

FACTS ABOUT THE ROHINGYA MUSLIMS OF ARAKAN

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Arakan, formerly called Rohang, lies on the north–western part of Burma with 360 miles coastal belt from the Bay of Bengal. It borders 167 miles with Bangladesh both by land and sea.

Rohingyas have been living in Arakan from time immemorial. They are a people with distinct culture and civilization of their own. They trace their ancestry to Arabs, Moors, Pathans, Moghuls, Bengalis and some Indo-Mongoloid people. Early Muslim settlements in Arakan date back to 7th century AD.

Burma is a home to numerous ethnic groups and about 60% of the area is inhabited by nearly 140 ethnic races and Rohingya is one of them. Burma has a population of about 50 million of which nearly 8 millions are Muslims. Of the Muslim population about 3.5 millions (both at home and at the places of refuge) are Rohingyas of Arakan. The Rohingyas are a majority community in Arakan.

Due to large scale persecution through ethnic cleansing and genocidal action against them, about 1.5 million Rohingyas are forced to leave their hearth and home since Burmese independence in 1948. This unfortunate uprooted people are mostly found in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; also in UAE, Thailand and Malaysia. Present distribution of the Rohingya population is given below:

Inside Burma: 2 million*
Bangladesh: 600,000 *
Pakistan: 350,000*
Saudi Arabia 400,000*
Others (U.A.E., Thailand, Malaysia.) : 100,000*

* Approximation

1. Occupation:

The Rohingyas are living on agriculture. Arakan state's agricultural output is mainly contributed by Rohingyas. Small percentage of them are engaged in fishing and trade & business. Besides there are Rohingya artisans, blacksmiths and carpenters. Due to discrimination against them, the Rohingyas have become landless and homeless. Their farm lands are being grabbed by the new Buddhist settlers being invited from within and outside the country. Over and above, high taxation on agricultural produce, continued forced labour and confiscation of farm lands and various restrictions on farming, conspire them to abandon their lands, live below poverty line or face starvation. At present, the number of Rohingya traders and businessmen sharply declined. They are not allowed to do trade and business freely. Sometimes, they require to share their business with the Buddhists giving them lion shares without investment. The military regime has prohibited the Rohingyas of their right to freedom of movement within the country, nay within the same locality seriously affecting the socio-cultural, economic, educational activities and daily life of the Rohingyas. The regime has stopped recruitment of Rohingyas even in civil services since 1970s. No Rohingyas are allowed to enter into defense services.

2. Religion, Culture and Civilization of Rohingyas:

Rohingyas are staunch followers of Islam. Most of the elderly Rohingya grow beards and the women wear hijab. All Rohingya houses are surrounded by high bamboo walls. There are mosques and Madrassahs (religious schools) in every quarter and village. The men pray in congregation, where as the female pray at home. There is still in existence of a social bond in every village called ”Samaj”. All social welfare activities like Adhahi meat distribution, helping the poor, widows, orphans and needy, marriage and funereal functions are done collectively by the Samaj. The Ulema play a very prominent role particularly in matters relating to personal laws, like family affairs of the Rohingyas. Unfortunately, today the cultural problem becomes one of the most important problems of the Rohingyas in Burma. The Muslims have to encounter strong pressure of the Buddhist culture. Particularly the Rohingyas have to confront ideological assault from all directions. The Rohingyas are considered practicing the foreign way of life having no origin in Burma. According to the ruling military the Rohingyas are to adopt and entertain no ideas but those of Burman race and culture and Buddhism.

The Muslims or Rohingyas are told to discard Islamic names and adopt Burman names. Everywhere Muslims’ or Islamic are razed to the ground. Hundreds of mosques have been demolished. Construction of new mosques or repairs to the old ones are prohibited. Pagodas, monasteries and Buddhist temples have been erected in every nook and cranny

of the Rohingya homeland. Muslim students have been brainwashed in schools where anti-Islamic materials are being taught to them. Islam and Islamic culture are always projected or presented inhumiliating, derogatory, degrading and distorted forms.

3. Education of Rohingya:

Before 1962 military take over Rohingya Muslims did not lag behind their Buddhist sister community. Due to poverty, serious discrimination and continued persecution against them, the number of Rohingya students have declined much. To get admission in colleges and universities for higher studies is a problematic matter for the Rohingyas. Severe restrictions have been imposed on their pursuing professional courses for citizenship question. There are a number of voluntary religious schools educating a good percentage of Rohingya students. However, because of various restrictions, lack of funds and facilities these institutions are unable to modernize the teaching methods thus failing to produce efficient students or manpower for the society. Most of the Rohingyas living in exile have little means to educate their children.

4. Political status of Rohingya:

Prior to 1962 the Rohingya community has been recognized as an indigenous ethnic nationality of Burma. They have their representatives in Burmese parliament and some of them have been appointed as ministers, parliamentary secretaries and in high government positions. After the military take over they have been systematically deprived of their political rights. With the promulgation of the most controversial and discriminatory citizenship law of 1982 they are declared as "non-national" or "foreign residents". Very much contradictory to their declaration, the military could not disallow the Rohingyas to participate in multi-party elections held in 1990, the result of which was not implemented by the military junta. Today the Rohingyas are living in sub-human condition with uncertain future. They are declared a people fit to be exterminated.

5. Junta's policy towards the Muslims of Burma:

the ruling military junta practices two pronged de-Islamisation policy in Burma: -- physical extermination through genocide and ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims of Arakan and cultural assimilation of Muslims living in other parts of Burma -- Their main objective is to turn strategic Muslim Arakan into a Burmanised Buddhist region by reducing the Muslims into insignificant or manageable minorities.

6 Crimes committed against Rohingyas and present situation:

Arbitrary arrests, torture, summary execution, custodial killings are rampant.

The Rohingyas are engaged in forced unpaid slave labor days in, days out.

Confiscation of farm lands, uprooting of Muslim settlements, eviction of inmates, establishment of new Buddhist settlements on evacuated Muslim land.

Demolishing of mosques, religious schools and erection of pagodas, Buddhist temples with a view to changing the landscape of Arakan.

Rape and dishonouring of women, forced marriage of Muslim women by Buddhists, banning hijab wearing and forced use of contraceptives and imposition of restriction on marriage of Rohingya couples.

Restriction on movement, even from one village to another within the same locality, on socio-cultural and religious activities, trade and business.

Revocation of citizenship depriving the Rohingya of citizenship rights including the right to seek higher and professional education.

Unbearable taxation on all agricultural produces and even on domestic livestock like cattle, goats, fowls etc.

Uprooting of villages and eviction of inmates creating internal refugees or making them to wander from place to place while causing refugee exodus off and on in to the neighbouring countries.

9. Refugee exodus:

As a result of physical extermination, ethnic cleansing operations, large scale persecution and uprooting of villages and eviction of inmates, there were unprecedented refugee influxes into Bangladesh once in 1978 and the other in 1991-1992 with constant trickle of refugee exodus all along. About 1.5 million Rohingyas have so far been evicted from Arakan since the year of Burmese independence in 1948.