between the government and the UNHCR on 8 October 1992, Which allow the latter a role in verifying the voluntary nature of the return movement. As a result UNHCR withdrew from the repatriation program on 22 December 1992.

### **3.2 Repatriation Policy of Bangladesh Government**

When the refugees first began to arrive from Myanmar the people and the government of Bangladesh received them with great degree of sympathy and provided them with all forms of support. The Government of Bangladesh took effective steps in providing relief to the refugees and provided those temporary shelters, food, medicare and health and sanitation facilities. A large number of officials were mobilized to shore up the relief efforts. Later international agencies (the UNHCR and the WFP) and the NGOs (both local and international) were involved in the relief activities.

However, an important consideration of the policy-makers in Dhaka all along had been the duration of the refugees' stay in Bangladesh would be short and they were to return to Myanmar as soon as the situation permitted them to do so. It is in this context that one sees Bangladesh's eagerness to negotiate the return of the refugees with the Myanmar authorities. The GOB held that the country did not have the capacity and resources to host the refugees over an uncertain period of time. Added to this perhaps there was a degree of self-confidence in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka (which later proved to be misguided), that solution to the problem could be worked out through normal bilateral diplomatic channels, as was done during the 1978 influx.

Bangladesh continued to view the refugee as a short-term problem and repeatedly demanded the immediate repatriation of all Rohingya refugees. In April 1992 the Bangladesh Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman stated that the repatriation of refugees would be completed in six months. It is out of that sense of urgency that Bangladesh signed a Joint Statement with the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) of Myanmar on April 28, 1992.

### **3.3 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Bangladesh and Myanmar**

According to the Joint Statement Myanmar agreed to take measures that would halt the outflow of Myanmar residents to Bangladesh and to accept after scrutiny all 'those carrying Myanmar identity cards', 'those able to present other documents issued by relevant Myanmar authorities' and 'all those able to furnish evidence of their residence in Myanmar'. An important lacuna in the Memorandum is the role of the UNHCR - While it was agreed that the GOB (Government of Bangladesh) would fully associate the representatives of the UNHCR to assist the process of safety and voluntary repatriation, the Government of Myanmar (GOM) agreed that 'the services of the UNHCR could be drawn upon as needed at an appropriate time'. Thus, the MOU failed to assign any role to UNHCR in Myanmar. Another important limitation of the Memorandum was that it failed to specify that all refugees, without exception, would be taken back.

An important coincidence was that Bangladesh signed the Memorandum at a time when there were efforts by the UN to get access to Myanmar by the Mission of Undersecretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Eliasson. It has been reported that in later negotiations with Bangladesh SLORC's (State Law and Order Restoration Council) position, at least for some time, was involvement of UN agencies has become obsolete, since both countries agreed on the terms of solution and repatriation.

Another important omission for Bangladesh was her failure to point out that most of the Rohingya refugees were stripped of their Myanmar documents prior to their crossing to Bangladesh and many of them were not in possession of any identity papers in the first place. It is difficult to assess the reasons for Bangladesh's rush in signing the Memorandum without mounting a concerted pressure of international community on Myanmar and particularly at a time when refugees were still arriving "at the rate of about 1,500 per day".

### **3.4 Starting of Repatriation**

The Bangladesh government's attitude towards the refugees underwent a significant change following the signing of the Memorandum. On 22 September, 1992 the first repatriation of 49 refugees took place on a very limited scale without the UNHCR involvement. National media criticized it very much. UNHCR was disappointed for that. The statement of UNHCR was, "We are not against repatriation. Rather we are in favour of repatriation under the internationally agreed principles where the safety and security of the returnees are guaranteed. It is unfortunate that the government did not ask us to be involved". It has been suggested that the UN agency was notified after the repatriation had taken place. UNHCR believes that "this movement was accompanied by considerable pressure from the Bangladesh authorities, who insisted that they could not give the refugees long-term asylum". Again the UNHCR was reported to be holding the view that exclusion of the UN organization from the repatriation movement sent a wrong signal to Myanmar about the international monitoring. This has been further corroborated by non-governmental organizations who reported that in September 1992 cases of forced transfer to transit camps by taking away family books, coercion in the form of physical abuse had increased significantly. In addition, it was alleged that camp officials were given quota to come up with a number of refugees per month who were willing to return. The first phase of repatriation was not voluntary is evident from the increased outbreak of violence that had occurred in camps, often resulting in deaths of the refugees. According to official statement, 15 people died at that violence. Protest demonstrations in camps were held in all camps against the repatriation demanding a total halt to all repatriation. The refugees' main conditions to repatriation were: *(a)* The UNHCR must be involved in the repatriation. *(b)* The Myanmar government must accept and declare the Rohingyas as an ethnic race in Arakan. *(c)* Human rights must be guaranteed for the Rohingyas. *(d)* Aung San Suu Kyi must be freed. *(e)* The Myanmar government must compensate or return the confiscated lands of the Rohingyas and *(f)* The military rule in Myanmar must end.

### **3.5 The Relation between UNHCR and GOB**

On 8 October 1992 an agreement was reached between the UNHCR and GOB which allowed the UN agency a role in verifying the voluntary nature of repatriation. Following signing of the agreement two batches of repatriation took place on 12 and 31 October which according to UNHCR were voluntary. But following this several rounds of repatriation took place without UNHCR's involvement. A UNHCR Situation Report states that most of the repatriations held in months of November and December 1992 took place without the UNHCR supervision. The Bangladesh government's intransigence to accord the UNHCR its due role in the verification of the voluntary process of repatriation as agreed upon early October 1992, and to continue to coerce refugees to repatriate, ultimately led the agency to withdraw from the repatriation program on December 22, 1992. An additional 11,216 persons were repatriated after the withdrawal of the UNHCR which was not voluntary to all. This form of repatriation also came under criticism from the US Department of State which viewed it as "coerced repatriation".

Following these criticisms the GOB suspended its unilateral repatriation in late January 1993 and announced its plans to discuss the issue with the UNHCR. Negotiations for a MOU between the two began soon after.

After several rounds of negotiations and exchange of letters the two sides finally signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 12 May 1993. The Memorandum provided GOB to allow "free access to officials of the UNHCR to independent interview of refugees in transit camps. It was to determine the voluntary character of their decision to return and for conducting independent interviews with prospective returnees for certifying the voluntary nature of the repatriation". It further commits the Bangladesh government that no refugees will be coerced into leaving against his/her will. In addition the Memorandum provided UNHCR free access to and presence in all refugee camps at day time. An important provision of the Memorandum is that the UNHCR undertook to carry promotional activities to motivate the refugees to return home once international presence for observing reasonable conditions of safety for the returnee is established in Myanmar according to agreement of 28<sup>th</sup> April 1992 between the GOB and Myanmar.

Two most important concerns of the UNHCR were in the Memorandum. Those were protection of refugees in the camps and voluntary repatriation, guaranteed by private interviewing of refugees by UNHCR. For Bangladesh government the tying of the Memorandum to that of Bangladesh-Myanmar Agreement (April 1992) was an important achievement. A grave limitation of the Memorandum was that it did not clearly spell out that repatriation would be promoted only

when an appreciable improvement in the conditions had occurred and the safety of the refugees could be assured. This issue became a major bone of contention between the aid agencies and human rights groups and the UNHCR on the one hand, and Bangladesh government, on the other, in the later phases of repatriation.

Discussion with aid agency officials as well as with the refugees suggest that even after the MOU was signed there was significant degree of coercion in the camps to make refugees volunteer for repatriation. A high ranking official reckoned that as many as fifty percent of the repatriations that occurred prior to August 1994 were affected either through overt force or other coercive methods. Threat, intimidation and liberal use of broad powers of arrest by the camp officials had been resorted to promote repatriation. In spite of all these problems repatriation process continued and another 50,000 people were repatriated.

### **3.6 MOU on Repatriation between UNHCR and Myanmar**

Another important development during this period was the signing of an MOU between Myanmar's SLORC authorities and the UNHCR on 5 November 1993 to facilitate the voluntary return and to carry out the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Myanmar residents from Rakhine State who were in UNHCR-assisted camps in Bangladesh. The GOM assured that the returnees would be allowed to return to their respective places of origin and after necessary verifications with the assistance of UNHCR, issue to all returnees the appropriate identification papers. The Myanmar authorities also committed that the returnees would enjoy the same freedom of movement as all other nationals in the Rakhine State, in conformity with the existing laws and regulations. Among other things the GOM ensured UNHCR access to all returnees in the Rakhine State in order to enable them discharge their responsibilities.

### **3.7 Mass Repatriation**

The signing of the MOU with Myanmar by the UNHCR completed the triad that was felt to be necessary to mount a major repatriation initiative. Accordingly on 19 December 1993 an Operational Plan for mass repatriation was presented by the UNHCR. The objective of the plan was to facilitate voluntary repatriation of approximately 190,000 refugees at the rate of 15-18,000 refugees per month (1,500 every other day).

The Operation Plan had taken into account UNHCR's presence in Arakan to assist return and reintegration and the sufficient improvement of situation in Myanmar. It was further assumed that all refugees would decide to return and

GOM would accept them all. As part of the Operational Plan it was decided to promote confidence among refugees, governments and the NGOs.

Although preparations were being made principally on the GOM-UNHCR MOU, there was no convincing evidence about the situation of the 50,000 refugees who had by then returned to Myanmar prior to the beginning of mass repatriation. In addition, very little could be gathered from independent sources about the situation actually then prevailing in the operation area in Arakan. The NGOs felt that very little information was made available to them and that they were not involved with the planning process of mass repatriation. It was generally believed by the non-governmental community that the refugees were not being provided information that they needed to make an informed choice. In addition, the staffing position, particularly at the Arakan side, was too low to handle and monitor such a major operation.

UNHCR got access to Arakan after the November 1993 agreement between it and Myanmar. Then UNHCR abandoned the system of individual interviews in favor of a mass registration program in which thousands of Rohingyas returned each week. At that time, NGOs providing services in the refugee camps questioned the voluntary nature of the repatriation program. A majority of the refugees who repatriated did so under intimidation or with sufficient information. UNHCR's monitoring role in Myanmar should be assessed against this backdrop. The UNHCR's monitoring program in Northern Arakan was to ensure the basic rights of the returnees, through a continuous dialogue with the Myanmar authority and to provide socio-economic interventions to stabilize the population and provide a basis for ongoing reintegration and development. The ability of UNHCR to carry out an effective monitoring program was impeded by denial of citizenship, compulsory labor, forcible relocations and restriction on freedom of movement. These are the issues which drove the Rohingyas away to Bangladesh from Myanmar and these still were there.

Moreover, the presence of UNHCR in Arakan State has been having a negative influence on the protection of Rohingya asylum-seekers in Bangladesh. Soon after UNHCR gained access to the Burmese side of the border, new Rohingya arrivals were no longer allowed to take shelter in the existing refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar District. The UNHCR has never strongly challenged the restrictive policies of the Bangladesh government in labeling all Rohingya newcomers as 'economic migrants'<sup>4</sup>. The claim to protection of new asylum-seekers in Bangladesh has been secondary to the goal of maintaining the momentum of

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<sup>4</sup>. Individuals, whose socio-economic rights are at risk and those who migrate for a better living are the economic migrants. Chimni, B. S, "Who is a Refugee?", in Chimni, B. S ed., *International Refugee Law: A Reader*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications,2000)pp. 6-7

repatriation, and this has deliberately kept the relentless outflow of Rohingya out of Burma invisible. The other major objective of the UNHCR presence in Myanmar was to anchor the population and prevent a future exodus. However, this proved difficult to accomplish in view of social, economic and political factors beyond the control of UNHCR.

In early January 1994, the UNHCR Head of Desk, Regional Bureau for Asia and Oceania, made a visit to Dhaka following his trip to Yangon, Sittwe, Maungdaw and the 5 reception centers on the Myanmar side. In his briefing in Dhaka he expressed his confidence of the goodwill of the Myanmar authorities and expressed his feeling that they had the commitment. In reply to a question if forced labour was still practiced he said 'no'. It is interesting to note that the senior official of UNHCR was making optimistic statements though he did not speak to any returnee and was not allowed to enter Bangladesh over the Gundum bridge (as was originally planned) by the Myanmar authorities. By then the UN agency was to make any physical presence in Arakan which made the refugees hesitant to go. In spite of this fact in implementing the MOU, UNHCR began the information sessions in the camps and together with the Relief Commissioner.

Thus far in a hostile environment of uncertainty and fear, the camp-inmates gradually began to trust the UNHCR as promoter of their interests and protectors. This the UNHCR earned through its strong stand against the involuntary repatriation that Bangladesh was pursuing at the initial stages. However, the distinction between the GOB and the UNHCR began to fade when UNHCR began the information campaign using the public address system of the camp in charge which so far had aired very little things that the refugees could really trust upon. NGOs claimed that this perhaps was the beginning of an erosion of trust of the refugees in the UNHCR.

By March 1994 the situation showed an upward trend in repatriation. However, there were fresh instances of new refugees and some double-backers and UNHCR was not ready to receive refugees on the Myanmar side. The dissemination of information could not satisfy the refugees. They were particularly concerned with the citizenship rights and freedom of movement.

In April 1994, Myanmar announced the partial completion of the reception facilities. It was in this month that repatriation was organized with the cooperation of UNHCR. The first group of refugees crossed the border on 30 April 1994, accompanied by the UNHCR Representative in Bangladesh to establish confidence of the refugees. The efforts however, were disrupted by the cyclone of May of that year.



The impasse was further compounded by the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary's accusation that UNHCR was obstructing the repatriation process. The Foreign Secretary also threatened not to renew the MOU that was to expire in May. He demanded that interviewing should be stopped and that all refugees should leave Bangladesh before the end of 1994.

The repatriation process faced a severe blow by a cyclone in early May 1994 that destroyed all camps, departure and reception points. The total number of returnees since January 1994 was 3,275. It was only in July 1994 following the mass repatriation registrations that repatriation figures gradually picked up with the monthly figure being 3,592. There were positive developments following the arrival of the new Relief Commissioner. The UNHCR was given permission for the first time to begin interviewing in all non-transit camps. It should be noted that prior to July 1994, UNHCR was authorized to interview refugees only in transit camps, to ascertain voluntary of the refugees to repatriate. Kutupalong was the first camp where 25 percent of the interviewed stated that they wanted to return. During this exercise there was a shift in UNHCR's policy from information to promotion of repatriation.

The new message was that it was time for the refugees to return to their home country as UNHCR was present there and the situation there was conducive. According to UNHCR, the final result revealed that 90 percent of those interviewed said "yes" to repatriation. On July 18 the first group of returnees went over to Myanmar over the Tumbru Bridge, the second departure point.

The repatriation process came to halt because of that cyclone of May 1994. 12 out of 19 camps were completely razed to the ground. 86 refugees were killed. Between August 1994 and March 1995, a large scale of repatriation could be completed. But the repatriation came to a virtual halt in April 1995 when Myanmar authorities suddenly started talking about re-verification of individual refugees who had earlier been cleared for repatriation. Thus repatriation of 54,000 refugees became uncertain. In the beginning of the repatriation process the Myanmar authorities offered clearance to refugees on the basis of a 'runaway list', which they themselves had initially prepared. But at different meetings they later admitted that the runaway list was far from accurate.

Repatriation continued in small batches in 1996 and 1997. During this time there had also been fresh cases where Rohingya Muslims were returning from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Bangladesh Rifles 39 Battalion had pushed back a

group of 81 Rohingyas to Myanmar on April 25, 1996.<sup>5</sup> They formally handed over the apprehended the Rohingyas to the NASAKA (Myanmar Border Security Force).in February 1997 a total of 26,832 refugees were still awaiting repatriation. Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia said, “We are close to winding up the repatriation of the refugees from Bangladesh. We will now only focus on the re-integration of the returnees in their homes. The situation in Myanmar had changed a lot. And the authorities they were extending all cooperation to the UNHCR. They have accepted the protection role of UNHCR and granted its international staff unrestricted access to all the returnees. But there is no guarantee that no fresh exodus will happen in future.”<sup>6</sup>

The Myanmar authorities in the mean time had set a deadline for repatriation starting that the repatriation of remaining refugees must be completed by 15 August 1997. The repatriation of the remaining refugees, however, continued to be faced with a number of problems. The government postponed scheduled repatriation of 200 refugees on 23 July 1997 following law and order situation in two camps. Some 200 refugees from the Katupalong camp were due to go back home. A militant group from the Nayapara camp marched towards the Katupalong camp and asked the refugees not to return to Myanmar. Hundreds of refugees armed with bamboo stick, bow and arrow forced out six officials and employees from the camp. They damaged six huts and looted the goods that were to be distributed amongst refugees. Police arrested four refugees on charge of rioting incident of 23 July was very serious. UNHCR Dacca went to Cox's Bazaar on July 24, 1997, morning to visit the camps and had talks with government officials on the latest developments. UNHCR officials however said that no force was being applied to make the refugees agree to be repatriated. A Bangladeshi newspaper commented:

“That the Bangladesh preparation fell short of talking the UNHCR officials along which was why they were purportedly urging the Bangladesh authorities now to ensure voluntary repatriation. Bangladesh might have followed the procedure of sending the local UNHCR office the list of would be returnees seemingly there had been some communication gap. But it was ironical that Bangladesh had to undergo a sensitivity test at the fog end of the send off process involving the last batch of 21,000 refugees.”

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<sup>5</sup>. Saha K.C, “Learning from Rohingya Refugee Repatriation to Myanmar”, in Mishra Omprakash ed., *Forced Migration in The South Asian Region*, (Kolkata: Centre for Refugee Studies, 2004)p.317

<sup>6</sup> Saha K.C, “Learning from Rohingya Refugee Repatriation to Myanmar”, in Mishra Omprakash ed., *Forced Migration in The South Asian Region*, (Kolkata: Centre for Refugee Studies, 2004)p.318

It was considered important to discuss repatriation of the remaining refugees with the refugee, leaders. A tripartite meeting among government officials, UNHCR representatives and leaders of Rohingya refugees was held in Cox's Bazaar on 30 July 1997 which failed to resolve the problem that arose out of anti repatriation stand taken by a section of the refugees. The meeting held for the consecutive day ended inconclusively as leaders of Rohingya refugees were firm on their eight-point demand, which included suspension of repatriation till democracy was restored in Myanmar. Despite repeated assurances by both the government and UNHCR that their demands would be considered, the militant refugee leaders did not agree to give up their anti repatriation agitation.

## **4. PRESENT CODITION OF ROHINGYAS**

The Rohingya Muslims from Arakan state are vulnerable as they have no legal status in Burma and are considered as outsiders. They have faced continuing persecution by the military government in Burma successively and have escaped to Bangladesh in a large number in 1991-1992. About 250,000 Rohingyas crossed the border and entered Bangladesh. Though many of these refugees have been repatriated to Burma since then but there are still about more than 30,000 left in Bangladesh. They are living in three camps. Two camps are registered and one is unregistered. 12,000 live in Nayapara camp-I & II (registered), 8,000 live in Kutupalong camp (registered), and more than 10,000 live in Dumdumia camp (unregistered). The refugees are completely dependent on United Nations and Aid Agencies like MSF, MOH and TAI.

### **4.1 Humanitarian Condition**

The humanitarian condition of the camps is very poor. Most of the time, they are dominated by local people and some of the camp officials. They face many problems like sexual harassment, restricted freedom, etc. Those situations have been given below:-

***Vulnerability to sexual harassment of Refugee women:*** Like Myanmar, in Bangladesh the Rohingya Refugee women are still now the most vulnerable. In Bangladesh, their houses are very congested and the density of population is very high. So women do not have privacy. And also in the camps many of the powerful Rohingyas always try to establish their power. Sometimes the Refugee women are raped by their manipulations. As they are usually called “Illegal Migrants” So they can’t protest. As a result, many women are involved in prostitution in various hotels and also in the locality. So, the possibility of HIV/AIDS is huge here.

***Restricted freedoms and opportunities:*** Since arriving in Bangladesh in 1992, the Rohingya refugees have been confined to the camps. Their freedom of movement is restricted, officially prohibiting them from seeking employment, or other activities, outside the camp. However, in reality, minorities of refugees do engage in outside work, and several road-side-type stalls have developed inside the camps (mostly throughout Nayapara). These endeavors are only recently tolerated by the camp authorities. The refugees are arrested by local police or punished by the camp police if they are caught outside the camp. Little cash is useful to supplement and diversify their food ration and to purchase goods that are not available in the ration package.

## **4.2 Poor Accommodation**

When the refugees started to flee into Bangladesh in September 1991, the government hurriedly constructed temporary shelters in the Cox's Bazaar district to accommodate the arrivals. After 10 years, the sheds, or rows of 5-10 'houses,' maintain their temporary, emergency set-up character. Though they can hardly survive a monsoon season, they are repaired only every few years. In between repairs, the refugees manage by taking the doors and partitions from the latrines, or collecting stray plastic to fill in the holes. According to recent registration records, the average household size is 6-7 persons. The dwelling size remains constant regardless of family size. Many refugees have coped by modifying their units, dividing the 100 square foot space (9-10 square meters) into two rooms, or extending a 'veranda' into the passageway between sheds. The huts, as stated by the WFP in its 1999 vulnerability report, 'are small, crowded, and inadequate for healthy living.' Indeed, in a survey, housing was second only to food as a main concern for the refugees. Most explained that the house was too small for the size of their family, and some added that privacy was a problem. The structural condition of the house is also a concern for many of the refugees, who have cited leaky plastic roofs and broken bamboo partitions as the most common problems. While the housing woes of the Rohingya refugees are perhaps no worse than elsewhere in Bangladesh, it must be noted that any chance of improvement rests with the government. The authorities have consistently asserted that better living conditions would counteract their drive to repatriate.

## **4.3 Food and Malnutrition**

For 10 years running, the majority of the Rohingya refugees have been malnourished. In a closed-camp setting, the refugees still do not have enough food. Today, 58 percent of the refugee children and 53 percent of the adults are chronically malnourished.

Surveys conducted regularly since 1992 have consistently found unacceptably high rates of malnutrition among the adult and children refugees. And these rates have always been worse than the average for Bangladesh. Each study has cited food insecurity<sup>6</sup> as a result of a shortage of food. In an informal survey conducted in January 2002, the refugees scored food as their number one concern, with most explaining that they sometimes or never have enough food to feed their families because the ration was insufficient

The Rohingya refugees do not have enough to eat because of a combination of circumstances. One is that almost none of the refugees are receiving his or her full ration. The refugees are totally dependent on the weekly distribution of food. Each family member, including babies from the day of birth, is entitled to the same ration amount and composition. The ration amounts were increased only in June 2000 to meet the standard for minimum daily energy requirements.

At no time since food basket monitoring started in 1996 have the rations reached the 100 percent mark. Breaks in the WPF supply line is one reason for the shortfall. And if a certain item in the food ration package did not make it at all to the weekly distribution, a substitute or increase in other foods were often not arranged.

Even if all the food commodities were available that week, many refugees would claim that ‘the people who distribute the food keep some for themselves.’ The Bangladeshi Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) is responsible for the weekly distribution and had hired residents from the surrounding villages to carry it out.

In January 2002, BDRCS reformed the food distribution system by replacing the locally hired workers with refugees to dispense the weekly food rations. Many refugees did remark that since this shift took place, the portions were more accurate. And this accounts for their feeling that overall camp conditions after 10 years have changed for the better.

Even with the improvement in distribution, the fact remains that not all refugees entitled to a ration are actually receiving it. For example, newborn babies whom the government fails to register, and households whose family books have been confiscated<sup>10</sup> are denied their right to food assistance, and essentially left to their own devices to manage. They often share the rations of other refugees. That food is consumed by those other than the registered refugees cannot be discounted as one explanation for a shortage of food.

For many, food is the only source of income, as employment is prohibited. In the absence of cash, rice, for instance, might be bartered or sold to obtain green

vegetables or clothes, or other items that are not included in the ration package. Selling or trading food rations therefore also results in a subsequent shortage.

Borrowing, lending, trading, selling and buying food are common coping mechanisms among the refugees to compensate for the food deficit. These coping strategies tend to create a situation of 'food debt.' To pay back the loan of one, a refugee borrows from another, or immediately apports out that amount from the next distribution. This in turn can generate an endless cycle of food shortage.

The weekly food basket consists of rice, pulses, oil, sugar, and blended food. Though they may be high in nutrients, they do not make for many recipes. In order to add a little variety and dignity to their diets, refugees will sell or trade ration items for other foods, most commonly fish and vegetables.

The need for a diversified diet is necessary not only to satisfy the palate, but also for nutritional balance. A widespread deficiency in Vitamin B2, associated with inadequate consumption of milk and other animal proteins, is regularly detected among children showing signs of angular stomatitis, or chapped corners of the mouth. A vulnerability survey conducted by WFP in 1999, and all surveys since, has strongly recommended measures to vary the diet to combat deficiencies in vitamins and minerals that only encourage malnutrition.

In June 2000, the distribution of vegetable seeds and chicks among vulnerable households was unofficially approved. It is hoped that this measure will not only expand the food supply and variety, but will also restore a sense of self-sufficiency and responsibility among these refugees.

In June 2001, additional suggestions were made to increase the amount and variety of the ration, such as school feeding, additional food-for-work activities, and the distribution of fresh foods. But these recommendations have yet to be implemented.

Even so, most actors involved in the Rohingya refugee operation have demonstrated a commitment to stamping out malnutrition in the camps. WFP launched in January 2002 a US\$2.1 million appeal for the means to end the years of chronic malnutrition.

While the recommendations may improve the access to and availability of food, it is still uncertain whether they will ensure a sufficient amount of food. Perpetual hunger, heightened vulnerability to disease, and hampered growth will only be overcome if the Rohingya refugees get enough to eat everyday.

It is possible that further efforts to increase and diversify the rations will face political obstacles, in light of the GOB's belief that free food is an incentive to remain in Bangladesh. Food has been used as a tool of coercion and intimidation in the past.

#### **4.4 Water**

In Nayapara camp, the supply of water has always been a major health concern. The water level of the Nayapara reservoir suffers from a shortage during the dry season. From February to May, nearly 225,000 liters of water is trucked in daily from a nearby dam. Water rationing is often imposed throughout the year, with the dry season scarcity used as the explanation.

The UNHCR finances a government department to supply the water in the camps and maintain the facilities. Water is transported from the hilly forests through canals to a reservoir, and treated in water treatment plants. MSF is responsible for monitoring the quality of the water in Nayapara camp.

Monthly UNHCR reports have indicated a supply of 25 liters of water per refugee per day in Nayapara, which is above the minimum acceptable level of 15-20 liters. MSF has long contested this figure, arguing that the refugees have in fact been receiving only 6-8 liters each per day.

The operating time of the water taps – originally two hours per day – was one cause of the discrepancy. In fact, most of the refugees in MSF's January 2002 survey indicated that the water taps were never open long enough (Table 5b). They managed to collect only three to four containers (45-60 litres in total) per family per day. With an average family size of 6.5, it is quite clear that the refugees were not attaining the daily 25 litres per person.

Another cause of the water shortage was the miscalculation that the amount of water allocated for Nayapara is consumed only by the refugees. In fact, there are hundreds of additional consumers using the supply, including the facilities of MSF and other agencies, 160 camp security personnel, and some villagers. An additional source of the scarcity is the structure itself. The water supply network, including the treatment plant, was installed 10 years ago as an emergency response. By now, the permanent infrastructure has run down, the pipes are exposed and leaking, and the storage tanks have rusted.

The vast majority of refugees from Nayapara, but very few from Kutupalong, in MSF's January 2002 survey stated that they sometimes or never have enough water to accommodate their daily needs. Most explained that they have

compensated by drawing water from sources outside the camp, or by digging wells in secluded areas inside the camp.

Skin diseases, such as scabies, and diarrhoea have been in MSF's top five causes of overall morbidity since 1992. But neither the high incidence of water-related diseases, nor the claims of the refugees themselves convinced the responsible actors that the refugees were suffering from a lack of water.

It wasn't until late 2001, when Nayapara experienced an outbreak of typhoid, when all actors agreed to an investigation. The investigation concluded that the 10-year-old system is still capable of providing enough water for the whole camp population. But the system is not used to its fullest capacity because of obstructions along the supply route (such as the absence of staff to turn on the generators).

As a result, it was agreed in December 2001 that the water points would operate four hours per day, and a monitoring committee involving refugee participation would be established. As well, additional water containers would be distributed to achieve a household storage capacity that meets daily water needs.

## **4.5 Health Care**

Despite its nutritional setbacks, the overall health status of the refugees is stable. What remains concerning is that the predominant health problems are related to the substandard living conditions in the camp.

A large population in a tight space has a significant impact on the overall quality of health. Respiratory tract infections (RTI), such as the common cold, continue to be the top cause of overall morbidity year round for children under five. Other communicable diseases, such as chicken pox, also happily thrive in densely populated areas. During the winter season, the number of in-patient admissions rises, especially among infants and children.

Diarrhoea and skin diseases regularly battle for a close second to RTIs, most commonly as a result of unhygienic surroundings and habits, and untreated water. It is hoped these rates will decrease with recent efforts to improve the water supply in Nayapara camp

The mortality rate in the camps remains low, although neo-natal deaths in recent years account for the highest number of deaths. It is suspected that these babies were born with too low a birth weight to survive in these circumstances. Low birth weight derives from a malnourished mother.



In Nayapara camp, MSF runs in- and out-patient treatment departments, therapeutic and supplementary feeding centers, reproductive health programmes, health and hygiene promotion sessions, a microscopy laboratory, and water and sanitation activities. In Kutupalong camp, Concern, an Irish NGO, is responsible for health and nutrition, sanitation, non-food items distribution, food ration monitoring, primary education, non-formal adult education, and seed and poultry distribution. The target populations for both MSF and Concern are children under 10 years of age, pregnant and lactating women, and women of child-bearing age.

Both MSF and Concern have enhanced their health education activities, involving hygiene promotion, nutrition, and reproductive health. These initiatives support the call to place a stronger emphasis on preventive care, as curative care facilities are well-established. All refugee children under 10 are immunized, and Vitamin A is also distributed to prevent health conditions resulting from nutrient deficiencies, such as night blindness.

To encourage greater involvement of the refugees in the promotion of healthy habits, several refugee volunteers have been trained as community health workers. They support many in-camp health activities, such as screening for malnutrition and conducting health and hygiene education sessions.

While these preventive measures are essential to control morbidity and mortality among the refugee population, it needs to be said that the most effective safeguard against the above-stated health problems is an improvement in the camp's environment. Expansion of the living spaces and upgrades in the water and sanitation infrastructure can effectively reduce refugee morbidity. Environmental well-being not only benefits physical health, but also mental well-being. A few refugees explained why they felt conditions in the camps over the decade had improved: because their camps were cleaner.

Reproductive health services include antenatal care, training and support of traditional birth attendants, and family planning. The camps show high rates of pregnancy and birth, so much that the number of births has outnumbered in recent years the rates of death and repatriation combined. This fact is a major source of anxiety for the Bangladeshi authorities, who have at times called on MSF and Concern to institute family planning practices that are contrary to medical ethics.

MSF and Concern provide counseling to women of 15 to 45 year of age on birth spacing and birth control. 23 percent of the women in Nayapara and 29 percent in Kutupalong are currently engaged in family planning activities. The numbers

continue to increase only slowly, as side-effects and cultural beliefs are significant barriers for many to participate.

Those refugees not in the NGOs' target population – the over-10-year-olds and non-pregnant/lactating women – can seek care at the health facilities provided by the Ministry of Health (MOH). However, many refugees in MSF's January 2002 survey complained that they were generally dissatisfied with the services provided by the MOH, chiefly because of disrespectful behavior displayed by the MOH doctor. Other refugees revealed that the MOH doctor required payment for services, or for a referral to a health complex outside the camp. This serious matter remains under investigation. MSF and Concern health facilities were also criticized by a small number of refugees, because of long waits for consultation, a poor drug supply, and 'improper treatment.'

## **4.6 Sanitation**

Government prohibition of constructing semi-permanent structures in the camps has impacted the sanitation system. MSF in Nayapara is responsible for the construction and maintenance of latrines and bathhouses, and for refuse collection and disposal. MSF is regularly repairing the latrines and/or replacing its temporary features. As there is no space to build new latrines, existing ones are patched up and emptied frequently. Erosion over the years has caused greater damage to the facilities.

Because the GOB was responding to an emergency in 1992, the layout of the camps did not take into account cultural sensitivities or traditional social relations that are observed by the Rohingya Muslims. The latrine units and bath houses were not designated according to sex, and their location and distance has exposed women and children to unsafe situations and compromised their privacy.

Adjustments to the original camp layout have not been allowed. The government's reservations on accepting any notion of permanence has prohibited advancements to improve safety and security, accommodate traditional beliefs, and uphold international standards.

Recently, improvements in the drainage system in one part of Nayapara camp were allowed, as well as the upgrade of some latrines and bathhouses. Masonry drains are being constructed to dispose of waste water from the bathing cubicles and to collect rain water. This upgrade, though confined to only one area of Nayapara, has been recognized by a few refugees in MSF's informal survey as a change for the better after ten years

As MSF steps up its efforts to promote good hygiene habits among the Nayapara refugees, it continues to urge the responsible actors to provide a sufficient supply of water. That a lack of water and a substandard sanitation system adversely affect health and hygiene is obvious. Perhaps not so clear, but equally important, is the impact on the refugees' morale and dignity.

#### **4.7 Political and Economical Situation**

The refugees also face extortion threats by powerful local elements outside the Rohingya camps that collaborate with camp authorities. The refugees told RI that they feel voiceless, often harassed and abused, not allowed to form refugee committees or even to hold meetings in the camp. If they are outspoken, they are at risk of camp officials lodging a false case against them and sending them to jail. If they mention their concerns to foreigners visiting the camps, they are punished for daring to express their grievances once the foreigners depart.

More restrictions have been placed on the refugees since a violent incident on November 18, 2004, when tensions between refugees and camp authorities, which began with refugees staging a hunger strike in June, reached a boiling point. The refugees wanted to organize a meeting to discuss their inhumane treatment at the hands of the camp authorities, but were prevented from meeting. A brawl ensued and police and local people became involved. By the end of the clashes, three refugees, including a minor, were killed by police and 42 refugees detained. UNHCR requested the Bangladeshi Government to investigate the incident but so far no investigation report has been produced.

#### **4.8 Education Condition**

There are significant gaps in the education services in the camps and as a result of opposition from the Bangladeshi government, refugee children only have access to very poor education services that do not meet minimum basic standards. Literacy rates in the camps are only 12% and instruction per day lasts just two hours. Even informal education was not permitted in the camps prior to 1997, and at present there is no educational or vocational training for children over the age of 12 years in the camps. Due to the lack of higher educational opportunities, children are not motivated to stay in school.

The teachers in the camp schools are refugee volunteers. Many of them have spent their lives in the camps, where they received a minimal level of education, very basic teacher training, and few incentives. The teachers also are under threat from camp officials and mahjees, who accuse them of political activism, and they are suspected of writing letters on behalf of refugees. NGO workers involved in the education sector note that teacher training and acquiring more

Burmese textbooks for the children has not been a priority for UNHCR in recent months as it is focused on its phase-out.

The refugees see their conditions deteriorating further with the withdrawal earlier this year of Concern, the last international NGO involved in providing assistance to the camps in education, community services, sanitation in Kutupalong camp and logistics and procurement. Concern was also seen to be playing a role in the protection of refugees through its community services program. With its departure, there is a gap in implementation of projects, and although UNHCR has recruited a few former Concern staff to keep programs running until another agency agrees to step in, shortfalls persist.

#### **4.9 Present Role of NGO and Bangladesh Government**

European Union, Germany, USA and others are the main donors.

WFP (World Food Program) and MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) Holland are working as the operational partners.

MFDM, RRRC, MOH/CH, BDRCS and TAI are working as the implementing partners.

The Bangladeshi Government prohibits the refugees from establishing their own management committees to oversee service delivery in key sectors like food management, water, sanitation, health and education. The refugees receive rations from WFP, which are distributed by teams of refugee volunteers, under the supervision of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society or BDRCS. The refugees interviewed by RI said that they are victims of local corruption and the BDRCS workers cheat them out of their complete rations, using a fake scale when WFP officials are not around. Consequently some of the refugees end up receiving 5 kilograms of rice as opposed to the nominal standard of 6.5 kilos per refugee.

Under UNHCR's phase-out plan, the agency stopped supplying refugees with packets containing spices and basic condiments as part of their rations so many of the refugees have resorted to selling part of their rations to outsiders in order to buy spices and other commodities. During the process of selling rations, the refugees are vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of the locals who have a monopoly on buying rations at low prices. The rates of malnutrition in the camps are disturbing. The most recent nutrition survey showed 12.8% of the children were acutely malnourished, including 0.5% severely malnourished; chronic malnutrition was present in 65.4% of the refugee children.

Water and sanitation remain problematic, especially in Nayapara camp where Bangladeshi authorities are in charge of these services, and refugees complain of inadequate water, particularly in the dry season. They also report bad sanitation facilities, which lack maintenance, and garbage pits located just outside their shelters. As a consequence of the poor hygiene and unsanitary conditions, the overall disease environment is alarming, with high levels of acute respiratory infections, skin diseases, worms and diarrhea.

Due to UNHCR's mismanagement of the transition for service provision in the camps, two international NGOs providing health and nutrition programs to children under ten and pregnant and nursing women, MSF Holland in Nayapara camp and Concern in Kutupalong camp, had to discontinue these services in 2003. The programs were taken over by the Bangladeshi Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Since the handover, there has been a significant decline in the standard of health services being provided to the refugees. The refugees stress that medicines are in short supply and not easily available, and doctors refer few patients to hospitals outside the camps.

#### **4.10 Present Condition of Repatriation**

Refugees report unbearable conditions in the camps, primarily due to the serious abuse and intimidation at the hands of Bangladeshi local authorities and mahjees, or camp volunteers, picked from the Rohingya population by the Bangladeshi manager of the camp. Instead of being representatives of the refugees, the mahjees are seen as an arm of the government, playing a major role in forcing refugees to repatriate. Since 2003, when large numbers of refugees complained of coercion to return to Burma, protection against involuntary repatriation has improved significantly, primarily due to UNHCR playing a more active role. UNHCR has stopped several repatriation movements when allegations have surfaced about them being forced. As a result whereas more than 3,000 refugees were sent back to Burma in 2003, there were only about 200 repatriations in 2004. In early 2005, UNHCR came up with a housing grant of 15,000 Bangladeshi taka (about \$235) as an incentive for refugees to repatriate; it remains to be seen how effective this cash grant will be in speeding up repatriations.

Although the current slow pace of repatriations is reportedly voluntary, the refugees complain of ongoing pressure from local authorities and mahjees to sign voluntary repatriation declarations. When they refuse to go back, they encounter ill-treatment such as beatings, arbitrary arrests and confiscation of ration cards. Many of the refugees feel that if they return to Burma, they will face the same kind of religious, cultural and political persecution from which they escaped to Bangladesh in the early 90s. It is not clear how many of the

Rohingya repatriated to Burma have since returned to Bangladesh, although agencies working with the refugees in southern Bangladesh claim having seen many of the Rohingya previously repatriated back in Bangladesh and living outside the camps.

#### **4.11 Environmental Problems Create by Refugees**

The refugees destroy the forest resources, damage the new plantation areas. There is no doubt about the fact that the influx of refugees has had an unwanted ecological impact on the area and tremendous pressure has been put on the forest in the camp areas. Lack of sanitation system is also creates severe problem for environment.

#### **4.12 Present Conditions in Arakan**

***Persecution over religion:*** A member of Burmese Rohingya Association in Japan (BRAJ) had assessed the situation of Arakan and Bangladesh from 22<sup>nd</sup> April to 28<sup>th</sup> June 2001. According to him, the Myanmar authority had ordered the villagers of southern Maungdaw to shut 36 mosques, primary Islamic centers and religious schools down. When the locals refused to do that then the authority brought some inmates from the jail and did that destruction to a total 33 Islamic establishments. It raised fear and frustration among the local Muslims over the junta's naked policy against the Muslims. Besides more Islamic establishments were dismantled by the Na.Sa.Ka authority. In Buthidaung, a century old religious school was destroyed to construct some military family quarters at that place. A lot of more incidents are being occurred relentlessly.

***Violation of human rights:*** Humiliation of Rohingya Muslim women is a very common phenomenon in Myanmar. Rohingya Women must report to the authority at the 4-month stage of pregnancy and have to take photograph of stomach (development of womb) every there subsequent month and only then the parents will be allowed registration of birth of the new-born. On the other hand, the authority has also banned the adoption of new-born baby from other villages.

Village Headmen are compelled to give speeches on forced labour in their area. And the villagers are ordered to be present there. All of them are forced to ensure the absence of any kind of "forced labour" in their region. The whole so-called program was video taped to prepare documents to submit it to the ILO as refutation.

In the name of “Population Control Policy” muslim spouses are supposed to have only 2 children. There was also a plan of government to raise the age limit of marriage to 25. Since last 3 years, no marriage of Muslim could take place without written permission from the authority which costs Kyat 15,000-20,000 and a time period of one to two months. Both of them would have to appear before the authorities physically and be interviewed. The most shocking matter is, sometimes the government is taking steps for forced contraception by long term birth control injection even without the knowledge of the concerned person.

#### **4.13 Integration Process of Rohingya**

Bangladesh is a poor and highly populated country. Because of the easy way all the Rohingyas come in Bangladesh. It is very difficult for Bangladesh to give permanent settlement for Rohingya. So the easy way is to consider a third country for Rohingya settlement. Canada is only country which makes permanent settlement for Rohingya. But there are very few. Canada plans to resettle additional small numbers of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh in 2007. Through this resettlement process in last year Canada resettled 10,651 refugees from over 60 different nationalities.

In some cases particularly like Bangladesh, local integration of refugees could never be a viable proposition. The moment the local inhabitants have felt the crunch in terms of price rise, scarce supply of essentials, pressure on both cultivable and grazing land, agriculture, livestock, forest resources and the limitations in the employment opportunities they have unequivocally shown the symptoms of ‘compassion fatigue’ finally leading to a showdown with the refugee population. This has been heightened by the increasing ‘aid fatigue’ and the withdrawal tendency of the relief agencies like the UNHCR and other organizations.

### **5. VARIOUS INTERESTS OF VARIOUS ACTORS**

There is a very responsible reason for the permanent destitution of Rohingyas. In this crisis, several actors are working, such as- Bangladesh government, Myanmar government, UNHCR and national and International NGOs. It is very sad to say that, nobody is working for Rohingyas without interests. Everybody’s self-interest is given first priority. Bangladesh government wants to get rid off these Rohingyas as early as possible. It is an unacceptable problem for Bangladesh. As a poor country, it has done enough. Bangladesh government at first allowed the refugees and provided food and shelter. The primary motivation of the government was to ensure immediate repatriation of the refugees due to their negative economic and environmental impact on the areas where they were allowed to stay. After bearing this problem in so many

years, now Bangladesh government often try to show some of the refugees as “economic migrants”, so that the GOB does not have to bear the responsibility of them as refugees. Myanmar government wants to demolish Rohingya community from Myanmar forever. UNHCR wants to be free by repatriating to these Rohingyas as soon as possible. The more this problem exists, the more money from its fund will be spent. Though UNHCR was very vocal for voluntary repatriation at the beginning, they also later wanted to send back the refugees in a large number. Sometimes refugees were forcibly repatriated by UNHCR in the name of voluntary repatriation. Because, to UNHCR, it is a waste of resources to linger this problem, where the problem is created by the country itself. To support its view, UNHCR states that improvement in human rights situation in Arakan, its presence in the region and its access to returnees to monitor protection matters has led to its decision to promoting repatriation. It also argues that a total change in circumstance to occur in the country of origin may take a long time and may mean that the refugees continue to live in camps for a long period in sub human conditions as opportunity for integration in the host country in minimal. The local and international NGOs are also working here for their interest, not only for humanity. The NGOs work here to establish their fame and fortune. Again, the local officials of the NGOs always want to carry the activities on, so that they can get funds from their head offices. They argue that no substantive change has occurred, which warrant promotion of repatriation. That is why there is a conflict between UNHCR and the NGOs.

Again, the government officials in the camps of Bangladesh work against repatriation. However, Bangladesh government wants repatriation. But some of the officials think about money, rather the destiny of the Rohingyas. Sometimes, a large section of refugees, however, is optimistic and wants to return to their homeland. But they become confused by some of those opportunities. There are allegations from the camp officials that some foreign NGOs and fundamentalists are seriously disturbing their motivation work. “Money” is the name of the game for the fundamentalists campaigning against repatriation in the camps. Comments abound such as: “the NGOs are doing good business,” “the corrupt officials are earning money” etc. once the Rohingyas go back and the camps are closed down, there will be no money from the donors and many of those currently employed in the caps will lose their jobs. Even the construction of Jummapara camps was once patronized by the local MP (Member of Parliament) and some political leaders were chosen as contractors. It is a big money deal which the contractors do not want to lose. So, we can not get aside easily the motivational measures of some unscrupulous and selfish persons connected with some of the Rohingya groups and also with some of the NGOs serving in the area. Even the leaders of the Rohingyas (Majhee) are now selfish. They want to stay in camps and want to continue



ration business and other manipulations with their influence. In Myanmar, there will be no extra facility for them.

As we know, Bangladesh government had treated the Rohingya issue as a “short-term” problem like the incident of 1978. Because, as a small, poor and poverty afflicted country, Bangladesh wanted to repatriate them anyhow as soon as possible. In 1978, we have sent back a large number of Rohingyas to Myanmar. But this time, UNHCR and various local and international NGOs had rushed here and made it a sensitive issue and tried to linger the process of repatriation in the name of voluntaries. They were successful and it served their interest.

As we can see, UNHCR had started its operation in April 1992 and 33 local and international NGOs became involved with UNHCR as implementing partners. All the NGOs were engaged in providing various survives in the camps including water and sanitation, health and nutrition, primary education etc. None of these NGOs were human rights organizations.<sup>7</sup> For whatever reasons, human rights organizations did not see the Rohingyas as stakeholders (authors’ emphasis). Protection of the refugees remained the sole concern of Bangladesh government. According to UNHCR’s mandate, refugees should enjoy the highest protection facilities from the authority of asylum country and all other authorities concerned. As Bangladesh is not a signatory country of the 1951 Convention of the Refugees; the UNHCR were surely supposed to engage itself in protecting the Rohingyas. UNHCR dealt with the protection issue afterwards but not fully.

If we talk about the NGOs, many NGOs worked in the makeshift Camps of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. There are two charts from trustworthy sources those articulate the name of the NGOs and their activities.

***NGOs that are working in the camps and the types of services they are offering in 1992:***

Name of NGOs	Operating in	Types of services offering
Care	Dhoa Palong, Dechua Palong-1&2, Maricha Palong and Haludia Palong	Sanitation
OXFAM	Dumdumia-1&2 and Nayapara	Water and Sanitation
Islamic Relief	Dechua Palong-2	Medical centre, Supplementary feeding, Food distribution
Islamic Relief Agency	Dechua Palong-1&2	Health Care

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<sup>7</sup> Khandker Tushar Kana and Haider Zulfiquar Ali, “Protection to Refugees: Case of Rohingya Women”, in Abrar C R, ed., *On the Margin: Refugees, Migrants and Minorities*, (Dhaka: RMMRU, 2000)

(ISRA)		
Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF)-Holland	Balukhali-1&2, Nayapara	Health and Sanitation
Save the Children Fund (SCF)-UK	Dumdumia-1&2	Health and Sanitation
World Concern	Gundhum-3	Clothing
MSF-France	Dhoa Palong, Dechua Palong-1&2, Maricha Palong	Nutrition and Supplementary feeding
Caritas	Harikhola	Sanitation
Muslim Aid	Gundhum-1&2	Shad Construction
International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO)	Shailer Dheba	Shad Construction
Teredes homes Netherlands (TDHNL)	Adarshagram	Sanitation
Gonoshasthya Kendra (GK)	Gundhum-1&2, Dechua Palong-2, Maricha Palong	Health and Sanitation
Enfansts Du Monde (EDM)	Gundhum-1&2 Nayapara, Jummapara	Shelter Construction
Church of Bangladesh	Harikhola	Water and Sanitation
Association of Medical Doctors for Asia (ADMA)	Dhoa Palong	Health Care
Rabita-Al-Alam-Al-Islami	Dechua Palong-1&2, Maricha Palong, Kutu Palong& Dumdumia	Health, Nutrition and Food distribution
Concern	Kutu Palong	Sanitation
Association for Social Advancement (ASA)	Nayapara-1&2	Shelter Construction
ADRA	Gundhum-3	Shad Construction
Al-Haramine	Nayapara	Shad Construction
World Vision	Balukhali-1&2, Kutu Palong	Clothing, Health and Sanitation, Shelter Construction, food

**Source:** Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Cox's Bazar<sup>8</sup>

### ***Activities of NGOs in Different Refugee Camps: as on November 1993***

Name of NGOs	Location	Activities
I.I.R.O	Haluadiapalong, Shailerdeba	Health Health/Nutrition/Sanitation/Construction of Shed/Water Supply
	Kutupalong Dumdumia-2	Health Health

<sup>8</sup>. D' Souza, Jarlath, "Rohingyas: A Case for Human Rights Violation", Gain, Philip ed. *SHETU- An Alternative Media Approach*. (Dhaka: SHETU, 1992)p. 32

	Adarshagram	Water Purification
Ganoshasthya Kendra	Gundum-2	Health/Therapeutic & Supplementary feeding/Water supply & Sanitation/Rice husk supply/Plantation
	Gundum-3	Health and Nutrition
	Dechuapalong 2	Sanitation
	Rangikhali	Sanitation
	Nayapara 2	Water test
OXFAM	Dumdumia-1&2	Purification and supply of Water/ Sanitation/Health education
Save the Children Fund	Dumdumia-1&2	Primary health care and Nutrition
Concern Bangladesh	Kutupalong	Nutrition of child and Lactating women/Sanitation/Health care
World Concern	Dechuapalong and Haluadiapalong	Nutrition of child and Lactating women
ISRS, Sudan	Dhoapalong	Health care
ISRA, Islamic Fondation, Pakistan	Dechuapalong-1	Health/Religious education/Health education
Rerres des Hommes	Adarshagram	Water supply/Sanitation/Health/Health education/Supplementary and Therapeutic feeding
MSF, Holland	Balukhali 1 & 2 and Nayapara	Health/Sanitation/Nutrition
MSF, France	Dhoapalong	Health/Child feeding
	Morichapalong	Health and Supplementary feeding
	Dechuapalong-2	Therapeutic and Supplementary feeding/ORS centre
	Gundum-1	Health and Sanitation
	Gundum-3	Health and Nutrition
Al-Markajul Islam	Dhoapalong	Religious Education/Repair of shed

**Source:** GOB November 1993 Report on Myanmar Refugee, p.10<sup>9</sup>

Presently those who are working in the registered camps of Nayapara, they are European Union, Germany, USA and others as the main donors. WFP (World Food Program) and MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) Holland are working as the operational partners. MFDM, RRRC, MOH/CH, BDRCS and TAI are working as the implementing partners.

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<sup>9</sup>. Abrar, C.R, “Dynamics and Transformations of Government, NGO and UNHCR Relationships in the Rohingya Refugee Operation”, Abrar, C. R ed. *On the Margin: Refugees, Migrants and Minorities*, (Dhaka: RMMRU, 2000)p. 50

In the registered camps Bangladesh government has given polythene to make huts. But, afterwards, when there is a necessity for new plastics for bad weather, Bangladesh government does not give that. Because, Bangladesh government now wants the refugees to feel that, they are worse here.

On the other side, many NGOs have raised a demand of a National Refugee policy of Bangladesh. If it is done, then the repatriation process will be lingered. And lots of authorities from abroad will come to Bangladesh to see whether the policy is right or wrong. And there will be ore involvement of the NGOs then. Therefore, everyone is thinking of himself and none is thinking of a permanent destiny of the Rohingya refugees. Therefore, the whole process is being lingered and becoming more stiff and permanent to solve. It is crystal-clear that, the Rohingyas are the scapegoat today and their future is uncertain.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we have shown the origin and history of the Rohingyas. We have examined the root causes of sorrows of them, who are living in this region for more than 1000 years. Discriminatory persecutions over this indigenous group have led to several influxes from Arakan state of Myanmar (former Burma). Our Bangladesh government failed to apprehend the long run of this problem. GOB treated it as a short-term problem. Though we have repatriated the Rohingyas after the '78 exodus by bilateral agreement signed with Myanmar Government. But, after the '90-'91 exodus, UNHCR and various NGOs came her and got then involved. In the name of "voluntary repatriation", the repatriation process and as well as Bangladesh is in trouble. The crisis had been prolonged by several actors. Like GOB, GOM, UNHCR and the NGOs. As the interests of all of them are not some, no unitary solution of this crisis has been yet found. Rather, the Rohingya refugees are living in sub human environment in the camps of Bangladesh. A large number of them has already integrated themselves with the Bengalese without the concern of the Bangladesh government. They are doing every thing, either good or bad, for living. Danish International Development Agency for example, 2 officials have been kidnapped on the 25 June, 2007 from Bandarban. Police has arrested some suspects and 11 of them are from the Arakan of Myanmar. Bangladesh is now engulfed with such type of troubles. Bangladesh is now in a dilemma where it wants maintain national security, economic and environment balance and also humanitarian helps. With a negative impact on environment and economy, Bangladesh is going to have this as a permanent crisis. Moreover, the outside world is not remaining the same. There were a number of repatriations of these refugees to a 3rd country like Canada, Australia, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. But after the notorious 9/11 incident, the

Non-Muslim countries are surely less interested about these refugees. There are 2 reasons. They are Muslims. And their own government (of Myanmar) has accused them of insurgency. We have become sure that, if we want to eliminate the destitution of these Rohingyas, we have to do something far-sighting with long lasting effect. The root of the crisis is not the kind of repatriation or the troubles in the camps of Bangladesh, the root is in Myanmar. So, the Myanmar condition should be made better at first. We, who are really concerned about the ins and outs of the will and woe of the Rohingyas, have some recommendations. Our aim is not to prolong the crisis and to make it permanent; rather we aim to help the Rohingyas- who are the scapegoats. All of us blame the military junta government for the trouble of the Rohingyas. But that is not the root cause of the crisis. Before the Ne Win's military regime, the Rohingyas were not still recognized by the then government. Giving support to the British rule, protecting the independence of Burma and demanding Arakan as an independent State were the root causes. After half of a century, political stability and tolerance is needed if we want to save this indigenous group. Recognition of the Rohingyas as an ethnic group by the Myanmar government is at first needed to ensure the existence of them in Myanmar. If there is no official recognition, then thousands of repatriation and development program can do nothing.

Myanmar government wants to totally demolish the Rohingyas from Myanmar. This is unfair. But it is true that at least an amount of Rohingyas is from Bangladesh. It should be mentioned that, just before 50 years, migration was a very common phenomena throughout the world. Lots of them have come here from there and lots of them have gone there from here. Now it's time to examine, who exists in which side of the border. In this case, we have to be less emotional and more rational.

In October, 2002, the UNHCR introduced a multilateral "special agreement" named "Convention Plus". It is not about revise the 1951 convention for Refugees, but about building on it. According to "Convention Plus", UNHCR wants to bring "durable solutions" for refugees and persons of concern. It includes DAR (development Assistance for Refugees), 4 Rs (Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction) and DLI (Development through Local Integration). Bangladesh Government has already given and has been giving DAR to the Rohingyas. As a poor and small country with huge population, it is quite impossible to provide DLI to them. It will bring negative impact on our economy and environment. But, while the UHHCR has different programs in Arakan of Myanmar, it is their duty to ensure the 4Rs to the Rohingyas. Only repatriation can do nothing. It just changes the location of the refugees. But something should be done so that the Rohingyas do not think

themselves the refugees. Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction can terminate their taking refugee here and there. It should be done and maintained by the UNHCR and the development agencies or NGOs.

None of the South Asian countries is signatory of the 1951 Convention for the Refugees. As migration and refugee crisis are very common in this region; we, the countries of South Asia, should jointly sign that convention or we can sign a multilateral agreement among us to avert the beurocratic problems relating the refugees.

The Burmese junta should be requested to stop forthwith the exercise of religious sacrilege in Arakan.

International community should press the Burmese regime to annul or review the 1982 Citizenship Act so that the Rohingya would avail equal rights and freedom with other ethnic nationals like Shan, Kachin, Burman etc.

The Rohingya should be given preference in granting asylum in third countries until there is a viable solution to their issue with the Burmese on a long term basis.

The UNHCR operating both in Arakan and Bangladesh should be more vocal and protect the persecuted Rohingya for whom it has been assigned.

The media in different parts of the world should play their role to portray the true picture of Rohingya and the state of affairs in Burma; and condemn or boycott those news media that has been publishing self-made news articles particularly in Bangladesh.

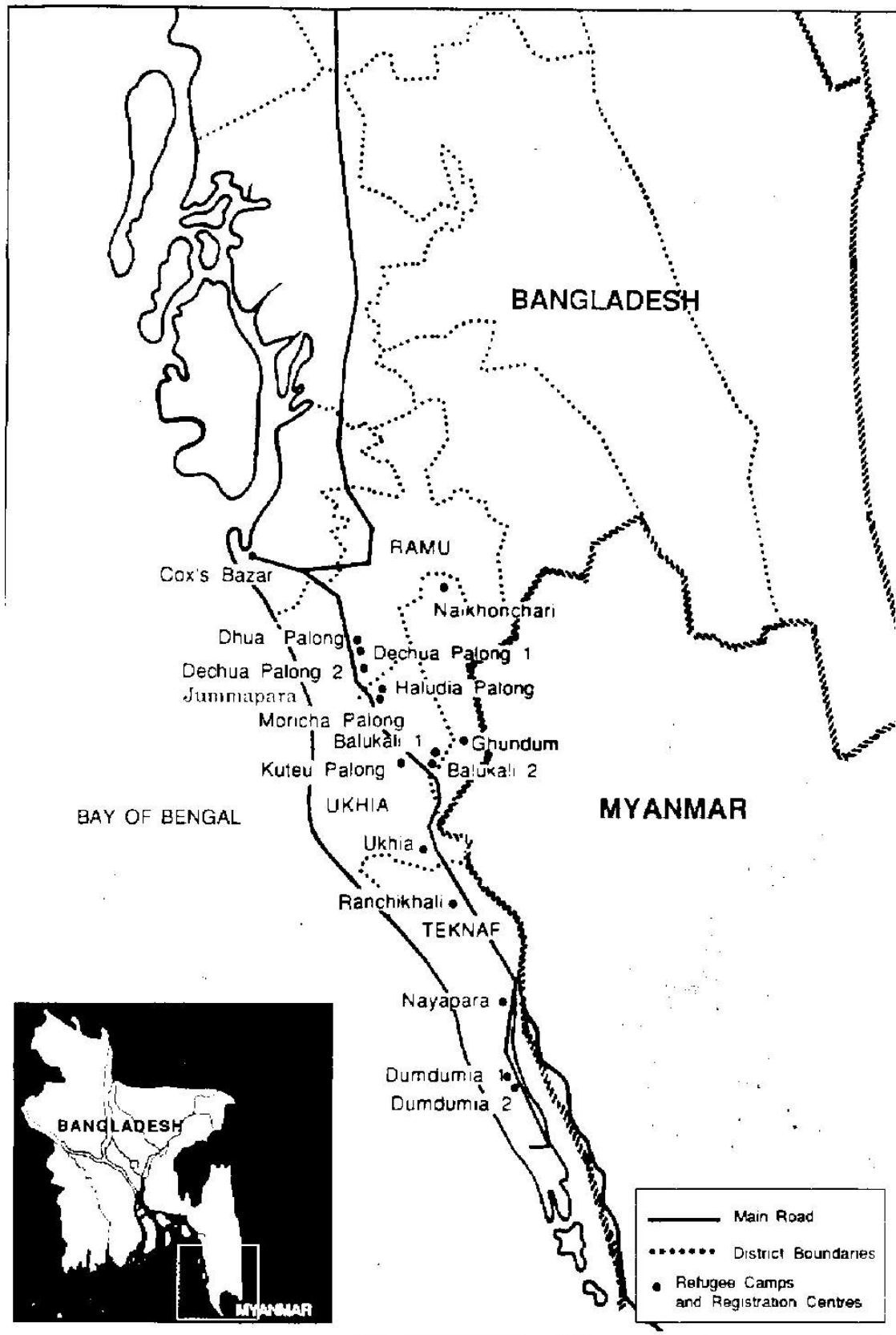
The international community, the Governments of the world and World Bodies, including United Nations Organizations (UNO), Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), ASEAN, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), other humanitarian and human rights Organizations should create enough pressure to pursue the Military junta to change its exterminating attitude toward tile Rohingyas and to provide all the rights and freedoms that the Burmese government intentionally and brutally had taken away.

The international refugee law entails that if there is no visible and substantial change in the circumstances which led the refugees to flee their home country and if there is any likelihood that change, if any, could not be truly effective, then a strong case exists for the refugees to continue enjoying the refugee status in the country of asylum unhindered. On the other hand, an extremely liberal interpretation of the principle of voluntary repatriation may be taken recourse to

given the vast increase in number of refugees worldwide. So, there should be repatriation followed by reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Because, life in makeshift camps does not solve the problem rather prolongs the problem.

## 7. APPENDIX

### *Makeshift Camps of the Rohingya in Bangladesh at early '90s*





*Regional Map of Bangladesh and Myanmar*



## CASE STUDY

Information given by an official (who wanted to be anonymous) of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Holland:

*In present situation there are not enough active NGOs here except MSF and International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO). Food is the main problem of Dumdumia. Over 90% people of Dumdumia camp eat only one time in a day. They are very poor. Almost everyone of them is illiterate. In past, 10-12 children used to die of per day. After giving medicine and other opportunities from MSF the situation had been developed. It distributes drugs in the camps and that is their main activities. Water crisis is very severe here. Main income source of Dumdumia people are salt production in winter, fishing in the Naaf River, porters at the port. Sexual harassment of women is also very serious in the camp. Polygamy and forcible incest are very common here. Many girls of the camp have adopted prostitution. Many highway buss and truck drivers usually go to them. That's why; there is much possibility of spreading of HIV/AIDS. Here they can go wherever they want. Basically they come to Bangladesh by boat.*

### In CAMPS

A woman named Nurhaba from Dumdumia camp said,

*"The main problems of the camp are food crisis and lack of opportunity of work. We cannot integrate with the Bengalese. They are not friendly to us. And we do not get equal wage to them. We fled from Myanmar due to discrimination. Our religion was not tolerated by government. Government always confiscate our lands."*

An Interview of a local Bengali-

Name	Moulovi Mohammed Harris
Age	27
Profession	Imam (conducts the prayer of local mosque)

He said, *"Rohingyas should return to their country. If anybody comes here from Myanmar, they never go back. Some are coming and going frequently. The Rohingyas had come here in 1942 for the first time. After that they have been coming. Most of them came in 1978, 1992 and 1995. Some of them have even gone and integrated in Rangpur. They do anything for their livelihood. Some girls of the camp have adopted prostitution and the bus and truck drivers come here. They are responsible for spreading HIV/AIDS."*

## Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 01

Name	Md. Zubayer
Age	26 (fled to Bangladesh 5-6 years ago)
Name	Rashida
Age	20 (fled to Bangladesh 6-7 years ago)
Name	Aysha
Age	20 (fled to Bangladesh 5-6 years ago)
Name	Md. Unus
Age	23 (fled to Bangladesh 7 years ago)

Their comments are given below-

*All of us live in Dumdumia Camp. Life was very difficult in Myanmar. It is not easy here too. We don't know what to do. It was easy to come to Bangladesh comparatively than going to Pakistan and India. Besides India is too far from Myanmar. If the GOM gives us assurance about our peace and security then we will return there. It is very difficult to live in the unregistered camp which is densely populated. The huts are very hot inside. Because it is covered by plastic. Water crisis is very serious here. We live in Bangladesh here and there. We had a permanent residence in Burma. The local people create disturbance. If we go to hill to collect firewood the villagers beat us. We want to go in any other Muslim country. We have relatives in registered camps. They are living in better condition than us. They get water and food sufficiently. We maintain communication with our Burmese relatives by cell phone. We wish that we will return to our country again. Maghs are better than Bengalis. Bengalis create problem in camps. We don't want to spread up to be integrated anywhere. We want to stay together. We do not have any permanent address here. Actually we do not know what to do.*

## Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 02

Name	Md. Islam
Age	28 (fled to Bangladesh 10 years ago)
Name	Sona Ali
Age	38 (fled to Bangladesh 15 years ago)
Name	Abdur Rahim
Age	42 (fled to Bangladesh 10-12 years ago)

Name Nur-us-Salam  
Age 40 (fled to Bangladesh 10 years ago)

Name Md. Unus  
Age 27 (fled to Bangladesh 16 years ago)

Their comments are given below-

*We reside in Dumdumia camp. In Myanmar, our children cannot not go to school. Only the Children of the leaders can go to school. There is no opportunity to go to school here, some of the children go to Madrasha (Religious School). We want to repatriate in Canada or Pakistan. Before 1978 our past generation was Militias against Myanmar government. But they didn't get success. Because government was powerful and very aggressive. The GOM persecuted us. There was no chance to protest. The law and order situation of the camp is not up to the mark. 30 families have a leader. They call him Mahjee. 25 families have a head Mahjee. The name of head Mahjee is Hafez Ayub. After coming in Bangladesh it is very tough to maintain communication with Myanmar. The GOM will create problem if it knows about it. Bengalese creates problem here. If we go to village to work, they beat us and drive us away. Some of us work in Teknaf. But they do not get equal wage to the local workers. It is very tough to earn livelihood even by running a shop. Hardly 100 taka comes from it per day.*

### Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 03

Name Hakim Ali  
Age 40 (fled to Bangladesh 10 years ago)

Name Kachi Rahman  
Age 80 (fled to Bangladesh 26 years ago)

Name Abdul Gafur  
Age 55 (fled to Bangladesh 8 years ago)

Name Kalu Ahmed  
Age 48 (fled to Bangladesh 27 years ago)

Name Sultan Ahmed  
Age above 60 (fled to Bangladesh 17 years ago)

Their comments are given below-

*We live in Dumdumia camp. We intend to go to Burma. But there is no option. Riot has started in 1978. Demolishing the Muslim residences, areas were built for residing of the Maghs. We have come by boat. The then BDR used to prevent slightly. Sometimes we catch fishes. Burma is a place for the Maghs, not for the Muslims. According to Myanmar authority, "you were guests from Bangladesh. Now go home." This is lotted. Bengalis are both good and bad here. Some Bengali guys harass the Rohingya girls. We don't want to go to Burma. Repatriation in a 3<sup>rd</sup> country will be okay if that country is Muslim. We don't have anything to demand from Bangladesh government. It has given us shelter that is enough. To come in Bangladesh is easy and less expensive. We used to live in the places where Muslims were majority. We lived at Buchidaung, Maungdaw, Aqiab, Mangpara; Filua etc. our lands were very fertile. Natural resources were there. Dam like Kaptai can be made in our Taraing river. We never believe the Burmese government. Now it is tough to come to Bangladesh. Protection at border has been increased. 250,000 Rohingyas have come in Bangladesh in 1991. The Burmese government has driven us away. We had right to vote during the Aung Saan regime. Here, elephants are big problem. At night they come down from the hills. We have nothing to do. Due to clashes with Bengalis, makeshift camps have been made for us for separation from them. 2000/3000 Rohingyas are in jails of Bangladesh without any specific accusation. NGOs have given latrines, bathrooms and medicine. None do anything about our repatriation. We want to be registered. Because registered refugees get ration. Many Islamic NGOs have gone away because of MSF. But MSF is helping us. It has made a little dam to store water coming from the hill. We do not have anything to do here and we do not have any future plan either.*

Name	Mohammed Yasin
Age	28 (fled to Bangladesh 17 years ago)
Profession	Community service worker
Camp	Nayapara (Registered)

*I have studied in Bangladesh and that is why I got this job. I am here with this job from the establishment of this camp (1992) and I live with my family here. There are more Madrashes than the schools. The students of the schools are given one packet of biscuit everyday, which is not given to the Madrasha students. I teach and create awareness about AIDS and diseases. I do not get my salary. I believe that I will get a job in camp in future. There are Bengali and Rohingya teachers in the schools. Reading up to class 5 is free. The school teachers have option to earn more. They can teach the students privately. I think my ration card ensures my ration and bears my identity.*

*Camp in charge is all in all in the camp. Other officials work under him. But the whole situation of the camp depends on camp in charge. Some officials manipulate the refugees in many ways. Such as- they do not give ration in perfect amount. They frighten the refugees in the name of repatriation, false accusation. Thus they snatch money from refugees. I think a good camp in charge is essential for camp's perfect situation. Sometimes good camp in charge saves the refugees from forcible repatriation. For instance, he convinces the government that there is still persecution in Burma. If he is ordered to kill any refugee, sometimes he saves that refugee and tells him to hide. In this case the camp in charge shoots ground and tells his authority that the accused refugee has been killed. The law enforcement officials of the camp help the refugees to go out and to come in the camp in exchange of*

money. They also manipulate the refugees by frightening. They leak out the news of arrival of any official of UNHCR or government. They take money from the refugees for this too. They harass the girls of the camp. They are responsible for creating some problems in the camp. Local villagers secretly enter in the camp and buy ration at a lower cost. Some Refugees sell ration in hotels outside the camp. Refugees earn by porting, rickshaw-pulling, fishing and working outside at night. This is secret. Refugees in the camp sell their ration to others. Relatives from Burma send money at post office. Unemployment and no access to the job market and lack of education exist here. Living standard is sub human. Health and sanitation system is very poor. Accommodation problem is severe. A family, whatever is the number of its members, gets only one hut. Unfortunately, many incidences of incest have been occurred. Water crisis becomes acute in summer. The water given by the authority is inadequate.

Name	Ismail
Age	15 (fled to Bangladesh 12 years ago)
Student	Read in class 5
Camp	Nayapara

My aim in life is to do anything for my country. I have no wish to be doctor, engineer like others. If Bangladesh government gives me opportunity to be educated, gives some land like other citizens then I will think to be a doctor or engineer. My aim in life is to see Myanmar as a peaceful country. For this I will do anything for my country. By reading many books and listening stories from my parents I understand about Myanmar that, the life led by Rohingyas is sub human. The problems for the students are- There is no opportunity to study after class 5. Those who want to read in higher class; they have to do it with own expense. Because of two reasons- (a) in future they can do something better and (b) for leading better life and don't want to be bad guy like other illiterate boys of the camp. I wish that, I should go to Myanmar to bring peace and security for the Rohingyas. I don't want be a citizen of Bangladesh and also do not want to go to any 3<sup>rd</sup> country. The Majhees of the camp are mainly responsible for creating bad situation because they don't want to solve the problems in the camp. They (Majhees) maintain good terms with the camp officials. There is no legal rule of selecting Majhee. I think if all the camp people become educated then they can do many things for their country.

Name	Moulavi Mohammed Hannan
Age	32 (fled to Bangladesh 27 years ago)
Profession	Moulavi in the camp Mosque
Camp	Nayapara (Registered)

In Myanmar, our children could not go to schools. Our girls were being harassed. Muslims have to pay lot of taxes. We did not have freedom to maintain our religion. Government forcibly made us work without wage. Army shoots if 3 or 4 Rohingyas are together. Many of us are sentenced without any reason. We fled here by boat with our parents. Before registration in Bangladesh camp we lived in hazardous situation. After registration, our family started to stay together. Accommodation problem of the camp is very severe. We have to live all together in a hut. The situation of the hut is very poor and congested. The Majhees are not friendly with us. There is not enough food in the camp. Per head we get 5.50 or 6

kilogram rice, 0.25 liter oil, 125 grams Suzy (Semolina) and very little amount of dal (Pulse) in 15 days. The people of unregistered camp are living with difficulties. It is better to register them. Being Moulavi I can earn money and get helps, but other can't do this. I will go to my country if the situation becomes stable.

## Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 04

Name Tawkir Ahmed  
Age 50 (fled to Bangladesh 16 years ago)  
Camp Nayapara

Name Kolim Ullah  
Age 25 (fled to Bangladesh 6 years ago)  
Camp Nayapara

Name Md. Saleh  
Age 28 (fled to Bangladesh 7 years ago)  
Camp Nayapara

Name Md. Zahid  
Age 32 (fled to Bangladesh 16 years ago)  
Camp Nayapara

Their comments are given below-

*Food, firewood, rice, pulse, sugar, Sault, soap, Suzy is given by UNHCR. MSF gives us medicine. TAI gives us education materials. It gives our children books, pens and papers. UNHCR gives the children clothes. Every hut is 7feet/10feet. UNHCR gives us one liter Kerosene per family every month.*

**Reason of fleeing away from Myanmar:** *Men are jailed by army, restriction on marriage, children can not go to school, restriction on religion. Especially moulovies are humiliated by army; women are sexually harassed by army. Many of our people came here by boat. Some people came here swimming. Many of them have brought their families from Myanmar. Some of our families still live in Myanmar. NASAKA wants us to come in Bangladesh. BDR did not prevent at the time of our arrival in Bangladesh. But now they try to protect. Many of the refugees had come here in 1990s. Now, it is tough to come.*

**Problems in Bangladesh:** *It is very tough to get a job. Some of our people are porters. Some are catching fish. Some are rickshaw-puller. Women make nets. Local people beat us without any cause. We do not get equal wage. We can't go anywhere if we want.*

**Problems inside the camp:** *All of our family members live in a hut. Incest is very common. Local people disturb us in the camp. Sometimes they set our houses in fire. Authority doesn't take any complaints against them. Majhees create problems. Many of them are **double agent** of the officials. Food is not enough here. Meat and fish had been given before, but not now anymore. Inside the camp, we can't give 'Azan' (call for prayer) with the mike. Total*

*situation of the camp is getting worse day by day. If the GOB registers another 10,000 new Rohingyas then it will not be our problem. We will adjust with them.*

**Integration:** *We want to stay together in Bangladesh, but do not want to spread up for integration. We have no special wishes to be citizens of Bangladesh. We will not go to Myanmar even the GOM assures us safety. Only then we will go there, if the GOM becomes democratic. We want to be repatriated to any country like Canada, except Bangladesh and Burma. Muslim country is better for us to repatriate. We are living better, but it is not our permanent home. Burma is our homeland. We are not satisfied with our life and have no future plan. Actually we don't know what to do.*



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