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BURMA: RAPE, FORCED LABOR AND RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN NORTHERN ARAKAN

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INTRODUCTION

Muslims from Arakan State in northwestern Burma, have become the latest targets of Burmese military atrocities. Since late 1991, they have been streaming into neighboring Bangladesh at the rate of several thousand a day with stories of rapes, killings, slave labor and destruction of mosques and other acts of religious persecution. By mid-March, the Bangladesh government had registered over 200,000 refugees and the exodus was continuing. In many ways, the treatment of these Muslims, called Rohingyas, seemed to be part and parcel of the stepped up military offensive against ethnic minorities and opposition activists by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the military junta that has become one of the most abusive governments in Asia.[1] Intensive fighting has been taking place along Burma's eastern border against the Karen and Mon people as well, with refugees pouring into Thai border camps with similar accounts of rape and forced labor.

But there are several peculiarities about the Rohingya situation that make it distinct from the pattern of human rights violations in the east. The Burmese government claims the Rohingyas are illegal immigrants from across the border in Bangladesh and never belonged in Burma in the first place, whereas

[1] The major opposition party, National League for Democracy (NLD), was overwhelmingly elected in May 1990. In July 1989, the leadership of the NLD was arrested including Aung San Suu Kyi, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. Since the elections, nearly a third of the elected parliamentarians have been jailed, while seven others fled to Thailand and formed a government in exile, The National Coalition Government for the Union of Burma (NCGUB). Thousands of opposition party members have been harassed, jailed and living in refuge in Burma's neighboring countries.

it clearly acknowledges the minorities in the east as Burmese nationals (whether or not they regard themselves as such). The armed insurgency among the Rohingyas is small and not a significant fighting force comparable to the Karen guerrillas or other insurgent armies in the east; SLORC does not even attempt to justify the campaign against the Rohingyas in terms of counterinsurgency. The religious persecution of the Muslims appears to be much stronger than persecution of other religious minorities. And the sheer scale of the human disaster, with hundreds of thousands fleeing to one of the poorest, flood-ravaged countries in the world, has no parallels on Burma's borders with China or Thailand.

This report is based on interviews conducted by Asia Watch consultant Crystal Ashley in mid-March 1992 with newly arrived Rohingya refugees in five of nine refugee camps established by the Bangladesh government at that time.

ARAKAN AND THE ROHINGYA MUSLIMS

Arakan State is a long province along Burma's western coastline on the Bay of Bengal. The northern tip of the province adjoins Bangladesh, and almost all of the refugees are fleeing from two townships, Maungdaw and Buthidaung, in Akyab District, the district closest to Bangladesh.

The Rohingyas are a Bengali-speaking people, similar to their neighbors across the border. They are a minority in Arakan; Rakhine Buddhists constitute the majority. The Rakhines themselves face discrimination from the majority ethnic Burmans who make up the country's rulers. The Rakhine language is a dialect of Burmese.[2] No census has taken place in Arakan since 1963-64, and the province has been even more closed to outsiders than the rest of Ne Win's Burma. The total population of the province is estimated to be about three million, with Rohingyas accounting for at least 1.4 million.[3]

Muslims have inhabited northern Arakan since the 12th century when Islam came to Bengal. Northern Arakan was in fact part of the province of Bengal under British India, and the current border was only fixed when Burma became a separate British colony in 1937. After the Second World War, as Britain prepared to grant Burma independence, a many-sided rebellion broke out in Arakan as in other ethnic minority areas of the country. As different factions of the Rakhine-led separatist movement gathered strength, a Muslim-led movement began to campaign for a separate Muslim state in northern Arakan, influenced in part by the emergence of an independent Pakistan. (In fact, many Muslims supported the inclusion of northern Arakan into East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.) Unrest continued for the first decade of independence. U Nu, Burma's first and only elected Prime Minister, campaigned in 1960 on the promise, among other things, of statehood for Arakan, but he backed down in 1961 under pressure from the military. In any case, Arakanese Muslims had viewed the prospect of a Rakhine-led state with suspicion and continued to press their demands for a separate Muslim state.

After General Ne Win took power in 1962, the government pursued a more ruthless policy of assimilation and this, combined with the economic effects of his "Burmese Way to Socialism", hit Arakan particularly hard. The state had been a major rice-growing area; it deteriorated into one of the country's poorest provinces. Per capita income and literacy lagged well behind the rest of Burma, and many

[2] The terms "Rohingya" and "Rakhine" both have the same origin as "Arakan."

[3] Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, Zed (London: 1991) and the newspaper, *New Nation* (Dhaka), March 17, 1992.

Buddhists and Muslims alike began migrating into more prosperous parts of the country. When this became evident in the 1963-64 census, the Ne Win government cracked down on all movement of Arakanese Muslims and prohibited any travel eastward at all from Akyab District. By 1964, the Muslims were virtually prisoners of their province, not even allowed to travel between villages within a single township. The government put enforcement of such measures into the hands of Rakhines, creating new rifts and distrust between Muslims and Buddhists.

The central government's distrust of Arakanese was reinforced by the history of opposition in the region. During the nationalist movement of the 1930s and 40s, Arakanese Muslims had supported the British, giving rise to enduring doubts about their loyalty. Before and after independence, Arakan was home to a number of armed opposition movements, the most important of which was the Burmese Communist Party (BCP) which had one of its oldest bases, albeit a small one, in Arakan. Set up in 1939, the Arakan base went underground in 1949 and endured beyond the collapse of the rest of the BCP in 1989. There was also the People's Liberation League, which lasted about ten years from independence in 1948 to its collapse in 1957; the Red Flag Communist Party which reached its height in 1950-1953; the Arakan Communist Party established in 1956; the Arakan Liberation Party set up in 1964; and the Arakanese Independence Organization set up in 1970. The membership of these groups were predominantly Rakhine and hill tribe.

The Muslims, for their part, developed the Rohingya Patriotic Front in the mid-1970s and later, the Rohingya Solidarity Organization and its rival, the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) which are believed to have several hundred armed regulars apiece, headquartered in Bangladesh.

Some of the Rakhine groups have at times lent support to the Muslim fronts, but the historic and ethnic division between Rakhines and Rohingyas remains complex and unbridged. It is widely believed that SLORC uses existing hostility between them to stir up clashes and ensure that they do not unite.[4]

The government claim that Rohingyas are illegal immigrants is clearly specious, but the efforts to deny them full citizenship go back to Burma's first citizenship law in 1947. By the terms of that law, anyone who could demonstrate that family members had been living in Burma at the time of the Anglo-Burma War of 1824 qualified for full citizenship. The law clearly favored ethnic Burmans rather than residents of ethnic minority areas where borders had been more recently defined and where cross-border movement had been frequent. Even the 1947 law, however, was preferable to a new citizenship law passed in 1982. That law gave full citizenship only to Burmese who could trace the families of both parents back to pre-1824 Burma. Some ten percent of the population who could not meet this criterion were considered non-nationals and were classified as Associates or Naturalized. The aim of the law was to isolate Indian, Chinese and Muslim ethnic groups; any "non-national" was barred from serving in state or party positions, serving in the armed forces or the police or attending higher education at national institutions. They also have no recourse for confiscation of land, property or business by Burmese authorities.

The 1978 Exodus

In 1978, the government undertook a major campaign against the Rakhine opposition groups, particularly the Arakan Communist Party, the Arakan Independence Organization and the Arakan National Liberation Front, and the Rohingya guerrillas, then referred to as the *mujahidin*. The campaign was referred to as *Ye The Ha* and employed the classic "four cuts" counterinsurgency strategy used all along Burma's

[4] Shwe Lu Maung, "The sociology of Rohingya persecution," *Holiday* (Dhaka), January 17, 1992.

borders. (In this strategy, the Burmese army attempts to cut off a rebel organization's food, funds, intelligence and recruits.) This was followed by a major military operation in Arakan called "King Dragon." People in small villages were uprooted and concentrated in fenced stockades. As in 1991-92, the army and Arakanese police claimed they were ridding Arakan of "illegal immigrants." Murder, rape and destruction of villages and mosques became commonplace. In April 1978, thousands of Arakanese, mostly Muslims, began fleeing to Bangladesh; by mid-July, some 200,000 refugees were crowded together in 13 camps administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the Bangladeshi side of the border. The Burmese government alternately claimed that "a few Bengalis who had no citizenship papers left the country" or that "armed bands of Bengalis," "rampaging Bengali mobs" and "wild Muslim extremists" had created the exodus.[5] It was widely believed that by targeting the Rohingyas and manipulating widely held anti-Indian sentiments inside Burma, the Ne Win government was trying to divert attention from serious domestic problems, largely economic ones of its own making.

The refugees faced another tragedy in the camps. The Bangladesh government decided that one way to persuade the refugees to go back to Burma was to starve them. In the words of Syed Ali Khasru, the man who was then Secretary of the Bangladeshi Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, "Well, gentlemen, it is all very well to have fat, well-fed refugees. But I must be a politician, and we are not going to make the refugees so comfortable that they won't go back to Burma."[6] Accordingly, the food rations given the Arakanese were at or below the amount of calories the World Health Organization considers necessary for survival, and the most vulnerable refugees, particularly children, began dying of starvation. By late November 1978, the death rate in the camps was 33 per 10,000 per week, or eight and a half times the Bangladeshi average; between May and December, 10,000 refugees had died, about 7,000 of them children.[7] It is worth noting that the Bangladesh government at that time, unlike the current government of Begum Khaleda Zia, did not permit foreign journalists or diplomats to visit the camps, and the UNHCR which had overall responsibility for the relief effort, did not challenge the government's policy.

Faced by 150,000 experienced Bangladeshi troops and after one uncomfortable confrontation with the Bangladeshi navy, Rangoon realized it was not prepared for both widespread internal unrest among its minorities and an external war as well. In July 1978, the Burmese and Bangaldeshi governments agreed on a program of repatriation, but there was strong resistance from the refugees. The Bangladesh government then grew impatient and cut already low food supplies, in some cases to near zero, and prevented refugees from leaving the camps to look for food or work. As a consequence, the rate of both deaths and repatriation increased. By mid-1979, well over half of the refugees had returned to Burma and by the end of the year, nearly all had gone back.[8]

The 1990 Election and Its Aftermath

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[5] Bertil Linter, "Diversionary Tactics", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 29, 1991, p.26 and Martin Smith, *op.cit.*, p.

[6] Alan C. Lindquist, "Report on the 1978-79 Bangladesh Refugee Relief Operation", June 1979, p.9.

[7] Cato Aall, "Disastrous International Relief Failure: A Report on Burmese Refugees in Bangladesh from May to December 1978," *Disasters*, Vol.3, No.4, pp.429-34; and Lindquist, *op.cit.*, p.7.

[8] Lindquist, *op.cit.*, p.22-23.

The September 1988 pro-democracy uprising affected Arakan as it did other parts of Burma, and many students fled to the jungle or were arrested following the September 1988 military coup. Like the rest of Burma, Arakan voted heavily against the ruling National Union Party in the National Assembly elections of May 27, 1990 and in favor of the opposition. The votes were divided among Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy; the Arakan League for Democracy; and the National Democratic Party for Human Rights.[9] Following this display of support for an end to the military junta, Rohingyas interviewed by Asia Watch say the routine of oppression became one of concerted brutality by SLORC. In fact, the increased visibility of the military may have been less due to the election per se than to the fact that a general effort by the military to tighten control over the country in the wake of the 1988 mass pro-democracy movement had only reached Arakan by late 1989 and the Buthidaung and Mawdaung areas by late 1990.[10] Food supplies were suddenly confiscated by the military, and physicians now in Bangladesh say they can measure the onslaught of malnutrition in children by the desperately reduced diet since 1990. Forced labor, population resettlement and land confiscation increased, and so did the flight of Rohingyas to Bangladesh.

In April 1991, Edith Mirante of Project Maje interviewed a number of Rohingya refugees who had left Buthidaung between one and three months earlier.[11] They said thousands were fleeing then, long before the international community began to take notice, and reported Rohingya men being seized for forced labor, women being systematically raped, houses, land and farm animals being taken by the soldiers. They also reported a military build-up in and around Buthidaung and establishment of new cantonments of the 23rd and 24th regiments of the Burmese army some 10 miles from Buthidaung.

One man from Laweta village, Buthidaung, who arrived in Bangladesh in April 1991 said his four acres of land and property had been confiscated for the new military base. He himself had to engage in forced labor every two or three days in a group of about 100, levelling land, building roads and carrying water for the troops. He was given no payment, and no food or water while working.

Another Rohingya man said that military activity had intensified after the 1990 growing season. He had to spend so much time in forced labor crews that he had no time to harvest his rice, and the whole crop was lost. He said the military also wanted to erect buildings on his land, a practice that was clearly continuing when Asia Watch conducted its interviews eleven months later.

All the Rohingyas interviewed reported the destruction of mosques, harassment of religious leaders, a ban on most forms of religious activity, and the inability to obtain Islamic books and materials.

By August 1991, there were an estimated 10,000 refugees from Arakan, mostly Rohingyas, in Bangladesh. In November, the Bangladesh foreign minister visited Burma, returning with assurances that the refugees who "could prove citizenship" could be repatriated. These assurances were meaningless when there were numerous instances reported to Asia Watch when Rohingyas would present identification to Burmese military officers, only to watch the officers destroy it.

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[9] One of the more famous candidates, U Tha Tun, 82, was arrested and died in prison before the election.

[10] *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 29, 1991, p.6.

[11] Edith Mirante, "Our Journey: Voices from Arakan, Western Burma," *Project Maje*, May 1991.

On December 21, 1991, Burmese troops from the Lon Htein security forces crossed into Bangladesh and attacked a well-marked Bangladesh border post. Four Bangladeshis were killed and 22 wounded. The Bangladesh government put its army, navy and air force on full alert. At first, SLORC claimed the raid and been a mistake made in pursuit of rebels, but this explanation was later withdrawn and SLORC refused to apologize, return captured weapons, or pay compensation. (The weapons were eventually return in mid-February 1992.)[12]

Bangladesh massed troops along the border, and SLORC was reported to have sent an additional fifty to seventy thousand troops to Arakan. These included the Lon Htein forces, who played a key role in the bloody crackdown in Rangoon in 1988. In late December, a series of meetings between the Bangladeshi Rifles and Lon Htein guards was initiated where the main agenda items, according to Bangladeshi sources, were the attack on the military post, the build-up of Burmese troops, and the "illegal infiltration into Bangladesh by Burmese nationals."[13]

The increased military presence spelled more suffering for the Rohingyas, and it is against this backdrop that Asia Watch conducted interviews among refugees in several camps outside the Bangladesh town of Cox's Bazaar.

PATTERNS OF ABUSE 1991-92

Rape

The refugees interviewed by Asia Watch reported appalling atrocities at the hands of the Burmese army. Rape of women after their husbands or fathers had been taken for forced labor was common. Sometimes the rapes occurred in the homes of the victims with children and relatives left to watch; sometimes the women were taken to a nearby military camp where they were sorted out by beauty. In some cases, the women were killed; in others they were allowed to return home.

**Eslam Khatun, 31, mother of six children, was the wife of the village headman of Imuddinpara, Rama Musleroi, Buthidaung. About February 1, 1992, she was at home with her children, brother-in-law and sister-in-law named Layla Begum, aged 16; her husband had been taken for forced labor and had not returned home. It had been cold, and the family was sitting next to the fire, about to get ready for bed. It was about 9 p.m. when they heard the sound of boots and soldiers speaking Burmese outside. When the soldiers forced open the door, the fire lit up Layla's face, and they saw her.

First they pulled her up by her arms, and her brother tried to stop them. They began beating him, while undressing and violently molesting Layla, though not raping her on the spot. When they dragged her and her brother from the house, the brother was bound and Layla was wearing only her earrings.

Eslam's husband, Abdul Halim returned from forced labor duty to learn of his sister and brother's abduction. He had been regularly forced to work for the military but since he was a village headman, he was also obliged to provide male laborers to the soldiers. Hoping he had a more privileged position than most villagers, he decided to go to the local army camp to ask about Layla.

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[12] Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 12 February 1992, FBIS-NES-92-029, p.48.

[13] Foreign Broadcast Information Service-EAS-92, January 28, 1992.

Eight days later, Eslam found Layla's body in the jungle near their house. She appeared to have bled to death from her vagina. "The soldiers had been satisfied with her," Eslam said.

About 21 days later, the bodies of Abdul Halim and his brother were found dumped in the same area. Eslam herself buried her husband. She said his genitals had been cut off, his eyes gouged out, both hands cuts off and he was cut down the torso into two pieces.

A few days later, Eslam Khatun and her six children walked for two days with 250 other villagers to reach the Naaf River. Soldiers opened fire on the boats in her group but she was uninjured. About two-thirds of her village is now in Dechuapalang 1 Camp.

Jahura Khatu, 30, is the widow of a farmer in Naikaengdam village, Buthidaung. She arrived in Bangladesh on February 1, 1992. Over the last decade, she said, Muslim villagers had been harassed continuously by local military personnel, and told they were not Burmese. Jahura's only Burmese identification card indicated she was a Muslim foreigner. Chickens, cows, rice harvest and cash were taken freely by soldiers at any time. If there was no cash in the house when they appeared and demanded it, she said, the women were beaten and raped.

A year ago, a military camp with some 1200 soldiers was established in Naikaengdam on the site of the local mosque and cemetery, which had been just next to Jahura's house. Village households paid a fixed fee of 200 *Denga* (US$30; 1 US$ = 6.7 *Denga/Kyat* at the official Burmese exchange rate) per month to support the camp. Men were abducted house-to-house for forced labor; Jahura's husband Fazil Alam, 45, had been taken many times for road construction, usually for two or three days of service.

In December 1991, her husband was taken for labor again. One day soldiers appeared at her house to give her a bundle of bloody clothes she recognized as Fazil's. They said he had been unable to carry the assigned load, and they had beaten him to death.

After that, soldiers came back to her home again and again at random to rape her, demand money and food. A month after they brought the clothing, several soldiers came late one night and raped her again. Afterward, they took her out of her house, where three young women, all unmarried, were forced at gunpoint to walk with her to Naikaengdam Camp, about fifteen minutes away. The women were kept together, given no food or water, and raped by officers throughout that night, and all the following day. Jahura noted that an officer named "Arkanbu" was in charge. They were told that if they promised to bring other women to camp, they would be released. After sunset the women were let go, and decided on the walk home they would escape to Bangladesh.

Half the village left at the same time, in broad daylight. One hundred families walked for seven days, most carrying nothing but a little rice. On the eighth day they met soldiers at the river bank; their pillows, bedding and household items were all confiscated, and they crossed the Naaf River to Bangladesh.

Oziba Khatun, 20, from Napura village, Maungdaw, arrived in Bangladesh the first week in February 1992 after walking seven days to the river. She said her husband, Abdul Haq, 28, had been abducted many times for forced labor under very harsh conditions, so when the soldiers came in the daytime, shortly before she fled, her husband hid in the bushes. When Oziba told the soldiers her husband was not at home, they took her instead. She was forced to leave her two children in the house, and walk for five hours with the soldiers, until they arrived at a camp in the dark. There she was raped by officers all

night; she knew them to be officers by the flower symbols on their sleeves. The next day her husband came to find her at the camp, and she was released, but he was kept. She never saw him again.

**Rohima Khatun, 35, from Shigdarpara village, Maungdaw, arrived in Bangladesh about February 1. A widow, Rohima said that soldiers from the Charmael Camp, Luntin battalion, regularly forced Muslim men and youths of Shigdarpara to do hard labor. They were picked up, house by house, whenever soldiers needed workers. But in recent months, girls between the ages of 12 and 16 were being collected in the same way, from house to house. Survivors of these abductions had always been raped, and Rohima was worried about her own daughter. She also had three sons, aged 14 to 6.

One day in December 1991, a letter from the military post four miles away was delivered to Rohima's house: it said to send her daughter to the camp. Rohima did not respond. Soon thereafter, four or five soldiers burst into the house where Rohima and her four children had finished their evening meal. All they said was, "We're taking your daughter sightseeing." They picked her up and carried her out screaming, clubbing her brother of fourteen as he tried to protect her from them.

Rohima waited six weeks for news of her daughter from the camp. She decided then to leave Burma for Bangladesh.

**Dilara Begum, 16, of Hashuradha village, Maungdaw, had only been in Bangladesh for a few weeks when she was interviewed. She said that about the middle of February 1992, Dilara was home with her three week-old baby. Her husband, Habibul Rahman, 30, had been serving as a captive laborer but was allowed to come home each night. When he went to the market one day and failed to report back to the camp on time, two soldiers came to her house. In the presence of her 55 year-old mother-in-law and two brothers, they asked the whereabouts of her husband. Dilara did not answer and was immediately seized and forced on the floor to be raped. At the same time the mother-in-law was attacked, but fought back and escaped to a neighbor's house. Dilara continued to fight and scream, but the neighbors who burst in to protest were violently beaten. Her brothers escaped. She was raped by both soldiers.

Dilara said for the past two years soldiers had entered their house to rape her on many occasions. Sometimes they had guns and sometimes they were unarmed, she said. In her village of 400 families, she added, this abuse was common.

**Jaharu Begum, 20, from Lapia, Devina in Akyab district arrived in Bangladesh on February 11, 1992. She said that in November 1991, four or five soldiers came to her house at about 1:00 a.m. They ordered the door to be opened; Jaharu, knowing they were abducting forced laborers, said her husband, Animullah, was not home.

The soldiers then kicked down the door, spotted her husband in the room, and tied his hands. They dragged him outside the house and beat him badly, taking him as they went. After three days Jaharu still had no word about Aminullah. That night the same soldiers came back at 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. This time they took her alone to the small camp, punching and hitting her with rifle butts during the one-hour walk. At the camp various soldiers raped her continuously for about 16 hours, until they appeared to be "satisfied," as Jaharu stated. The village head was at the camp at the time. He happened to recognize her and convinced the soldiers to release her.

After a month at home with no information about her husband, Jaharu decided to flee to Bangladesh. She has no children, and no remaining relatives other than a mother who escaped to

Bangladesh over a year and a half ago, about whose whereabouts Jaharu knows nothing. She joined five or six families in the trip to the river and believes only two or three families may now remain in her village of Lapia.

**Gul Mar, 25, from Ludengpara, Buthidaung, arrived in Bangladesh about February 21, 1992. She said that one afternoon sometime in October 1991, soldiers appeared at the house where she lived with her husband, 18 month-old daughter and baby boy. That day Gul Mar was suffering from malaria. The soldiers said nothing more than, "Let's go," and led her out to where 120 women from her village were all tied with their hands in back. Some of the women were begging to bring their children; a few had infants. At first the soldiers discouraged keeping them, but relented in the end and some of the women were untied to carry the children.

They began a walk that lasted eight hours. On the way, the soldiers grew tired of the crying children. One by one, they took them from the mothers and tossed them by the roadside. One baby only 40 days old was thrown away in this way: Gul Mar estimated 20 such children were lost that night, including her own little girl.

When they arrived at Taraing military camp in the dark, the women sat under guard for four hours in a group. Each woman was given a cup of cooked rice. That was the last food Gul Mar was to see for four days. The women were then separated into groups. Gul Mar, taken to a room alone, did not see the other women again at all. She was kept for seven days in the room, raped several times a day by men in groups of four or five. Sometimes the same men returned; others were new to her.

The fourth day neighbors from her village were allowed to bring her food. They were given the message by the military that her family was to pay a 500 *Denga* (US$75) ransom for her release (an average salary for one month.) Her father, Kalamidi, learned of the demand when the neighbors returned to the village, but he could not raise the money until the seventh day. For Gul Mar, the rapes continued and she was not fed again. Her father finally was able to pay the fee, and the two were allowed to make the eight-hour walk home.

All families of the 120 abducted women had been informed of the same ransom. Most of the women returned, but some were never seen again. Some of their dead bodies, like that of Gul Mar's friend Rohima Khatun, 30, were dumped outside the village that week. Gul Mar found no trace of her daughter.
Kalamidi decided after this incident to take his family to Bangladesh, but it was raining, so they were delayed. In February they set off in a group of 300, bringing only what rice they could carry.

**Mohammed Yaqub, 30, and his wife, Doya Banu, 25, came to Bangladesh in February from Hangdaung village in Buthidaung. They said that about 7:30 p.m. around February 1, soldiers from the 82nd company based in Thentarang Camp were going house to house in Haungdaung, abducting men and women to be taken to the camp. Mohammed Yaqub was away on a forced labor assignment. Doya Banu was dragged from her house, her hands tied behind her. She was tied to a group of about a dozen women, including four or five elderly women. Some of the houses were completely emptied of their inhabitants, and all were tied in groups.

The groups were forced to walk all night on rough terrain. Children were crying; the old women were being frequently beaten for not keeping up. By daylight they had reached a hill camp. Upon arrival, the women were separated "by beauty," the old women and children being made to sit outdoors under armed guard while the other women were taken into rooms by soldiers. Doya was among those taken to rooms,

and raped continuously for three or four days, without rest or sleep. Even after the long night's hike, she was never given any water and only after two days was she given any food. She received about a cup of rice, which was not offered again during her stay there.

When Mohammed Yaqub returned home, neighbors told him that his wife had been taken to Thentarang Camp, and soldiers had said he should see them about the conditions of her release. He then went to the village head, who was a non-Muslim named Meu Yung Chi. The village head told him that the price of his wife would be one bottle of wine, one live rooster, and 150 *Kyat* (US$22). Mohammed Yaqub sold three of his roosters to obtain enough cash. He arrived with the required payment, and Doya Banu was allowed to go home, but he was kept for two more weeks of labor and Doya had to walk home without him. After two weeks, he was too sick and exhausted to work, at which point soldiers guarding him said, "All right, get out of Burma and go to Bangladesh." He and Doya Banu left three days after he returned from the camp.

**Mohammad Rafiq, 25, came to Bangladesh from Bawli Bazaar, Akyab. About the end of January 1992, he said, there was a big increase in the abductions of men for forced labor in the area. Work teams were forced to build roads and level hills. There were many deaths among the workers, mostly from weakness due to starvation and the resultant beatings. Mohammad watched two men die on the roadside in this way.

At noon time about February 10, five soldiers came to Mohammad's house to collect men for this work. Only Mohammad, his brother, mother and younger sister Gulbahar were home. Instead of taking the men, the soldiers grabbed Gulbahar, only twelve years old and having just begun to menstruate. In front of the family, the five began taking turns raping the girl. When Mohammad tried to fight them, he was beaten, and received a severe blow through his left hand with a long-bladed work knife, between the middle fingers. When the soldiers were finished, they carried the child away with them. The family has heard nothing of her since.

After waiting in vain for her return, Mohammad and his mother decided to join a group of 41 others from his village, and walked four days to Whykong Crossing, where they caught a boat for Bangladesh. Though the wound in his left hand has been treated by refugee camp medics, it is healing badly, and he remains unable to use his hand.

**Sayed Hossein, 25, from Bawli Bazaar, Akyab, arrived in Bangladesh on March 1, 1992. He said that about the second week of January 1992, every house in the village of Bawli Bazar had to give up its young men for forced labor. Soldiers came to Sayed's house about 1:00 a.m.; his wife, father, mother and baby were present. Sayed had been captured for digging road beds three times before.

Sayed was forced out of the house, where more than 100 other men were being tied with their hands in front. They were being held in this group at gunpoint in front of a shop. As they waited, the sounds of women being attacked began to emerge from several houses, one of which he recognized as his own. He estimated that of the original 50 soldiers in the group, about 35 remained to guard the captives and the rest were raping at will in the neighborhood.

Sayed then ran from the back of the group and managed to return to his house, where three soldiers were holding and raping his wife. They attacked and beat him badly, wounding his elbow so seriously with a bamboo club (he showed a large scar) that he was useless as a laborer, so they left him in a heap at the house. It took almost two months for Sayed to recover from his injury so that he could make

the trip to Bangladesh. His wife also recovered fully, and arrived with him.

**Aisha Khatun, 25, from Labadogh village, Buthidaung, came to Bangladesh with her five children and her father. She explained that about a year and a half ago, the army set up camp in the village rice fields. They gave notice to the villagers to leave, announcing the local Muslims were all "Bangladeshi." They forced abducted male laborers to destroy their village mosque, and build a Buddhist temple in its place. Unable to cultivate their fields because of the camp, many farmers were confined to their houses and idle. Sometimes the soldiers ordered them out. When they refused, their homes were burned. Everyone lived in fear.

One afternoon in early December 1991, soldiers announced that all Muslims must leave. Aisha and her husband made no preparations to do so because they had no place to go. That night, while her husband and children were sleeping under their blankets, five soldiers kicked down the door of their house. They said they were collecting laborers. Aisha told them her husband was not there. "Then we'll take you," she said they told her. They then carried her outside, tore off her clothes, blindfolded her with a rag, and while two or three held her, each of the five took a turn raping her. They tore her pierced earrings out.

At some point during the violence, she was aware of her husband emerging from the house to defend her. There were blows, and her husband briefly appeared to escape the group of soldiers. Two or three of the rapists chased him, he was caught and brought back. Using a long-bladed work knife, the soldiers then hacked him to death, leaving his body in front of Aisha. She herself lay on the ground injured and bleeding, and the soldiers said they would return for her. When she had recovered enough to travel, she gathered her five children and father, and left on foot. They caught a boat to Bangladesh at Parampur Crossing.

Forced Labor

The above accounts indicate that forced labor has been part of daily life in northern Arakan for at least a decade. Any able-bodied man is subject to being forcibly recruited for hard labor at repeated intervals. He must work without pay and with little food or water for anywhere from two to thirty days. The work involved ranges from widening roads to digging irrigation canals to leveling hills -- reminiscent of the projects the Khmer Rouge imposed on the Cambodian populace. It is not clear how much of the work is carried out with a specific end in mind and how much is sheer brutality which, combined with systematic rape of the women left behind when the work crews are taken away, is designed to force the Rohingyas out of Burma.

**Abdul Jalil, 70, came to Bangladesh about February 22, 1992 from Kiladaung village, Maungdaw. In his village of 600 families, Abdul Jalil knew of no adult male who had not been a forced laborer for government troops. Soldiers first took him ten years ago for road building, and he has served the military at the same camp, Kilarbil, for a decade. He had been involved in portering heavy loads and canal building, sometimes in military camps.

He said there was no change in treatment of workers over the ten years. If the load was too heavy or the worker too exhausted, there was no rest allowed. No one was allowed to stop work and sleep until midnight, at which point workers had to sleep on the roadside, without cover. Only two and a half hours of sleep were allowed. They resumed work in the dark and were not allowed to stop or eat until noon: this was the only meal, and it lasted one hour. Only a handful of cooked rice was provided. When work began again, it carried on until midnight. Availability of drinking water depended on individual soldiers who were acting

as guards. Sometimes no water at all was allowed; other times workers would be ignored if they sipped from a stream.

Between eight and 20 days of service were required before release, which always followed. Those who escaped during service suffered attacks on their families, Abdul said. Those who tried to escape were usually beaten to death, as were those too ill or slow to keep up. Malaria also took a heavy toll.

At no time in ten years was any medical treatment made available to the workers. Injuries on the job were common: Abdul has a wide scar the length of his right leg, where a boulder fell on him. He was never released at the time of the injury, and remembers five days during which the leg was very bad. He also has multiple scars from punctures during beatings.

Abdul's family was never harassed to his knowledge in his absence. His two eldest sons also provided labor. Whereas the military used to just announce publicly who would be on the labor crews, Abdul said now workers are abducted house to house at night.

Around the last week of February, Abdul Jalil could no longer stand his bondage to the Burmese military, and walked the half mile from Kiladaung to the Naaf River with his three sons and wife. They met with no soldiers on the way.

**Sabed Ali, 29, a farmer from Bardaija village, Maungdaw, arrived in a refugee camp in Bangladesh with his wife and two daughters on February 13, 1992.

One morning, about a year ago, Sabed Ali said, he came out of his house to pray at about 6:00 a.m. Someone aimed a flashlight in his eyes, and a soldier told him to come forward. He ignored it and went on to pray. They made a leap for him, a chase ensued and he was soon surrounded. His elbows were tied from behind, and he was loaded with 40 kilos of rice. He was then made to walk several hours to Bardaija Camp, a military post.

When they arrived, his load was taken and his face was covered with a cloth. With four men holding his limbs on the ground, boiling water was poured over his face. He was ordered to promise that he would not resist forced labor again, and "since a crowd was watching", Sabed decided to promise. He was allowed up, and taken then to a room in the camp. Hundreds of people seemed crammed into a small room. He recognized many fellow villagers from his area, and noticed that the tightly-packed room was completely silent. He was brought there at about 8:00 p.m. He had had no food or water since he went out to pray that morning, and received none in the room.

The room had windows, and the river was visible outside. When one of the captives said something, a guard pulled him out of the room, telling the group they had to maintain silence. It was winter, but from the window Sabed saw the man stripped naked and made to stand in the river outside for the next 90 minutes. No one else spoke.

At 6:00 a.m. the entire group was roused but given no food or water. They were each loaded with 40 kilos of rice, and under guard walked 15 kilometers to deliver it at a camp. There was one armed soldier for each 10 porters. When they were unloaded, the whole group was forced to return to the first camp with another similar load, without rest, food or water. Numerous times Sabed saw Muslim villagers along the way offer water to the porters, but the soldiers always drank it. The group was forced to make three such trips before being put back in the room and allowed to rest. This routine continued along the same route to

Amtola and Bulipara camps for one month. Sabed saw at least 20 fellow porters die of starvation and fever. After the first five or six days, Muslims who brought food and water along the route were allowed to feed the porters.

Sabed said the ages of this group ranged from three men over 70, to several over 50 and one nine year-old boy. When the boy was too tired to carry a bigger load, he was forced to carry many pairs of the soldiers' boots, so that they could hike in flip-flop sandals.

Sabed did not remember how many trips he made like this before he was released, after a month. His wife had been safe, with enough to eat while he was gone. But repeated service since then, and fear of more to come, convinced him to escape to Bangladesh in mid-February.

Magbul Ahmad, 30, came to Bangladesh from Donchara village, Buthidaung. Over the past year and a half, Magbul worked intermittently as forced labor on the construction of a major highway across Akyab district. Beginning in Akyab City and stretching to Taungbru, near Fokirabazar in Kyandaung near the Bangladesh border, the nearly finished tarmac road is four lanes wide.

Magbul saw many of his fellow workers die of mistreatment, beatings, exhaustion and malnutrition on the road crews. Water is not supplied to the workers: he once saw a laborer ask a soldier for a drink, then watched the soldier urinate in a cup and give it to him. Magbul has gone as long as seven days on the work crews without being allowed to steal away for a drink from a stream or pond. Forced to bring and carry food supplies from their own homes for the soldier guards, the only food the workers are allowed is a tiny portion per day from the rice and greens they bring. At night the workers had to sleep under guard on the road they were building.

A friend of Magbul's, Abu Sidiq, also worked on the highway. "I never escaped," he said. "They said the families of anyone who escaped would all be killed." A few times he was allowed to go back to his village of Kapurdaung in Buthidaung for two to three days before reporting back to the road gang.

Nur Alam, 30, arrived in Bangladesh from Bawli Bazaar about February 1, 1992. He said in his village, the army chooses forced labor crews from alternating houses, and the village head is responsible for replacing the workers. The previous crew is not released until their replacements are sent. Some of the village heads are Buddhists, others are Muslims, who "belong" to SLORC. Muslims are constantly told they are not Burmese, but from Bangladesh. Once when Nur Alam complained to the village head about how often the soldiers were stealing his chickens, and asked for help, the village head said, "Your father is in Bangladesh. Go ask him for protection."

Shortly before Nur Alam left Burma, soldiers forced over 400 Muslims to work on what Nur Alam called a "useless, filthy pond - so filthy you could walk across it." For twenty days they worked in it: "It was winter, so our hands were freezing, we were exhausted and getting beaten when we slowed down." When the pond was finally clean 20 days later, the government brought out buses of mixed Burmese, city and suburban people, educated and poor, for a photo session to show cooperation in land development.

Faruq Ahmad, 35, his wife and three children arrived in Bangladesh with 55 other families around February 2 from Rohingadaung village, Maungdaw. His account was similar to Nur Alam's, above. In his village, the village head is responsible for providing labor crews. When men are abducted house to house for work crews, they are not released again until a new crew is sent. Crews of eight sent by the village head receive an eight-day term of duty; crews taken by force have an indefinite term. Also, if the village head

fails to provide an alternate crew of eight men, he must himself pay a fine of 50 *Kyat* (US$8) per man not provided.

Faruq worked in forced labor for as long as 25 days at a time. He received about a cup of cooked rice twice daily. Work shifts are from 8:00 a.m. to 12 noon, with a half hour to cook their own rice (brought from their homes) and eat it, whether it is finished cooking or not. When workers' own rice runs out, it is provided. The men are forced to work from 12:30 p.m. again, and at 8:00 p.m. they have another half-hour to eat. Work resumes until midnight, at which point workers are made to lie on the spot they stopped working, without cover.

**Dil Mohammad, 27, from Naikaengdaung village, Buthidaung, arrived in Bangladesh in September 1991 together with his mother and four sisters. His village had approximately 370 families about the time of the 1990 national elections, and most people in the area supported Aung San Suu Kyi. Shortly after the election, massive construction projects were begun by the military with forced labor on Muslim land. "This is not your land, it is ours," they were told by the military in charge. "You are Bangladeshi tourists with foreign identification and you don't own land." The housing was said to be for military families at first, but soon the units were full of non-Muslim Burmese from the cities.

Dil Mohammad had been abducted for road and housing construction many times over the past two years. Sometimes he would be held as long as three months without a break, allowed only a handful of cooked rice once a day. He was forced to work in what had been cultivated Muslim fields, building roads and housing for the urban Burmese newcomers. When they were allowed to stop work late at night, the laborers were forced to sleep under guard, in mud and cow dung.

Seven months ago his father, while serving as forced labor, was publicly beaten to death as an example for all the villagers to see. Dil Mohammad was left as the head of his household. He had witnessed women being brought by force to the camp regularly, and when one of his sisters was raped by soldiers, he decided to bring his family to Bangladesh.

**Mohammadullah was a village headman in Taungbru, Maungdaw who arrived in Bangladesh late last year. As village head, he had continually been obliged to recruit and supply forced laborers from among his fellow Muslims.

One day about one year ago, while at the bazaar with his son-in-law, he was confronted by soldiers. They demanded he turn over a crew of forced workers, and he refused. Then they said they would take Mohammadullah himself; he resisted. One of them, a SLORC officer and former policeman in the district, named Bulachi, fired one round from a light machine gun into Mohammadullah's left side. The bullet passed through and came to a stop in the chest of his son-in-law, injuring them both badly. They were left in the bazaar by the soldiers.

The son-in-law was not well enough to travel when Mohammadullah decided to flee to Bangladesh but has since recovered and is still in Burma. Mohammadullah has a three-by-eight-inch depressed scar from the bullet wound in his side.

Population Transfers and Religious Persecution

The interviews with Rohingya refugees revealed what appeared to be a government policy of moving non-Muslim Burmese into northern Arakan in an effort to displace the people the government calls

"foreigners." The population transfer has only intensified persecution of Muslims in the area as the following interviews illustrate.

**Abdul Shokur, 50, from Kandaung village, Buthidaung, who arrived in Bangladesh in mid-February, described the population transfer in his area. He is a watchmaker and had been a villager teacher of Islam and a part-time farmer. He lived in Kandaung with his wife, Jahura Begum, 35, and his five children, aged 19 to 1.

Before the May 1990 elections, he said, pressure on Muslims in this region was sporadic. Every Muslim had an identity card which designated him or her as a "foreigner," without Burmese citizenship (Abdul had received such an ID card fifty years ago, he said.) No Muslim could travel without permits, especially to Rangoon: the fee is 4000 to 5000 *Denga* (US$600 to 750), or ten times the average Akyab monthly salary. Muslims were frequently told they were not Burmese but Bangladeshi.

Most of Buthidaung district supported Aung San Suu Kyi in the election, with what Abdul described as a relative lack of public fear. Immediately after that election, however, brutality became commonplace, and has escalated in the past twelve months to a level that has surprised even the Muslims. "Our village is occupied, now," Abdul said. "They go house to house, day and night."

Mosques were at first locked up, and then destroyed throughout the area with forced Muslim labor, and Buddhist temples erected in their places. Starting two years ago, all of Abdul's rice yield from his fields was confiscated for military use, save a small amount insufficient to sustain even his family of seven. The rest of the land was occupied by military facilities, and distributed to non-Muslims in housing projects built with forced Muslim labor.

Two years ago, these housing projects for card-holding Burmese citizens were begun and the construction is continuing. About 150 homes of Muslims in Kandaung have been appropriated for non-Muslims, as well as 150 new buildings erected for dwellings. All new construction is on Muslim agricultural land; military personnel have announced that Muslims are not the owners, that Burmese are, and that all Muslims should "go home" to Bangladesh.

Abdul Shokur said most of the tenants being brought to the housing projects are from Rangoon, but some "are from Bangladesh," Abdul stated, having conversed with several of them himself. Though Muslims are not allowed in this housing, "my white beard and status as an elder teacher here allow me to talk to people sometimes," he explained. There are about 20 families from Cox's Bazaar, Nila and Ramu in Bangladesh who are newly settled in Kandaung now. Newcomer tenants receive, they told him, one cow, eight or ten *kani* of land to cultivate (one *kani* is about 60 square meters), as well as military and agricultural training.

This military training of civilians, including the use of arms, has increased the level of abuse against Muslims in the past year, according to Abdul. Non-Muslim civilians frequently join soldiers in beatings of Muslims and looting of their property, and random harassment has also increased.

One day shortly before he fled Burma, when Abdul Shokur had gone to pray, his family of six was pulled out of the house and into the street, to be taken to a camp. He saw them in time, protested to the soldiers, and was told he could pay 2000 *Denga* (US$298) for their release. He was able to do so, though he said it was the only such offer of ransom of which he had heard, and credited it to his white beard and status as an elder in the village. The day he paid the ransom, a captain in the Burmese military told the

soldiers standing by, "Send him to Bangladesh." Soon after, the soldiers discovered Abdul teaching the Koran to some children. They ridiculed him for it, threw the book out onto the ground, and stomped it with their boots. It was at this point Abdul decided to flee for Bangladesh with his family.

All seven members walked for five days before reaching the Naaf River. They brought only their clothes.

**Abdul Salam, 25, from Kandaung, Buthidaung had been in Bangladesh about a month when he was interviewed. He said the housing projects for urban non-Muslim Burmese were built over the last 18 months on Muslim land, by forced labor crews, in which Abdul Salam had to take part.

He said soldiers and non-Muslim civilians have abducted Muslim men for forced service to train the newcomers in much the same way they have collected work crews for road construction. Abdul Salam said he had been forced at gunpoint to train the non-Muslims in agricultural practices. The training sessions started in the morning at daybreak with a group of non-Muslim Burmese listeners, in a field or rice paddy. Abdul, under guard, had to explain the stages of cultivation or the steps for handling the crop of whatever grew in that field, as the "audience" changed in shifts throughout the day. Without breaks, water or food for the trainer, these lessons and audiences continued until late evening, every day. This kind of forced labor would continue for days, or alternate with construction for the military, porter duty or road building.

Abdul Salam has seen these urban newcomers receiving military and arms training by government soldiers, as well. He noted that much of the random harassment, bullying and beatings of Muslims in Kandaung by non-Muslim tenants of the new housing is prompted by such training; he said he saw the new arrivals carry weapons. Abdul Salam himself saw 45 trucks loaded with Chinese arms delivered to Buthidaung Camp three or four months ago, and because he has seen armed non-Muslim civilians accompanied by soldiers, he believes they, too, have access to these arms.

**Nurul Eslam, 20, a student of Islam from Kuansibaung village, Maungdaw arrived in Bangladesh on March 12, 1992. He explained that one year earlier, all Islamic schools were closed in Kuansibaung. At the time, soldiers said they had orders "from above" to close them. Military harassment in the area included orders for all Muslims to get out of Burma and "go back to" Bangladesh. Since his birth in 1972 Nurul had had Muslim identification designating him as a foreign national in Burma.

Shortly before he left for Bangladesh, Nurul Eslam and his friends had been tied up at gunpoint by soldiers for listening to BBC radio broadcasts. The radio was smashed to bits. He said the soldiers had taunted him with taking everything the BBC said as absolute truth. They then told him that if the BBC was saying that Muslims should stay in Burma and **not** go to Bangladesh, they would obey the BBC and shoot anyone who tried to leave. It was the first time the youths had heard this contradiction to the usual encouragement to get out of Burma.

Nurul Eslam convinced the soldiers he and his friends were harmless, and for some reason they were let go. After this incident, anyone seen by soldiers preparing to move from the village was threatened with death if they left.

During the several months before he left, the nearby military camp in Kuansibaung had been taking a heavy toll of rice and livestock from the village. Nurul's cousin, Dudu Ali, 30, was the owner of three cows. On March 11, 1992, soldiers suddenly claimed every cow in the village. Dudu Ali protested when they

tried to take his cattle. Eight soldiers began to beat him publicly with rifle butts, clubs and fists. They also beat the gathering crowd of neighbors who protested, even pulling women into the clubbing. When Dudu Ali was senseless, soldiers took him from the scene to Tombro camp, which was also nearby.

Shortly afterward villagers returned from the camp, and informed Nurul that his cousin had been tortured with matches and cigarette lighters. Since it was the month of Ramadan fasting for Muslims, Nurul took rice to the camp in the evening and was given permission to see Dudu Ali.

He found his cousin in a small room in a dark building, which was extremely hot. Dudu Ali was unable to speak. His chest, hands, beard, lips and mouth were severely burned. He was unable to respond or eat the rice, so Nurul left it there for him. Before leaving, Nurul explained his family's plan to escape the village that night and said goodbye. He set out that night with eleven others for the Naaf River, only one mile away. Soldiers posted along the river stopped them, taking 3,400 kyat from the 12, as well as the 120 kilograms of rice they were carrying.

Mohammad Yonus, 50, from Miumaungkora, Maungdaw, arrived in Bangladesh in mid-January 1992. He had worked as a tailor in Miumaungkora, but had to finish all sewing orders for the military before he was allowed to do any private sewing. Soldiers provided the materials, but he was never paid. He was forced to finish seven to nine complete uniforms a week on his treadle sewing machine at home.

The mosque in his village had been destroyed by forced Muslim labor under military orders. All Muslims had been ordered to stop prayers: Mohammad Yonus was sometimes beaten for praying in a field near his home. There was no armed resistance in his area, although the military constantly suspected youthful, educated and strong Muslim men in the community of organizing against the government. His family members complained of being beaten often as they went about their daily tasks in Miumaungkora. "Elders like myself seemed to be beaten a lot for this or that," Mohammad said. "They were always telling us to get out of Burma."

A year ago a large housing development was begun with forced Muslim labor in their village. It has hundreds of non-Muslim Burmese citizens living in it now, and these citizens are frequently seen abusing Muslims in the community. Two months ago at about 8:00 p.m. five soldiers and ten non-Muslim housing residents stood on a public corner in the village and announced they needed laborers (they regularly collected workers this way.) All the Muslim men within hearing range dispersed in all directions, and none was recruited by the group.

The group of 15 then began entering homes. Mohammad Yonus was in his house a few meters away, observing this. Soon he heard the noises of women in trouble, screaming for their parents, for "someone to save them." House after house was entered in this way, the whole group of 15 staying together, for about 90 minutes. The screaming didn't stop. Women were raped in twenty to forty houses that night, Mohammad estimated. When it was over they had collected and bound five particularly beautiful women, and made off with them to the camp. This part was usual: every two or three days in the village, women were abducted in this way.

As an elder in the village, Mohammad Yonus could often speak to soldiers in his shop, and the next day he asked them about the attacks the night before. They said, "We take all we want, and when we finish, we take the prettiest women back to camp for the officers." He asked about the presence of Burmese housing residents, noting that some appeared to be educated, some young, some older, even some leaders. The soldiers said these men were not really selected to join, but just showed an interest in coming

along. Mohammed Yonus said, "They were encouraged to take the opportunity."

Mohammad Yonus complained to the Monduthaung Police Station nearby. The officer in charge was Mong Kyo Zha. When the officer had heard Mohammad's protest about the night before, he stated bluntly, "You are not Burmese. We are torturing you so you will leave this country. We will continue until you are gone." With that, he ordered Mohammad Yonus jailed in the Miumaungkora Camp, a military post, for five days.

During the five days he was held in a room with windows and a 24-hour guard. He saw no one else. He was given food and water daily. At the end of five days, he had to sign a statement that he would never complain of military actions in his community again, and he was released. The women he saw abducted that night were released after one day.

Military personnel began to suspect Mohammad Yonus was planning to leave Burma, and reminded him he could not take his sewing machine. He agreed that he was thinking of moving. He finally made his escape at night with 150 others. In all, 300 families fled the same week. It was five days' walk to the river, and Mohammad Yonus accomplished all of it with his treadle sewing machine on his back.

**Abolhashem, 20, from Singdaung village, Buthidaung, was a student of Islam, and he spoke of the religious persecution he and others in his school faced.

One day a little over three months ago, Abolhashem was with four friends after class, walking to the market with religious books in hand. A group of Burmese military and non-Muslim civilians who had recently moved into a new housing project stopped the youths and began to ask them about their books. They were told to read aloud, and Abolhashem did so.

The soldiers stopped him and pushed the boys down the road to the Islamic school where they were students. The civilians stayed with the group. They then released the young men, but took their four teachers. Abolhashem and his friends followed.

The local mosque had been demolished with forced Muslim laborers earlier, and a Buddhist temple erected in its place. The group took the teachers to this temple and stood guard over them in the sun. When it was prayer time, one teacher said something in Bengali and was immediately beaten. When another started to pray in Arabic, the whole group of soldiers and Burmese civilians immediately fell upon all four, beating them fiercely with fists, feet and rifle butts. They were ordered to pray aloud to the statue of Buddha; they refused, and the beating continued.

Finally, one of the teachers cried out that they would pay money to be released, and the soldiers took the offer. They took all the money the teachers had, then brought the four teachers to Buthidaung Camp, where they were again detained. Abolhashem heard that the soliders were demanding 3000 *Denga* (US$448) for their release; the community collected it, and they were freed the next day.

Three months before Abolhashem left, the Islamic school was closed for good by the military. One Thursday about 8 a.m., when 500 men and boys, ages 10 to 40, were studying what proved to be their last lesson there, the school was surrounded by some 30 soldiers.[14] They tied the hands of all those present and

[14] Trying to pin down exact numbers from witnesses is difficult; these are the numbers as recounted by Abolhashem but they may be a little high.

made them walk for one hour to Fumali Camp. There they took the shirts off everyone, and each was given a load to carry. Some took rice, others ammunition, and they started walking.

They continued to walk that day and through the night. None was given any food or water nor allowed to rest. In the middle of that night, they arrived at a camp where they removed their loads and were taken to a walled place, a "roofless room" as Abolhashem described it. All they were allowed to do was lean against each other; they had not been allowed to urinate yet.

In the morning they picked up the same loads and started up a mountain. It was to be eight days and nights this time, with the same load. During this period only the soldiers were allowed to rest; they would stop, eat, rest and catch up. But at no point were the porters allowed again to stop. By now many were falling from the cliffs in exhaustion and hunger. Slow ones had been beaten and kicked over the edge, with their loads left along the side for the next passing crew to eventually pick up. Abolhashem saw scores of deaths that week. Only about a third of the original group lived to reach the next camp [Afored Dala].

The remaining 150 were all tied together then, again with no rest. They were herded back down the mountain with no loads this time. Still without food since the ordeal began, they were snatching leaves to eat from bushes along the trail. Almost everyone was sick now, but there were no deaths that day.

Upon arrival at the lower camp again, they were put into the same roofless room. They then saw soldiers bring in about 300 more young men. The whole group of 450 was fed for the first time: each received a cup of cooked rice with salt. Those who were sick were separated from the group then, but Abolhashem was passed over, even though he was clearly ill. "I still looked strong," he said, "and I'm young." They only rested an hour and a half (Abolhashem still had his watch) then were given loads again, and headed back for the mountain camp.

When he arrived this time, they took his watch. They dropped their haul at the camp, were not given new loads, and were told they were to walk straight for Taungbru, on the Bangladesh border. "Go back to your own country," said the soldiers in charge.

Some did not make the last leg of the journey: it was one day's walk, and Abolhashem estimated that about 100 more had died by the time they reached Teknaf.

Summary Executions

As some of the above accounts indicate, the Burmese military has not hesitated to shoot at departing refugees, even as it presses them to "return" to Bangladesh. On March 10, Anis Ahmed, reporting for Reuters from Dhaka, wrote that on March 4, Burmese troops had captured more than 300 Rohingyas trying to flee across the Naaf River, separated the young women, and shot many of the rest dead. The military seems to be aiming at ridding Burma of Rohingyas by any method, including murder.

**Mohammad Shah, 30, from Azarbil, Maungdaw, arrived in Bangladesh on February 13, 1992. He recounted what happened to a group of about 200 Muslims from the Azarbil area who left for Bangladesh about January 3. The group included Mohammad's best friend, his uncle and many neighbors.

His friend returned in a panic later the same day, describing how the group was stopped by Burmese civilians and soldiers, and how he had fled the scene. A day later, a villager reported to Mohammad that his uncle was now in the military post called Napru Camp. He went to the camp but learned

nothing. He distinctly recalled the screaming of women from buildings at the camp.

On January 5 Mohammad Shah himself discovered his uncle's body floating on the river near their village. No marks were evident. The following day, Mohammad found more bodies, this time four females, floating near the same place. He recognized them as his neighbors, from the group that had departed for the border.

Mohammad spoke to a few survivors of the January 3 group; some had been detained at the camp, other at Maungdaw jail. They confirmed the murders of his neighbors, but they had been released only on promise of never speaking of the incident and declined to discuss it further.

**Hafez Ahmad, 32, from Tongbazar village, Buthidaung, arrived in Bangladesh at the end of February. He had owned a small grocery shop in his village. Four or five years ago, Hafez said, he got an identity card that designates him as a foreigner in Burma. His job was illegal because businesses are not allowed without citizenship. The Muslims in his area are not allowed to celebrate Muslim holidays, and his family land has been occupied by soldiers in a camp. Muslim work gangs have been forced to build new construction for non-Muslim residents on the land. After most of Hafez' area voted in favor of Aung San Suu Kyi in the 1990 elections, soldiers started saying publicly, "All Muslims should go to your homeland of Bangladesh. You are not from Burma."

When Hafez left Tongbazar with 1500 villagers about February 20, 1992, soldiers encouraged them to go. There were only a few families left there, and Hafez believes them to be in Bangladesh now. They traveled 40 kilometers to the Ghacharibil Crossing of the Naaf River. At the river, they recruited about 20 boats to take them across.

There were about 20 to 25 soldiers at the river who began taking money, gold and jewelry from the refugees in the boats. They were carrying what Hafez described as Chinese G3 and G1 rifles. The soldiers grew progressively more hostile, beginning to take even the clothes and then rice supplies, leaving people holding only their children. Finally the soldiers began pulling the smallest children from their parents' arms. They swung the children "like sacks" by their ankles, beating their heads again and again against the bank of the river. Hafez saw approximately ten children killed in this way.

His boat was among the first of the twenty to shove off, and when it had almost reached the middle of the river, the soldiers opened fire on the boats behind his. They continued firing until one boat had capsized and sunk. When the firing started, the boats scattered and landed at many different places on the Bangladesh and Burmese sides, so Hafez was never able to ascertain how many casualties were sustained. But he could see bleeding people in several boats behind him.

Fatema Khatun, 30, arrived in Bangladesh on March 5, 1992. She left Goalangi village, Buthidaung, on February 26, together with her son, husband, father, father-in-law, mother-in-law, and two brothers-in-law. They were in a group of 600 to 700 people. Fatema and her son had been having trouble keeping up, as she suffers from high blood pressure and her son had injured his left foot badly on the trail.

On March 3, as the group of refugees neared the river Daijarkhal, they saw soldiers for the first time on the trip. There were 40 to 50 armed soldiers on both sides of the stream, and soon the crowd was completely surrounded. Fatema and her son had fallen behind, and as they were separated from the group on the top of a little hill, were not spotted. Suddenly, the soldiers began firing into the crowd. Everyone tried to flee or drop to the ground as the firing continued. Fatema kept her eyes on her family members in the

group as best she could. She clearly saw her father shot in the chest and saw her husband take at least one shot as well. In the ensuing confusion she could not distinguish the others in her family.

Fatema and her son hid until the firing stopped, and then had no choice but continue their escape on foot, alone. They walked for two more days; by now they had no food. Over the whole nine-day trek, the two of them ate rice only three times. Eventually they met up with small groups of refugees also traveling to the river, but Fatema could find none of her family among them. At Balukhali Crossing, 200 to 250 people had gathered to hire boats to Bangladesh. Fatema could identify just about 100 from her original group. When interviewed, Fatema was seeking word from newcomers every day about her missing relatives but had heard nothing. Her son had been treated by camp medics for his injured foot. She wept throughout this account.

CONCLUSION

The Burmese military has clearly embarked on a policy of ridding the country of ethnic Rohingyas by any possible means. Official claims that the refugees are "illegal immigrants" who belong in Bangladesh or opportunists seeking relief agency hand-outs are blatant lies: the refugees are leaving because they are being raped, tortured, made to work as slaves and banned from practicing their religion.

The international community needs to address the problem urgently. Even if Bangladesh and Burma were to agree on a scheme for repatriation, return of the refugees is hardly a humane option as long as the policy of the Burmese government remains unchanged. A two-pronged strategy is needed, first to ensure that enough funds are available for the refugees in Bangladesh to prevent a recurrence of the 1978 tragedy (although that tragedy was more the result of politics than a cash shortage), and second, to prevent the kind of atrocities now taking place in northern Arakan.

To address the first question, the support pledged by the international donor community thus far is inadequate. When refugees from Arakan first began fleeing into Bangladesh in March 1991, they found help only from other Rohingyas living in the area, sympathetic Bangladeshis, Rohingya political organizations and a Saudi medical group. By late 1991, a Bangladeshi government still reeling from the impact of the April 1991 cyclone (which hit the area in which the refugees are now camped) began providing limited assistance. By January 1992, Bangladesh announced a full emergency assistance program for the refugees who by then numbered over 100,000. In mid-February, it formally requested UNHCR assistance and the UNHCR in turn sought US$27 million for a relief program to serve 150,000 people. Contributions toward that program came from around the world but as of mid-April totalled only US$8 million while at least 50,000 more had arrived in Bangladesh. President Bush pledged US$3 million on March 17, following a visit to Washington of Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. European donors have contributed a total of approximately US$3 million. Japan has pledged approximately US$1 million.

In addition to securing sufficient funds for the refugees, world attention must also focus on various proposals for repatriation, which in Asia Watch's view must be postponed until the situation in Burma has radically changed. In early April, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali sent his newly appointed Humanitarian Relief Coordinator, Jan Eliasson of Sweden, to the refugee camps in Bangladesh and to Arakan. Eliasson said "the aim of his mission was to secure the safe and voluntary return of some 200,000 Burmese Muslims to their homes."[15] (The Burmese government wildly distorted news on the visit.

[15] *Hong Kong Agence France Presse*, April 3, 1992, in *FBIS*, April 6, 1992, pg. 28.

According to Rangoon Radio, April 4, the villagers in Arakan explained to the mission that the "majority of those who fled to the country on the other side were landless laborers who went there after hearing reports about distribution of relief goods. They said some of them who were disappointed have already returned."[16])

The Burmese government has made it clear to Bangladesh that it will only accept the repatriation of those refugees who are "genuine Burmese" with proper identification -- identification which the Burmese authorities have themselves made every effort to destroy. As of early March, the Bangladesh government had provided five lists with a total of 23,258 names. Dhaka Radio announced on March 9, that the lists were given to start quick repatriation of the refugees as agreed by the two countries during the Bangladesh Foreign Minister's visit to Burma in November 1991. The Bangladesh government has promised to provide lists of more refugees soon.[17]

Many of the refugees, however, have stated that they do not want to be repatriated for fear of further persecution when they return. Many, in fact, are afraid to report to camp authorities when they arrive or to voluntary agencies, for fear that registration will lead to repatriation. There is political pressure on the refugees from some of the Bangladesh-based insurgent groups to resist repatriation until there is an internationally-supervised settlement in northern Arakan. Even without that pressure, however, the refugees would fear returning, and that fear, if the above interviews are any indication, is clearly well-founded.

If some international pressure on Burma to negotiate repatriation of the refugees has been forthcoming, pressure on Burma to cease the abuses has been more difficult to obtain, particularly from the countries that could make the most difference: China, Japan, and the countries making up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). China arguably has more leverage over Burma than any other country (see below), as its major arms supplier and trading partner. In January, it apparently assured Bangladesh that it would use its influence to diffuse the tension with Burma, but the promise did not extend to helping stop the abuses.[18]

The ASEAN countries, led by Thailand with its close economic and military ties to Burma, have by and large pursued a policy of "constructive engagement," resisting pressure from Europe, the United States and Australia to take a more critical stance. But when the abuses against the Rohingya Muslims began to attract international attention, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia, all with large Muslim populations, began to speak out. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir said in March that Malaysia would take a firm stand on the plight of the Rohingyas and would press for the problem to be addressed immediately. Throughout March other Asian countries including the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei and Pakistan, also voiced their concern for the Rohingya people and called on SLORC to seek a peaceful solution. Even Thailand's Prime Minister acknowledged in early March that Thailand's Burma policy had been unsuccessful. (He was replaced not long afterwards by General Suchinda, the Thai military leader whose ties to Burma are very close.)

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[16] *Rangoon Radio Burma in Burmese*, April 4, 1992, in *FBIS*, April 6, 1992, pg. 28.

[17] *Dhaka Radio Bangladesh Network*, March 9, 1992, in *FBIS*, March 10, 1992, pg. 30.

[18] *Agence France Presse*, January 27, 1992, Dhaka.

Japan, for its part, joined in condemning Burma at the meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights in early March, supporting a resolution calling, among other things, for the appointment of a Special Rapporteur to Burma and specifically "for the Government of Myanmar to create the necessary conditions that would end the exodus of Myanmar refugees to neighboring countries as well as to facilitate their early repatriation from their countries of refuge." Japan also took part in a two-day tour to Arakan on March 29-30 for diplomatic representatives in Rangoon. Most Western diplomats boycotted the trip, but those who went returned convinced that the Muslims indeed faced serious persecution.[19]

RECOMMENDATIONS

The plight of the Rohingyas in northern Arakan is desperate, but it cannot be isolated from other human rights issues in Burma: abuses against ethnic minorities along the Thai and Chinese borders, students, members of opposition political parties, Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi and anyone else who has directly or indirectly challenged SLORC. Many of the following recommendations therefore address the human rights situation in Burma as a whole. But there are also human rights concerns relating to the refugees in Bangladesh and the safeguards that need to be in place before any repatriation takes place.

Human Rights Throughout Burma

Any effective international strategy to exert pressure for an end to human rights violations in Burma must involve those key Asian countries who provide Burma with the bulk of its economic and military support.

According to the State Department, Burma's major trading partners include China, Thailand, Singapore and Japan.[20] Other Asian nations that have supplied SLORC with arms or strategic materials reportedly include Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore and South Korea. More than any other country, China is responsible for keeping SLORC in power and for subsidizing its repressive rule through arms sales. China has reportedly made deals to sell over US$1.2 billion worth of arms to Burma, including jet fighters, boats, tanks, armored personnel carriers, guns, missiles and rocket launchers.[21]

In July 1991, the European Community formalized a *de facto* arms embargo and called for a worldwide arms embargo. Legislation is pending in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate calling on the President to "seek an international arms embargo against the Burmese military regime." The resolution also asks the administration to call "privately and publicly for an end to China's arms sales and economic support to the Government of Burma until such time as all political prisoners are unconditionally released, martial law is lifted, and the results of the May 1990 elections are fully implemented."

1) In its relations with its Asian allies, the U.S. should actively promote and build support for an international arms embargo against Burma, to be organized under United Nations auspices.

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[19] *The Nation*, Bangkok, April 2, 1992, in *FBIS*, April 2, 1992, pg. 21.

[20] Assistant Secretary Richard Schifter, questions for the record submitted by the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations, February 26, 1991.

[21] "SLORC Salvation," Far Eastern Economic Review, October 3, 1991; "Burmese Warning on Arms Buildup," New York Times, November 19, 1991.

Specifically, the U.S. should encourage the members of ASEAN, at the foreign ministers' meeting, July 22-27 in Manila, to announce their support for such an embargo and in consultations prior to the meeting, should urge them to cut off arms supplies on a bilateral basis.

In its bilateral contacts with India, a key Asian member of the UN Security Council (and a sponsor of the UN Human Rights Commission resolution on Burma), the U.S. can also help lay the groundwork for a UN-sponsored arms embargo.

2) Thus far, Beijing's arms sales to Burma have received little more than token attention from the Bush administration. Before the President decides whether to renew Most Favored Nation trading status for China, the administration should inform China that Chinese arms sales to Burma will be a major factor in the President's decision. The administration and Congress should make it clear that unless these arms shipments cease, MFN will be in jeopardy. Through continuing diplomatic pressure, the administration should work to encourage China's cooperation and compliance with an international arms embargo.

3) Japan continues to provide bilateral assistance to Burma (the only industrial country to do so) in order to maintain a "dialogue" with SLORC to "contribute to the democratization of Myanmar," and is a key trading partner.[22] Japan also maintains close ties with the members of ASEAN, and is giving China more than US$6 billion in yen loans over a five period (1990-1995.) Japan is in a crucial position to promote an arms embargo and to increase pressure on SLORC to make specific human rights improvements.

The U.S. should encourage Japan to use its influence with China to urge Beijing to cutoff arms supplies to Burma, and to help build support for an arms embargo within ASEAN. In addition, Japan can do more to exert leverage directly on SLORC, beyond its calls for respect for human rights and its diplomatic interventions with SLORC to urge cooperation with Jan Eliasson's visit and the work of the UN Human Rights Commission. Japan should press Burma, as a condition for continued aid, to immediately cease the persecution of the Burmese people, allow the International Committee of the Red Cross access to all prisoners, and free all political prisoners -- all demands made by the UN Human Rights Commission. Unless Burma meets these requests, all ongoing Official Development Assistance (ODA) should be ended by the end of 1992.

Terminating Japan's ODA to Burma is clearly an option given Japan's new April 1991 policy taking into consideration the recipient countries' efforts to promote democratization and human rights and the volume of arms sales and expenditures. Burma spends over half of its national budget on defense and its human rights abuses have been well documented and universally condemned. However, Japan's ODA to

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[22] Foreign ministry spokesman, quoted by *Kyodo News Service*, quoted in FBIS, December 9, 1991. After the military crackdown in Burma Japan suspended all ODA but in February 1988 partially resumed "humanitarian aid" for certain projects. Reliable information obtained by Asia Watch, however, raises questions about the nature of some of these projects which may benefit Burmese civilians, but which also provide crucial economic infrastructure support to SLORC. One involves improvements in the national railway system; another project involves construction and renovation of two major electric power stations. The Baluchaung No. 2 Power Station supplies 70% of Rangoon's electrical needs and has been the cause of partial blackouts due to lack of power. Further blackouts could result in social unrest. Japan agreed to fund renovation of No. 2 in 1987.

Burma in 1991 totaled over US$61 million, reduced from the previous high of US$259.6 in 1988.[23]

4) The U.S. should take additional steps to curtail trade with the investment in Burma, if necessary through Congressional legislation. In July 1991 the administration decided not to renew a bilateral textile agreement with Burma worth approximately US$9 million in exports to the U.S. in 1990. This step was taken in accordance with the Moynihan Amendment to the 1990 Customs and Trade Act. However, in 1990, the total volume of all exports to the U.S. was valued at US$20 million and the administration has taken no further initiatives to limit or restrict trade or investment. For example, oil concessions were sold to two American companies in 1989 (Amoco and Unocal) and Pepsi Cola International began joint venture operations in Burma in November 1991.

The example of U.S. trade and investment sanctions, though affecting a small portion of Burma's overall international commerce, would send an important symbolic message to other countries and potential investors, and could be used as a basis for encouraging limits on trade and investment by ASEAN nations and Burma's other Asian business partners such as Japan.

Human Rights Relating directly to the Refugees in Bangladesh

1) The Bangladesh government should ensure that given the massive human rights violations now taking place in Burma, no one -- with citizenship papers or without -- is repatriated against his or her will to Burma unless and until clear safeguards are in place to permit international monitoring of the safety and well-being of those returned. Thousands of refugees continue to enter Bangladesh from Arakan daily, while thousands more are moving across Burma's other borders as well.

2) The Bangladesh government must stop turning over to SLORC names of refugees with citizenship papers. This feeds into SLORC's illusion that these are the only "true citizens" of Burma. It also results in many refugees refusing to register with the Bangladesh government and for relief assistance for fear of being repatriated against their will.

3) To avoid a repeat of the relief disaster in 1978-79, The US, other governments and International relief agencies must monitor the situation closely to ensure that adequate food, shelter and health care are provided and maintained.

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[23] "Myanmar Assistance Policy Under Fire," *Japan Times*, March 25, 1992.

For Further Information

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News From Asia Watch is a publication of Asia Watch, an independent organization created in 1985 to monitor and promote internationally recognized human rights in Asia. The Chair is Jack Greenberg, the Vice Chairs are Harriet Rabb and Orville Schell, and the Executive Director is Sidney Jones.

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