

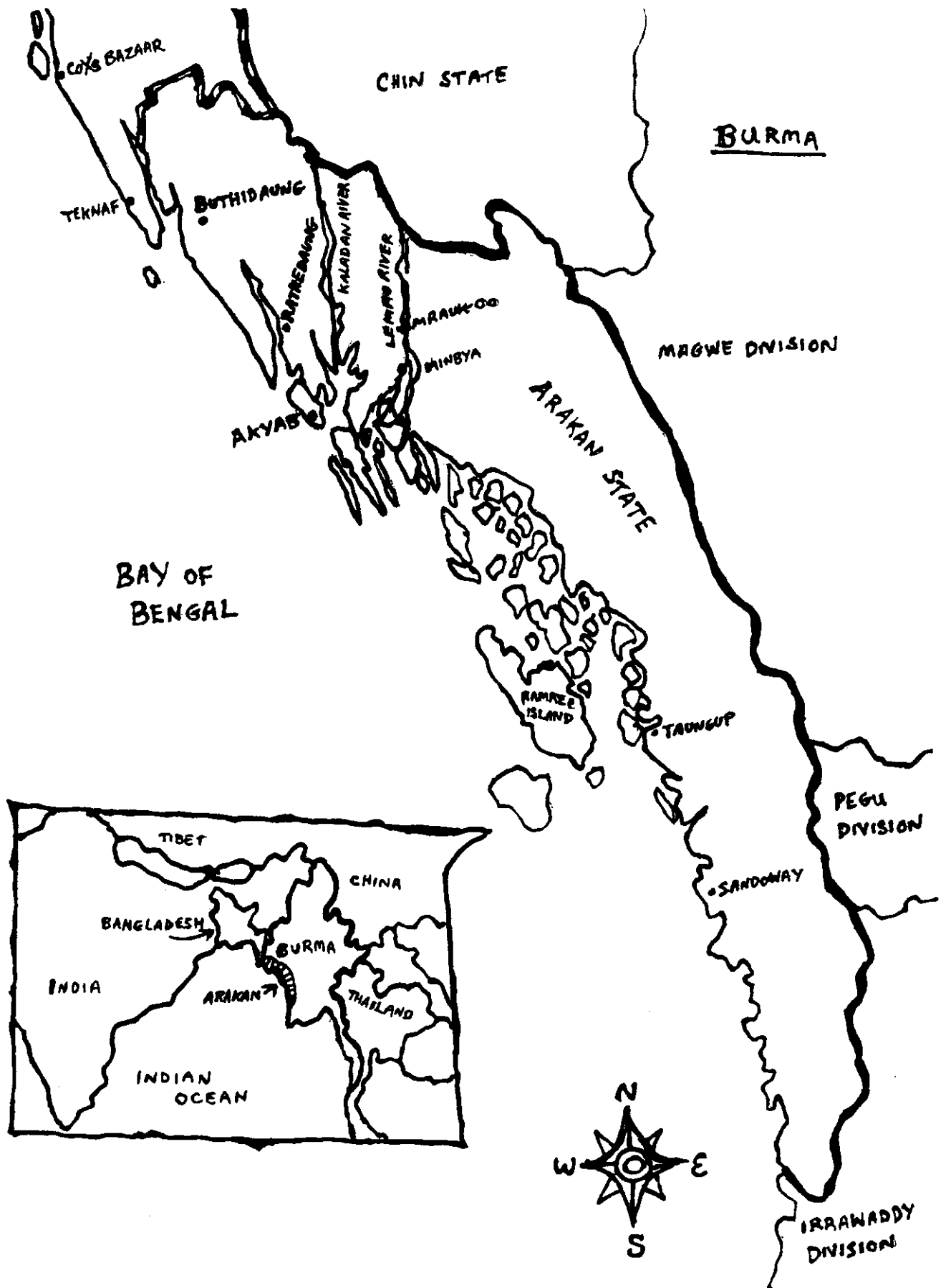
"OUR JOURNEY"

Voices from Arakan, western Burma



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Introduction

This report is a window into Arakan State, a region which has been held virtually incommunicado by Burma's ruling military. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the junta currently astride Burma, does not permit investigatory visits to Arakan by outside observers, and communications between Arakan and the rest of the country are poor even by Burmese standards. However, as is often so with "closed countries", there is an overflow of people from the captive state who are able to provide useful and timely information about conditions inside, based on their own experiences. In this report, thirty-two such people speak to the outside world about Arakan, in their own words.

The people interviewed for this report can for the most part be divided into two categories: activists and refugees. But on hearing their stories, it becomes apparent that almost every refugee is a past, present, or potential activist; and the activists, sheltering in another country (whether they admit it or not) are technically refugees. The interviews are ordered according to the ages of the respondents, from the oldest (61) to the youngest (13). Reading straight through them, one can see the mentality engendered by generations of conflict and political dissatisfaction in Arakan. The evolution of political consciousness in the individuals and groups can be traced. Common threads of political influences, underground organizing, setbacks, surrenders, and sacrifices, are apparent. In many cases, the pro-democracy uprising of 1988 was a pivotal event, and Arakan's participation in that movement is widely discussed.

The people of Arakan, (and one can use the term "Arakanese" for all of them, regardless of religion or ethnicity) tend to have a breadth of experience rarely found in such an isolated location. The Arakanese who break out of the regime's hold are often great journeyers, finding themselves in far-flung parts of Asia, learning and dreaming. Arakanese politics has room for intellectuals, adventurers, seafarers, some of the last surviving Marxists in the wild, mujihadeen trained in the Khyber Pass, and tribal rice-growers. The small sample of Arakanese men and women in this report includes a poet, a prizefighter, a Karate champion, a doctor, an ex Member of Parliament, a lawyer, a cross-border trader, an ex Burmese Army soldier, students and professors of Physics, Botany, and the Burmese language; plus several professional revolutionaries and a Buddhist monk.

Ethnic tension among the Arakanese is a reality, consisting of suspicion, jealousy and ignorance built up from conflicts in ancient history and compounded immeasurably by the persecutions of the military regime based in central Burma. The Rohingyas, a Moslem ethnic minority, consider themselves marked for obliteration by the Burmese regime, and suspect the Rakhine majority (Buddhist, like the central Burmese) of collaborating in such oppression. The Rakhine people believe themselves under threat of forced assimilation by the Burmese regime, and often lack understanding of Rohingya complaints. These tensions are not, however, insurmountable, and the 1988 democracy uprising evinced a strong level of cooperation between the two groups and with other ethnics such as the Mro, Khami, and Chakma tribal peoples of the hills.

The membership of current anti-government resistance groups tends to be segmented along ethnic lines: NUFA, the BCP, and the ABSDF are largely Rakhine with some tribal members in NUFA and BCP; while ARIF, RSO and several smaller groups are Rohingya. NUFA (National United Front of Arakan) was formed in 1988 as an alliance of resistance groups including the small but long-operating forces of the ALP (Arakan Liberation Party), AIO (Arakan Independence Organization) and ACP (Arakan Communist Party). The BCP (Burmese Communist Party) still exists in Arakan, although its large-scale national force and headquarters dissolved in 1989; the BCP is considered by some to be the only group currently mounting armed operations within Arakan State, although the BCP's minimal troop strength limits such actions. The ABSDF Arakan (All Burma Students' Democratic Front) is a branch of the students' organization which has become a fighting force in other areas of Burma since fleeing the cities during the SLORC's 1988 suppression of the democracy movement. The ABSDF Arakan is a small group, with no weapons, which presently concentrates on hand-to-mouth survival, and political education. The two main Rohingya groups, ARIF (Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front) and RSO (Rohingya Solidarity Organization) appear to be divided by leadership differences rather than any ideological schism. Both claim a substantial base of support from Rohingya exiles working overseas, and appear to have contacts with various Islamic groups abroad. ARIF and RSO appear politically and organizationally sophisticated. Their military operations in Arakan have been minimal, although this may change, given apparent overseas training of some Rohingya fighters.

The SLORC's activities in Arakan, as recounted by refugees, activists and others, appear to be part of what Amnesty International termed (in a 1988 report on other ethnic minority areas) "a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights", by the Burmese military. As in all regions of Burma, suspected dissidents are imprisoned, brutally beaten, tortured, and sometimes die while detained. The death of the Arakanese historian, U Tha Htun, is one such case recounted by the respondents. At least four of the respondents have close relatives who are imprisoned in Burma, with harsh sentences due to their family members' anti-government activism. While the level of actual insurgency in Arakan is minimal, the regime's efforts to flush out and destroy any elements of resistance have included constant abuse of local civilians. Entire villages, accused of giving help to rebels, are said to be destroyed, in Rakhine, tribal, and Rohingya areas. Even rumors of rebel activity lead to SLORC campaigns that displace and terrify Arakanese civilians. The Rohingya minority seems to be targeted particularly, perhaps because of a government perception of disloyalty on the part of the Moslems. The Rohingyas are reportedly severely restricted in their ability to travel, trade, and practice their religion. Refugees report widespread destruction of mosques, and sexual abuse of Moslem women, by the military. Of special concern is the recent military build-up in the Buthidaung area, where Rohingya and other civilians have reportedly been used as slave labor for the construction and maintenance of a series of new Army bases along the Bangladesh border. In Buthidaung, Rohingyas' homes and farms are said to have been confiscated for the new bases' land. To a large extent, the only alternative to life "on call" as slave labor for the military appears to be exile to Bangladesh. Some refugees recount being essentially told to leave the country by SLORC personnel.

The systematic abuse of an ethnic minority, with the end result of their fleeing to a neighboring country (thus clearing a border "security zone") has been seen elsewhere in Burma under military rule, notably in tribal regions of Kengtung Province. 1991's troop build-up in Buthidaung may successfully depopulate the area of Rohingyas, except for a work-force kept in the SLORC's "new village" labor camps. This, in turn may secure western Arakan for the SLORC's new economic ventures, including foreign concessions for oil and mineral exploration, and tropical timber extraction.

The interviews in this report were conducted in the weeks leading up to, and the week after, the cataclysmic cyclone that devastated southeastern Bangladesh on April 29, 1991. Most refugees from Arakan shelter in that part of Bangladesh, and some were badly affected by the storm's winds and tidal waves. It remains to be seen whether relief efforts for Bangladesh's storm victims will reach the refugees, who had been living on a narrow margin of survival even before it hit. Of interest are reports in Cox's Bazaar, a town in southeastern Bangladesh, that Buthidaung was also heavily affected by the cyclone's winds, with numerous deaths. One observer commented, "It stands to reason. Storms don't stop at borders." However, at the time, the SLORC's government-controlled media made no mention of any storm damage in Arakan, perhaps because any affected areas would have been the Rohingya "hells" of forced labor and abuse -- hardly a suitable place for visits by foreign relief teams. Whether or not the cyclone entered Arakan, the flow of Buthidaung refugees in March and April 1991 into a region of Bangladesh about to have its economic structure wrecked by the cyclone, provided a horrendous convergence of a human rights disaster with a natural catastrophe.

The Arakanese activists, both Moslem and Buddhist, enjoy speaking and writing about Arakan's illustrious past as an imperial maritime power, and speculating on the conflicts between Rakhines, Rohingyas, Bengalis, Burmese and British in eras past. However, when their attention is turned to Arakan's future, they often resort to the somewhat hollow phrase "armed struggle." Military action is often seen as a last resort, since 1988's best efforts were defeated. There appears to be little to no actual effort to build up armed resistance forces, or to unite the groups in a combined strategy to open up a "Western Front" or harass the SLORC's forces in Arakan. Most activists cite lack of money and weapons as the overwhelming obstacle to the commencement of operations. With an extremely optimistic perception of post Gulf War realities, many of the activists hoped that the United States would actively aid the resistance groups of Burma. Given the state of disarray which Burma's frontier rebels were in during the first half of 1991 (a quagmire at best, mass surrenders at worst), it is dubious that the United States military will come any closer to Arakan than the Marines doing cyclone relief work on the coast of Bangladesh. But the gains of Kurds and Eritreans (after decades of painful struggle) cannot help but inspire the Arakanese (fighting central Burmese administrations non-stop since World War II) to say, "If only..."

With Arakan at present utterly lacking in a military resistance role as Burma's Western Front, a beneficial outside influence is still possible. The international community can open up Arakan as new "human rights front." Much can be learned of the workings of the SLORC by observing their activities in Buthidaung, for instance. Such information is freely available to those who will make the trip to southeastern Bangladesh and take the time to speak with Arakan's human overflow. International pressure will only be kept on the SLORC regime, and increased, if the SLORC's abuse and exploitation of Burma continues to be revealed. The slave-camps, burned mosques, and political prisoners of Arakan have been hidden from the world's view for too long. The Arakanese have the courage and ability to reveal these things, and more, to anyone who will listen to them.

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"Our Journey"

Under the blow of the storm
We travel;
The waves are as high as the mountains,
And the day is so far as the sight.
The night is so dark,
And the cloud is so thick;
But some stars are shining soft,
And with the light of hope,
We travel.

-- Khai Htun
[ABSDF Arakan]

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The Burmese Relief Centre [PO Box 48, Chiangmai University, Chiangmai 50002, Thailand; fax 66-53-212-219] coordinates survival aid for Arakanese student dissidents in Bangladesh. There are also Bangladesh based groups coordinating relief for Rakhine and Rohingya cyclone victims and refugees; for more information, contact Project Maje. For information on Arakanese political prisoners, contact Amnesty International [Asia Research Dept., International Secretariat, 1 Easton, London WC1X 8DJ, UK]. For information on the SLORC's foreign investors, contact Burma Alert [R.R. 4, Shawville Que, JOX 2Y0, Canada].

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Purpose, Scope, Method

The thirty-two interviews contained in this report were conducted during April and May 1991, in Bangladesh. All interviews were conducted by the director of Project Maje. Many of the respondents spoke English, and translators were used for those who did not [their interviews are marked with a "T" at the beginning of their transcripts]. The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations: a port city, a seacoast town, a border village, a trading post, a jungle camp, etc. For their security, respondents' names are deleted in this report, except in cases where they maintain a high political profile and wished their names used. An initial set of questions established age, ethnic identity, and place of birth. The terms "Rakhine" and "Rohingya" are used throughout the report to refer to two main ethnic groups of Arakan. The Rakhines are a predominantly Buddhist ethnic group, who are in the majority in Arakan State, although they are a small minority in Bangladesh. The Rohingyas are a predominantly Moslem group, related to the Bengalis of Bangladesh and India; they are a minority in Arakan State but they form the bulk of refugees in Bangladesh. Roughly half of the respondents are Rakhine and half Rohingya, although no specific effort was made to obtain such a balance. A wide variety of political affiliations and occupations are represented in the report, but the interviews should not be taken to portray an actual quantitative political picture of Arakan. Some active political groups are not represented by an interview, and others are represented by several interviews. This does not mean that they are more or less active in the politics of Arakan.

This report is an overview of the people of Arakan -- refugees, activists, and others -- and their experience of the current political situation. The intention is to encourage interested persons from the international community to investigate Arakan further. It is hoped that journalists, human rights groups, relief organizations, government representatives and others will find background material in this report, and will realize that the Bangladesh/Burma border area shelters many interesting people with important stories to tell. Project Maje does not endorse or support any of the political groups mentioned in the report, and does not affirm the veracity of any of the respondents' replies. In particular, statistics quoted by respondents should not necessarily be considered correct.

Very little has been written about Arakan in recent decades. It is hoped that this report will help to change that by inspiring people to visit the border and find out more about this fascinating, tragic area. A exception to the general neglect has been the British journalist Martin Smith, who has visited and interviewed extensively. His articles in Cultural Survival Quarterly (Vol.13, No.4, 1989; US\$4.50 from CSQ, 53-A Church St., Cambridge MA 02138 USA) provide useful information on conflict in Arakan; and his forthcoming book, Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity (£16.20 from Zed Books Ltd., 57 Caledonian Rd., London N1 9BU, UK) is a valuable resource on Burma's turmoil, including Arakan.

For more information on Arakan (contacts, material from particular groups, etc.) contact Project Maje, 14 Dartmouth Rd., Cranford NJ 07016 USA. Project Maje is an independent information project founded in 1986 to encourage American awareness of the political situation in Burma, particularly the frontier war and related issues. This report is entirely the responsibility of the Project Director, Edith T. Mirante.

1) Male, aged 61; Rakhine activist; born in Minbya, Arakan.

Q: What is your name?

A: Khaing Pho Tun.

Q: What organization are you in?

A: Now I am a member of the Arakan Liberation Party, ALP.

Q: What is your position or rank?

A: Treasurer, Central Committee Member.

Q: How did you get involved in the movement?

A: My revolutionary history is rather long. At the end of Second World War, Burma struggled to get independence from England. General Aung San and our leader U Sein Da -- he was a monk -- were separated. U Sein Da did not accept the independence that Aung San accepted from the English. Because he said it was not real independence. And so we had to start fighting since June 1947. At that time there was British rule, Burma did not yet get Independence. At that time I joined the revolutionary army. I was only 17.

Q: What group was that?

A: People's Liberation League.

Q: When was the ALP formed?

A: 1964.

Q: Were you involved in 1964 with the ALP?

A: No, I have some special history. At first, after PLL, there was Arakan Communist Party. When PLL disappeared in about 1957 because our leader surrendered, I went to Rangoon and lived with my uncle and studied there and in 1968 I got my degree. My special subjects were economics, Western History, and mathematics. Then I joined government (civil) service, as a Cooperatives Officer. In 1974 they made the new Constitution. I didn't like this Constitution, so I went to the jungle again.

Q: Why didn't you like the 1974 Constitution?

A: Because this Constitution I think was more oppressive than the 1947 Constitution. Especially oppressive to our ethnic people. That is why I went to the jungle and joined the ACP. So when I was serving as an ACP member, the military government fought us for three years, very strongly with ten brigades. So all our members surrendered. Except me.

Q: How many members were there?

A: In the last surrender, I think over 90. I was left alone in the jungle. So I ran away to the Karen area. Across Burma proper. There I met with the ALP and joined them there in 1981. Since that time I have worked with them. Up to last October. Then I had to leave Wangkha [Karen base]. I had lived the whole period in Wangkha. Sometimes it was very dangerous. Since 1984 there was fierce fighting. Just now in the year 1989 they [Burmese Army] attacked Wangkha very strongly. So many times they fought. I stayed there with my comrades about one and a half years, and they attacked Wangkha very strongly about seven times.

Q: About how many were in the ALP force that you were with over there?

A: We had separate troops in the Mon area, some in Kachin area, most near Wangkha. If I add them all together, about 200.

Q: And what about on this western side?

A: At present there are no ALP troops. NUFA [National United Front of Arakan, an alliance including the ALP] has only a few troops.

Q: Why did you come back to the western side [Arakan border]?

A: For some revolutionary work. I am serving as the temporary General Secretary of NUFA. But before long I have to go back to that [eastern] side.

Q: What are your political aims for Burma and Arakan?

A: This alliance is my point of view. Countries have alliances such as NATO, Warsaw Pact. Even as the world has to live with companions, we have to live with companions. Separatism is out of date, I think. Arakanese separatism is out of date. So I want to live in a Federal Union. But, one thing we have to consider is

-- if Burmese, Burmans, take over Burma from us, then I will not accept Federation. But if they take advantage equally, I will live with the Burmans the whole long, long years.

Q: What about the political and economic system?

A: At present we have to use a free market policy.

Q: What do you think is the best way to move towards these goals?

A: We struggled to solve the problem politically for a long time. Repeatedly. More than two or three times, we have struggled to solve the problem on the table politically. But the Burmese government did not accept such kinds of solutions. They used Machiavellian politics. They will never accept our political solutions. We have to fight, until this government collapses.

Q: What kind of military strategy are you in favor of?

A: We have to use guerilla war system. Because we have not enough arms. In both the city and in jungle, I think.

Q: In Arakan in the past, with the many different revolutionary movements, has there been any action in cities or towns?

A: Not at present. But before, at the time of the PLL we could take almost the whole country [Arakan], 1951 and 1952. After 1957, some of our leaders surrendered. From that time on we had no strong army. We have to live in the jungle, where there is no big fighting, only guerilla actions.

Q: What is the situation in Arakan today?

A: It is very much worse. In Arakan almost all people are peasants, cultivators. There are some fishermen. But all of them cannot get their living. One problem is that communication is very difficult in our area. There is only water [transport] and no roads, no bridges. Very backward.

Q: What would you like the outside world to know about Arakan?

A: As I've said, they use Machiavellian policies. So we have no method to solve the problem peacefully. So in order to get political rights, ethnic rights, human rights, we have to fight. They will never set free the people. They will oppress us as long as they can. I believe they will never give authority to the people. They will cunningly hold power in their hands. Until the hold of the Army can be broken. So what we must do is fight as we can, and on the other hand we must break up the Army. I see these two ways. Only then can we solve the problem, the people can take power. So I want to shout to the whole world, please help us!

Q: What kind of help do you think the world should give?

A: If we get enough weapons, we can win. Weapons are the main problem. If we can get them, we can fight the military government. One thing I have to say is, Burmese, Burmans, are warlike people in our Union. Long, long ago, since the kings are ruling. They take power by fighting. They are very quarrelsome. In the past ages, we Arakanese also conquered them. Many times we conquered. At that time, sometimes we conquered, sometimes they conquered. At that time we had manpower -- we could get it from this side, Bangladesh. Our kings ruled the whole of Bangladesh up to Calcutta. Sometimes we occupied Calcutta. At that time we had manpower so we conquered Burmans. But at present we have no manpower. Lack of weapons, lack of finance. So we have to fight [in alliance] with other groups. If Arakanese are just like long ago, I would say, "Mon, Karen, Kachins, please sit down, and we will fight the Burmans."

2) Female, aged 60; Rohingya refugee; born in Bangladesh but family moved to Buthidaung, Arakan, when she was a child. T

Q: What village did you live in, in Burma?

A: Bazunchaung.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: Two months ago.

Q: What work did your family do in Burma?

A: We were farmers.

Q: Why did you decide to come to Bangladesh?

A: The [Burmese government] military took our house and animals and field. And the military killed people. The Burmese military took my husband. He was taken away and now he is under arrest. Three months ago, they took him.

Q: Are there more Tatmadaw [Burmese Army] in your area this year?

A: This year, 22,000 military came and occupied our place.

Q: Did many other people from your village come to Bangladesh?

A: About 1,000 came over here.

Q: If the military left, would you want to go back or stay here?

A: If we could live peacefully, I would want to go back to Burma.

Q: How does your family get its rice here in Bangladesh?

A: We have no rice of our own. We have no house. We are taking shelter in another house.

Q: When they cyclone came, did it cause any problems for you?

A: When the storm came, our house was completely destroyed. So we must sleep all crowded together. I never saw a storm like it before!

3) Male, aged 60; Rohingya refugee; born in Laweta village, Buthidaung, Arakan. T

Q: What work do you do?

A: I was a farmer.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: Only seven days ago.

Q: Why did you decide to come to Bangladesh?

A: Our lands and property have been confiscated to the new military cantonment. And at the same time, we always are taken for hard labor without any pay, so we can't survive if we stay there.

Q: Did you, yourself ever serve as forced labor?

A: Yes, we had to go there, once every two or three days, or alternating. But when we went, were were grouped together, about 100 or sometimes more. Someone from every family had to go at least once. And from my own family, usually I had to go.

Q: What kind of work did you do there?

A: All kinds of hard labor work, such as making the roads and digging the mud, and levelling the land and cutting the wood and sometimes we had to carry water for them.

Q: Did they provide the tools?

A: Every tool for work we had to bring by ourselves from our houses.

Q: Did they provide food and water?

A: No, they gave nothing.

Q: Did they give payment?

A: Nothing.

Q: When you did the work, how did they speak to you?

A: They never spoke quietly. They just treat us harshly.

Q: If someone was too tired or sick, what happened?

A: Whenever we are sick or tired, they will not treat us well, but they will just take a rod or branch or any kind of wood and beat us to make us work.

Q: Was there more labor this year than last year, or less?

A: This year it is more.

Q: Did you own land or property?

A: We had our own land, but now it's confiscated. I had about four acres of land.

Q: When they took the land, did they tell you where to live?

A: No.

Q: In your area were there any "new villages" started by the authorities?

A: They made a "new village", but we didn't want to go there. That's why most of the inhabitants have been leaving, some of them this way, some of them that way. They already tried to establish a new type of village.

Q: Why didn't you want to go there?

A: The main reason is that if we live there, we can easily be the victims of their hard labor. They can come and grab us whenever they like to. And if we deny them we will be beaten up or harrassed.

Q: In your community were the mosques able to operate freely?

A: No, we could not go, because they had destroyed three of the mosques in our area already.

Q: When they take people for labor, do they take the clergy?

A: Yes.

Q: In 1988 there were demonstrations in Arakan, what was your experience then?

A: There were difficulties but we didn't know very well what it was.

Q: When they had elections last year, did you vote?

A: Yes, I voted.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: Six.

Q: Are they in Burma or Bangladesh?

A: I brought them here.

Q: Do you think you or your children will go back to Burma?

A: If there is peace in Burma, then sure, I will go back.

4) Male, aged 60; Karen/Mon parentage activist operating in Arakan many years; born in the Irrawaddy Delta region of Burma.

Q: What is your name?

A: My name's Mr. Thaw Da.

Q: In your early days, how did you become involved in revolutionary activities?

A: My uncles took part in the Dobama Aseayone movement. When I was seven years old -- 1938 to 39, they were in it. So I became a sympathiser of their politics. I learned some political views from my elders. In 1946, when I was 16 years old, I became a sympathiser of the Communist Party. Before then, the Party had split. I took part in the student movement for Burma's independence.

Q: When you were a student, where were you studying, and what subject?

A: At first, I was originally Christian, so I learned in the American Baptist Mission school. Within the Second World War, I had no chance to study continuously. Then after 1945, I studied in Rangoon, at a private school. After 1946 and 47, our Red Flag Communist Party was declared illegal by the British Governor first, and second by Aung San's interim government. So we had to go underground.

Q: During that period, did you go underground with the Red Flag Party?

A: Yes, but at that time my responsibilities were semi-overground. I served as a runner and with students as a youth organizer. In 1950, the party took me into the underground and I served as office staff. In 1953 I became the private assistant of General Secretary Thakin Soe, up to 1971 when we sent Thakin Soe on the sacrifice peace mission to Rangoon.

Q: During that time, what area were you based in?

A: Our base area was mainly Pakkoku district, Myenbo district, the western side, the Arakan Range in the background.

Q: How did the Red Flag Communist Party (RFCP) develop?

A: In 1950 we put forth a slogan to promote unity between revolutionary forces. So we sent a peace mission to discuss with armed-conflict parties: Karens, People's Comrades Party, and CPB (Communist Party of Burma; BCP). So, generally speaking, we had relative unity of revolutionary forces since 1951. Then in 1956, the 20th Soviet Party Congress appeared and their political line entered our

country through the CPB. So between us and the CPB there were political differences appearing. Since that time our unity was not stable. In 1957, the Arakan People's Freedom Party -- the entire party -- and the People's Comrades Party -- the whole party -- and some one third or two thirds of the Karen National revolutionary forces, and some CPB, all surrendered. At that time our unity collapsed.

Q: When did the RFCP have its most members, and how many were there?

A: 1950, up to 1953, our strength was highest. At that time, nearly 8,000. But by 1956, our strength was only 3,000. After 1957, armed conflicts took place between our forces and the CPB. But for short periods. After that we could avoid contact. In 1963, we sat together with CPB, and in that meeting political differences in attitude towards Ne Win's government went up. They received Ne Win's government as a progressive one, as a socialist one, that can embark on the political revolutionary road. We didn't accept this opinion, this line. We criticised the Ne Win government as military-fascist, or feudalist.

Q: What happened in the 1970s with you and your party?

A: After 1967-68, Ne Win's government's operations were very strong, and very oppressive and brutal. We could not stand it. We had a plan to send our leader, Thakin Soe, as the sacrifice peace mission to overground. And the strong element, we retreated to Arakan in 1971.

Q: What is your analysis of the events of 1988?

A: We welcomed this democratic movement. We believed this movement would surely come one day. Our program is the capitalist path towards socialism, so our base must be democratic rights. Without democratic rights, any Communist Party cannot stand. So every time we have the chance, we agitate and propagate to organize a democratic movement against the military government. Ne Win's government is not socialist, it is feudalist, so it cannot help but breed a democratic movement.

Q: Did the way it ended surprise you?

A: We had no surprises. The Burmese political condition is very confused. The backbone's the Army. Without breaking the Army, we cannot topple down this Ne Win regime. For getting the Army to our side, we have only one way, the political. We cannot organize the Army by force. Only political means might separate it. For example, Second World War, it was in the sense of world political movements, a turning point. Fascism and capitalism and socialism clashed. The Burma Army origins then were the Thirty Comrades, who contacted the Japanese fascists. So their learned their strategy from Japanese fascism. And in 1946, with Aung San as leader, the Independence movement, which side did they take? They merged with the British Army, British Intelligence, all administrative organs. So the Burmese Army, brought forth by fascism, merges with the British system. And in 1948-49, they fought the Karen nationality. In this turning point they were also wrong. They committed counter-revolution. At that time the Burmese Army joined with CPB and Burma Revolutionary Rifles to fight Karen nationality and RFCP forces. In 1958, clashes within the ruling party, Ne Win's Army sided with conservatives. In 1962-63, it is ethnic problems, and the Burmese Army takes no side with ethnic rights -- the great Burma chauvinism. So they destroyed the federation-forming system with the 1962 military coup. Another turning point, 1988, the democratic movement. In which side did the Burmese Army stand? They didn't stand for democratic rights, they were the counter-revolutionary side. So, without smashing this military machine, we cannot build any democratic rights.

Q: The break-up of the CPB in northern Shan State, what's your analysis of this?

A: We have no contact with any sort of CPB since 1964. Especially since the Great Cultural Revolution of the Chinese Communist party, they made dangers for us. CPB became very strong. In Burma it was backed by the Chinese Communist Party, materially and "spiritually". They could "climb up the tall tree with ladders." Without ladders, they could not climb up, so their strength collapsed. Their strength was material, financial, not based on political, ideological strength. Facing some difficulty, they collapsed.

Q: What is the current situation of RFCP?

A: I strongly believe in the world democratic movement. No force can stop it. Now we have some forces overground, underground. Now we contact areas, our old areas, in the Delta and middle Burma.

Q: What is your analysis of the current situation in Arakan?

A: On the Arakan side there is only one need: leadership unity. Without it, this front cannot develop. They cannot organize their people, it is sure.

Q: What would you want the world to know about Burma?

A: Now Western attitudes to our Burma political movement, I think they are right. And the Soviet stance, in some parts, I think it is right. But China's relation with Burma, it is wrong. So I heard on BBC radio, the 27th celebration of Army Day, in March, the European Community countries and some other envoys boycotted it. But China and the Burmese government now are in economic and military facilities, for trade. This is very dangerous for us and the world, for democracy-loving people. It is historically the black spot for China's Communist Party and China's people.

5) Male, aged 57; Rohingya activist; born in Buthidaung, Arakan.

Q: What is your name?

A: Izhar Mian.

Q: When did you first get involved in politics?

A: In Burma I was elected as a Member of Parliament in 1956. Independent, from Buthidaung north constituency, at that time Akyab district. After that, I was in business.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: I came in 1969.

Q: Why did you decide to leave then?

A: Because so many oppressions were being done and some of our people were [arrest-]warrented by the [Burmese] government. Because the government blamed us as insurgents because we never accepted the Burmese Way to Socialism. So we crossed the border.

Q: Were you in any group then?

A: On this side, the Rohingya Independent Force, at that time, on the Bangladesh border. About 1982, I joined Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO)

Q: During 1988, were there demonstrations in Arakan?

A: We encouraged our people to join the democracy movement.

Q: What was your opinion of the election in 1990?

A: We encouraged our people to vote for the Human Rights party.

Q: Currently, is the situation in Arakan better or worse than before?

A: More and more worse than before. Our Rohingya people cannot practice religion freely. And forced labor and so many oppressions are being brought by this government, by the Tatmadaw.

Q: Is there a particular place where the forced labor is happening?

A: Maungdaw and Buthidaung, these areas.

Q: Currently, what's the refugee situation?

A: I think more and more refugees may be coming because the suppression is more and more. And without food, how can they live there?

Q: What is your future hope for Arakan?

A: I hope only that by our struggle we can do something. If our struggle fails, our Rohingyas will have no future.

Q: If things change, would you go back to Burma?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

6) Male, aged 57; Rakhine activist; born in Akyab, Arakan.

Q: What is your name?

A: Maung Maung.

Q: When did you first become involved in politics?

A: I've been involved for 21 years. At age 31, at that time I was a student of economics. In 1953, I came to Rangoon University, and after I'd studied one year, I was involved in the student movement. There was an underground BCP (Burmese Communist Party, same as CPB) group in Rangoon University. I became in contact with them. At first I was not a communist, I was anti-communist. I disliked communism. But when I came to Rangoon University, I found that the communist activists among the students were the most honest and self-sacrificing for the students. That is why I was impressed by them. I helped them in their activities. A cell organized me to become a Party member, and I accepted.

Q: After that, what were your activities?

A: Since then, I gave my life to this struggle. In 1963, peace talks between the government and our jungle forces [were held]. And after that, the anti-government mass movement, and the government suppressed the students, and I was expelled from school and I was chased after, so I fled to the jungle in 1964. From Rangoon I went to the Delta region of the CPB area. In 1966 I arrived in the Arakan area.

Q: What is your current position with BCP?

A: I am the Provincial Committee Member, Arakan region.

Q: Today, where is your Party headquarters?

A: My Party headquarters is at Matamuhari River, close to the Arakan border.

Q: Since the break-up of the BCP in Shan State national headquarters, do you have a national headquarters, or is it only regional?

A: Our headquarters is a regional headquarters, not national. It's only for Arakan.

Q: But since 1989 (BCP break-up) is there a national BCP headquarters?

A: The national headquarters, now it might be in China.

Q: Why do you think the break-up happened?

A: I think that it is in the Wa area, the [BCP] Army officers in this region became deteriorated, because they have their power and they weren't able to resist money and power. They became very selfish. That is my opinion. Because they are involved in the heroin trade and they got much money and they are well fed, and their morality became destroyed. That is why they were not able to stay within our party. Because our aims and their life are quite different.

Q: What are the aims of BCP Arakan?

A: Our aim is to abolish militarism in Burma. That is, to abolish the present military government, to establish any democratic government. It is not for our Party alone to take power. Any party supported by the people, we will agree with them.

Q: Do you have alliances with any other groups?

A: We have alliance with the student group, but we have no official connection with other groups in Arakan.

Q: How do you finance the BCP?

A: We are financed by ourselves. We have no external support. We try to get money from the people inside our country. Those of us who stay in Bangladesh, they farm.

Q: How many members does BCP Arakan have?

A: At present we have 60 Party Members. The fighting group, it is about 200.

Q: What is your weapons situation?

A: We have weapons that we obtained from 1948 to 1980. We got them from fighting with the enemy troops. We are equipped with these weapons.

Q: Your Party Members and soldiers come from which ethnic groups?

A: In our BCP, there are now two ethnic groups, Arakanese [Rakhine] and Kami [hill tribe].

Q: What is the current military situation in Arakan?

A: After the '88 movement, the whole [Burmese government] administration was bankrupt, and the dacoits and robbers spread all over the country. And the people were not able to carry on their livelihood peacefully. Cows, bullocks, were frequently stolen by the thieves. So when our men entered inside Arakan in 1989, we fought to control the dacoits. And the situation became stable. At present there are not many dacoits in our active area. But, from the beginning of April up to now, a large scale operation is going on, by the Burmese Army. It is spread from the east bank and the west bank [Kaladan River]. They use 232 Battalion, two columns; 233, two columns; 234, two columns; 34, one company; and 28th, one company. And commando platoons. Their aim is to catch anybody who struggles against them, to crush down. Even a man, or two men, or three men. They will crush down everything. But they do not get the real, exact news about our positions. So they are very worried now. And the high command, the western command, ordered the forces in operation that "you must get any insurgents, dead or alive. If anyone can get arms, ammunition or any man alive or dead, there will be a big bonus."

Q: Why do you think they're making this operation now?

A: They got some news from the villages that our men are there, that they had to guide our men to a further village. The enemy got this news. And they searched but they cannot find anything. So they are angry at the village and now this village was burned down. The village was Paung Rahat, a Mro [tribe] village.

Q: What are the most recent developments in Arakan?

A: We intercepted a Tatmadaw communication that says "The villages between Kyauktaw -- Mrauk-Oo motor road, Leimro River, are to be destroyed" that night, April 25th, "Especially Baukchaung, Paukpunkun, Kyirabrun, Kyiphruchaung, Leyinhundung, Chaungthaik, and Kragaing. The villagers are to be taken in escort to Teinnyo [military base]." It is from Western Division army command.

Q: Why did they make the operation in that area?

A: Because they got news from the Security Force #18 that in this area the insurgents are active.

Q: What ethnic groups lived in those villages?

A: They are all Arakanese [Rakhines].

Q: What does your Party want in the future for Arakan and Burma?

A: Our Party wants to stay within Burma, not to separate, that is our policy. We want to stay together with all the people in Burma. If the militarism can be abolished, then we can stay together.

Q: Economically, what do you want?

A: We think that socialism cannot be utilized at present. We have to follow individual economic freedom.

Q: What kind of military operations do your people do inside Burma?

A: At present our strength and their strength are comparatively very wide apart. So we have required some time to prepare our offensive. We are trying to familiarize the people and spread out our men all over.

Q: What do you want to tell the world about Arakan, Burma?

A: We want to tell the world that the people of Burma are now very much oppressed and they are suffering. So, any help the world can give is useful for all the Burmese people.

7) Male, aged 55; Rohingya refugee/activist; born in Buthidaung, Arakan.

Q: What is your occupation?
 A: Cultivator.
 Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?
 A: I came here in 1967.
 Q: Why did you leave Burma?
 A: The Ne Win government disliked us. They tortured the public, all kinds.
 Q: Did your family have any trouble with the Ne Win government?
 A: Yes, they took away all our ration books. Without rations, you could not live there. There was no explanation. They took them from every family.
 Q: Before you left, what was the religious situation?
 A: That government took over the Parliamentary government. In General Ne Win's administration, they tortured all the peoples.
 Q: Did you own land at that time?
 A: I had all kinds of land. But all were nationalized. Oppressions of all kinds -- economically, educationally. We could not trade freely from Rangoon and Akyab to Buthidaung.
 Q: Did you need special identity cards or documents?
 A: Yes, a "nationality card."
 Q: Were the mosques able to operate freely?
 A: They did not, there was no religious freedom.
 Q: Could you get Islamic literature?
 A: The government banned the Islamic books.
 Q: Where you allowed to make the Haj?
 A: Only the last two years it is allowed. Before that it was closed for anyone to go on the Haj.
 Q: What was your opinion on the 1988 movement?
 A: We are all for helping democratic parties.
 Q: What do you hope for the future for Arakan?
 A: That we will get freedom.
 Q: Do you have children?
 A: Yes, four boys, three girls. They take their education here on the Bangladesh side.
 Q: Would they ever go back to Burma?
 A: Yes, if I went.
 Q: Would you like to go back to Burma?
 A: Yes, it is my native place. I've stayed in Bangladesh for sheltering.
 Q: When you came in 1967, were many people coming from Burma at that time?
 A: Yes, many people. About 10,000.
 Q: Today, do people still cross over?
 A: Yes, in this area [Teknaf region] people say about 3,000 came during this month [April 1991].

8) Male, aged "about 50"; Rohingya refugee; born in Bazunchaung village, Buthidaung, Arakan. T

Q: What is your occupation?
 A: Farmer.
 Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?
 A: About twelve days ago.
 Q: Why did you decide to leave Burma?
 A: The main reason is that it is very difficult for our existence there, because every day we had to go for hard labor, as porters and sometimes the [Burmese Army] soldiers just come and demand rations, food, as they like. And

sometimes they just make us do work for them, so we have no time for our own work. So it is too difficult for our own survival to stay any longer.

Q: Is this a new situation?

A: Only recently, it became worse than before. It started last Spring. They demanded our hard labor so we had not enough time to reap our paddy and we lost it [rice crop]. And they wanted to build some buildings on our farmland, so we lost everything.

Q: Did you own some land?

A: About four acres of land. Even with the signature [title deed] the authorities took it. We did not know whether it was to sell or just to give them as a present, but we just had to sign it away on the paper.

Q: Did they give you any payment?

A: No.

Q: Did you, yourself do forced labor?

A: Almost every day. I went a lot. I had no time to work for my own house, my own family. One example of their harassment is, when I was going to the market, with some money in my shirt pocket, the military officers met us, and they just took away the money from my pocket. And they asked the question, "Whose money is this?" And I said, "This is my money." The soldiers said, "Where is your name on this money? Do you see any name on this money?" I said, "No, there is no name..." "So you must know that this is the government's money, here it says, the Bank of Burma, and so on. So this is our money!" And they took it away just like that.

Q: When they take people for the forced labor, do they take all kinds of people?

A: They usually collect all the different religions, from all the village tracts, so sometimes there are thousands.

Q: Is there a certain age they take?

A: They left children and the old ones. The youth and able persons they use.

Q: Do they take women to work?

A: Usually they do not call the women. But when there is no male laborer in their house, then they usually take the women, but not to the working fields. They kept the women under the control of the Maintenance Committee as tokens [hostages].

Q: Were clergy taken?

A: They usually call all persons, including the religious leaders and when they objected, they would reply, "Oh, for the government there are no religious leaders or other leaders, and we have no segregation, so all men have to work, equally."

Q: In your area, were the mosques able to operate freely?

A: As of now, they have burned down and destroyed most of the mosques. Now we have constructed some new, makeshift ones near the village.

Q: Are there more government soldiers in your area this year?

A: More than before. Too many.

A: How did they speak to you?

A: Not polite.

Q: The Moslem women, are the soldiers polite to them?

A: Whenever they see the Moslem girls, they will ask some questions and talk to them. If the girls are alone, single, no husband, they will usually take them to their area, after three or four hours they are sent back.

Q: In 1988, did you have any experience about the demonstrations in Arakan?

A: Yes, I took part in it.

Q: Last year, did you vote in the election?

A: Yes, I voted for the Human Rights party.

Q: What is your hope for the future in Arakan, Burma?

A: I don't know about what can happen in the future. But I think there will be some trouble.

9) Male, aged 46; Rohingya activist; born in Buthidaung, Arakan.

Q: What is your name?

A: Mohammed Zakariya.

Q: What is your profession?

A: When I was in Burma I was a botany professor at Mandalay University.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: In 1976, January.

Q: Why did you leave Burma then?

A: Because I was dismissed from the job under suspicion. Without showing any reason. Then the Intelligence Department tried to arrest me. So, knowing that, I crossed over to this border. They were thinking that I was involved in insurgency. But actually it was not yet so. My involvement was after crossing here.

Q: How did you become involved politically?

A: Directly, I joined the movement. At that time there was the Rohingya Patriotic Front.

Q: During 1988, the demonstrations, what was your response?

A: We were participating in the movement, we directed our people to participate there -- if at least we are getting democracy there, then we are achieving some of our rights. And one of the parties which we were supporting succeeded in the [1990] election also. We Rohingyas had our own party, the Human Rights Party. This was the party we were backing, and some were participating with the NLD [National League for Democracy] also. All of them were elected. But they now are concealing themselves there, because they are to be arrested by the authorities. Hiding themselves.

Q: What is the current situation in Arakan?

A: The situation in Arakan is quite different from that [elsewhere] in Burma, but everywhere the situation is not good. In Arakan it's just like imprisonment, because people have to stay in their own villages, without moving here and there, at the mercy of the Army.

Q: Are Rohingya people able to travel in Burma?

A: Under restrictions. By bribing the authorities, they can move.

Q: Are they allowed to make the Haj?

A: They [government] have given permission two, three, four years back, but it is not [real]. Just to show the outside world. These are their men, just to detect the Moslem movements there. They are sending them to detect the insurgent movements. Anyone able to bring information regarding this, they are permitted to go there. To serve their purpose.

Q: Is Islamic literature available in Arakan?

A: Not available. Not permitted to publish.

Q: Have the refugees coming to Bangladesh increased in 1991?

A: Yes, it is quite a sizeable increase. At present in Buthidaung side, seven or eight villages are uprooted now. And those people are coming here, this present refugee influx. We met 50 to 70 families. In one place, 20, in another place 10, another place, 13, this way. But according to them, 700 families have already moved to cross over the border.

Q: How many in one month, altogether?

A: In this month, six or seven thousand people.

Q: Have Rohingyas settled overseas?

A: I think the total Rohingya population is three million. Half of them have already left the country. Outside Burma, they are in Pakistan, India, .

Middle East, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. They are illegally living everywhere. Not any documents. Hiding, but the governments know, these are from Burma, they are living in this quarter, but they are not giving disturbances.

Q: What kind of work do they do?

A: Laboring, tailoring.

Q: What do you hope for in the future for Arakan and Burma?

A: At present we cannot guess exactly. It depends on the global situation. We could not live peacefully, so we left the country. Living and hoping for freedom. But to our thinking, unless the global situation [influences Burma], we have no good future.

Q: Would you ever go back to Burma?

A: If the situation was good.

Q: What is your message to the outside world about Burma, Arakan?

A: My message is just for the safety of these people, the international bodies should come here and take some steps to save these people. Because their life, property and dignity is no longer safe. Unless the world is coming to visit. And the situation should be assessed very well from here.

10) Male, aged 43; Rohingya refugee; born Kyauktaw, Arakan. T

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: 1980.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: I came here because the Burmese government oppressed the Moslem people there.

Q: What did the government do?

A: For us, one example is the confiscation of lands and farms. They accused me that I was involved in politics as a sympathiser and organizer. We organized ourselves, each other. I was the leader of our group at that time.

Q: Were mosques allowed to operate freely then?

A: The government officials and police usually inquired about their activities, because they heard rumors that they were organizing for politics.

A: Were Islamic books available?

A: No, it was very rare. The Burmese government had their segregation to the other religions, so they just banned all our religious activity.

Q: When they confiscated the land, the farm, did they give you any reason?

A: They gave the reason that the ones who oppose the government and have anti-government activities, should [have their land] confiscated and grabbed by the government. For this only reason, they just took away my belongings and property.

Q: Did they give you any compensation?

A: No.

Q: Did you come to Bangladesh right after that?

A: At first I tried, from Maungdaw, the border area, to regain my property, but it was hopeless and I was afraid there would be more oppression and later it would be dangerous for me, so I just fled to this side.

Q: Did other people in your political group have problems?

A: The same, some even worse. Some fled to the Thai border side, some to Pakistan, some to India, and some went to Saudi Arabia. They fled away.

Q: While you were in Burma, did you have to register about your religion?

A: Whenever we had to fill out a form, we had to fill out all the background history, religion, race and property and other related matters.

Q: What was your opinion about the 1988 movement?

A: If we have democracy it will be much better than before.

Q: What do you hope for in the future?

A: I have my determination that if somebody, some group or party, was honest enough to work for the country and everybody, I'm ready to join such a party

or group. As well as, if they have democracy and prosperity in Burma, and freedom of religion, I am determined to go back there. I don't want to stay here any longer. I am sure I would go back.

11) Male, aged 43; Rohingya activist; born in Arakan.

Q: What is your name?

A: Nurul Islam.

Q: When did you become involved in politics?

A: Our people have long been oppressed at the hands of different Burmese regimes. 1948 is my birthdate. Even from 1942, and most definitely 1948, the year Burma got independence. So we have become conscious of our duties and responsibilities, by dint of the situation which has been prevailing throughout our life. When I was a student in high school, we were taking an interest in politics, especially. We have seen before our own eyes how our fathers and mothers and our sisters are getting killed and dishonored, oppressed and repressed, and how we have been kicked out, how we have been treated. It creates a subconsciousness in our mind. We cannot stay aloof from the situation. After matriculation, I had been to University and I was a law student. At that time we had a Rohingya Students' Association, in which I worked in the capacity of President. At the same time we were organizing for the underground movement also. After graduation I did my chamber-practice, but after completing that I didn't get much time to practice law. I went into the jungles. Because we believed that was the only way. There was no other way out for us, the armed struggle is the only way.

Q: When was that?

A: That was in the year 1975.

Q: Did you join an armed group?

A: Yes. Mr. Jaffar Habib, he was President of the Rohingya Patriotic Front. I was the Vice President there at that time.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: Actually we have not come to Bangladesh. We are in the jungles. This is not that we are here. We are taking shelter.

Q: What are the aims of [your group] Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF)?

A: Basically, we are an indigenous ethnic group of Burma. We believe we have every right to self-determination and self-identification, at par with other nations of the country. And that's why we want a very strong democratic welfare state of Burma, in which peace and tranquility will prevail perpetually. And where all nationalities, irrespective of their religion, belief and creed and culture, enjoy their rights under federalism. This is one point to be stressed: Burma is a multi-national State. Many peoples live in it. This is a place where various streams of culture and civilization have joined together. Just like a garden where many flowers grow. And this is the beauty of the country. To be different, to have different cultures. But unfortunately, that democracy which has been promised the nationalities in the 1947 minorities' Panglong Conference, was undermined. Both in the parliamentary government led by U Nu, and by the following military regimes, Ne Win and Saw Maung, all this time they are jackbooting the spirit. That is why the problems today prevail. We believe that unless this is based on genuine federalism, giving the equal rights and privileges, including we the

Rohingyas, otherwise peace will never come to Burma. The Rohingya community especially, we are the worst-affected group among all nationals of the country. Although we were once the rulers of Arakan, before we have been dominated, captured, invaded, by the Burmese in 1784, we had been an independent nation. In utter disregard of our glorious past, the government together with some narrow-minded communal-ists [divisive ethnic politics], they are now giving the slogan in the country "to drive out the Rohingya people to the last man". That means they want to kill our people from Arakan. If that type of communalist feeling prevails in the country, exercised or encouraged by the State, there will never come peace in the country.

Q: Does ARIF have alliances with other groups?

A: We are a people who have been kicked out. Neglected. Both by the successive regimes of Burma and at the same time, through their effective misleading propaganda, even by our sister communities who are living in Burma. At the beginning of forming of NDF [National Democratic Front] we tried our level best to get membership there. But we have been rejected. By those who are fighting against the government with whom we are fighting as well. The similar case is with DAB [Democratic Alliance of Burma]. On my recent visit to Manerplaw [DAB headquarters, Thailand-Burma border], I made the written application again, giving past references, past endeavors, to get membership there. Everybody accepted but our sister community, with whom we are living together, drinking the same water, this is the Rakhine community. There are two [Rakhine] representatives living there and they objected to our cause. And thereby we were not able to get membership. Anyway, we want better cooperation. We uphold the principle of peaceful coexistence among all people of the country. Whether he's a Buddhist, whether he's a Christian, with respect for their religious belief. And we want to fight the enemy, and to share and share alike. And build this country to be a prosperous country. And we have a history that we have contributed many valuable services for the well-being of the people of Burma.

Q: Are the differences among Rohingya groups due to ideology, leadership, or what?

A: I don't think the difference is really on ideological grounds. What I think is, there are some people who are not very much aware of the present developments in Burma and the development process of our movement. Because there are by this time in Arakan among the Rohingya groups, two main organizations, ourself -- ARIF, and the other is RSO [Rohingya Solidarity Organization]. Although the RSO is seriously giving their program for Islam-izing the region, even then the main difference is, there were another two organizations before, one is Rohingya Patriotic Front and the other is the RSO -- at that time I was president of RSO. After the death of Mr. Jaffar, unity was longed for among our people. To get that, myself and Zakir Hussein, RSO and RPF, we agreed to make a single broad-based organization [ARIF]. But that was not accepted by some of our brothers, especially brother Dr. Mohammed Yunis, who was the vice president, and he remained with a faction of RSO.

Q: What is ARIF's current membership?

A: Thousands upon thousands. In every nook and cranny of Arakan. And abroad, wherever our people are sheltering, especially in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates. Even Thailand, Malaysia.

Q: What is your financial base?

A: Mainly our financial base is our people's contributions.

Q: What was your response to the movement in 1988?

A: We were very happily responding to the situation at that time. Because there was a peculiarly important reason, for us. For a long time, right from 1948, there were internal disturbances. From the ethnic groups. Not from any Burmans. The Burmans until now remained as the prime nation, where they treat the others as subnations. Because they think they have got exclusive ownership for Burma. But in 1988, that idea was changed. By dint of the oppression -- the fact that

the military even oppressed their own people, the Burmans. Burmans got killed. And Burmans began to recognize the struggle of the national minorities. Even today, you see the coalition government, and the students -- most of these are Burmans -- they are getting shelter with whom? If the Karens and Manerplaw is not in existence, they cannot form their government, they cannot propagate, and will never get any arms. So that is a very wonderful point. For us, this democracy [movement], this was such a time, the struggle was becoming very [mature]. To understand one another. For example, for the Burmans to know their compatriots. For the compatriots to convince the Burman people. That's why we supported the democracy movement.

Q: What is the current situation in Arakan?

A: The real problems of the Rohingya people. Since the Independence of Burma, successive Burmese regimes have been pursuing the policy of Burmanization. This Burmanization through cultural assimilation. They thought that within 50 years they could make the whole of Burma a country with one culture, same similar type. But in Arakan they found our people a stumbling block. A hard nut to crack. In the way of their assimilation of the region. Because we, as Moslems, the Islam demands some sacrifice from us. If we are going to retain it, we cannot be easily put into the Burman melting pot. So when they saw it is not possible for them to assimilate, to Burmanize us, that's why they have adopted for us a national policy of exterminating our people til the last one. But this is not applicable to other communities. Suppose, the Rakhine community. The Burmans do not feel much difference between the Rakhine and the Burmans. The culture's the same, the language almost the same, the physical features about the same. So that is why we have been subjected to the armed operations. This is their policy. This present day ongoing oppression is the continuation of the project, plan. Saw Maung's is a military government, they are not answerable to anybody. Not to the Constitution or the law. So they take the law into their own hands. Recently the government [sent] forces in the Buthidaung area, and uprooted many Rohingya villages and depopulated them and destroyed many mosques, religious institutions. And rape, murder, looting, dacoitry, arson, these are daily events in Arakan. And that is why unofficial refugees are now "infiltrating" to Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government says they are not refugees, they are "infiltrators". That they are not like those of the 1970s. So the people are afraid to show themselves. So they are infiltrating stealthily. If it continues, the problem will be much greater. So the international community should take serious concern about this matter, including the United Nations. The worst thing is that, unfortunately, the Burmese regime is accusing us of being illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Despite the facts of history that we ruled their country. In history you will see everything centered in Arakan, around the Moslems and Islam.

Q: What is the current level of refugees coming to Bangladesh?

A: This is very difficult unless our people here are allowed to take census, and I don't think that is possible. Approximately the number that recently crossed to Bangladesh, maybe some thousands. In addition, we have an idea that some hundreds of thousands of [Rohingya] people are already in Bangladesh.

Q: Do the refugees stay in camps?

A: No. It was so in 1978. After 1978, there is no shelter in the shape of camps. The massive drive started since 1948, since Burma's Independence. These oppressions one after another, resulting in the exodus to Bangladesh, which then was East Pakistan. These people came here, naturally they're looking for a greener pasture, and followed the road up to India, or Pakistan. And some from Pakistan by boat to United Arab Emirates, and then Saudi Arabia. The most serious was in 1978, at that point it became internationalized.

Q: What would you want to tell the outside world?

A: The present military regime is an illegal regime, because they're suppressing the popular will of the people. And they're killing the student community and killing their Burman people, just to retain the power illegally. It cannot be called a government and State. Rather, they're bandits. The bandits should not be

encouraged, but should be arrested, well in time. By the international community. By the civilized nations of the world. If there is really to be peace in the world -- peace will never visit and peace will never prevail if the international community allows this present government to perpetrate its banditry. So we appeal to the international people, the United Nations and human rights organizations, to pressure the Burmese government effectively. And at the same time, to make available both moral and material help to those fighting against this autocratic regime, before it is too late. I would like to appeal to the international people to extend their helping hands to the people of Burma, the multi-national people of Burma, to make it a prosperous welfare state on the basis of federalism, where peace will prevail forever. At the same time, the Rohingya people, who have long been deprived of their rights and freedom, who have long been left out from the State affairs, from the very beginning up to now -- their rights and privileges should be well-guaranteed, at par with other nations of the country. In recognition of the right to self-determination and self-identification. As for ARIF, we believe that the armed struggle is the only way to liberate our people, and to bring good to the people of Burma, so we appeal for material help to the world.

12) Female, aged 42; Rakhine cross-border trader; born in Cox's Bazaar (Bangladesh) but lived in Arakan for 30 years. T

Q: What work do you do?

A: Trading.

Q: When was the last time you went to Burma?

A: About March 25th (this year).

Q: How long did you stay over there?

A: About seventy days.

Q: What places did you go to?

A: I stayed in Rangoon most of the time, but on the way I had to stop on the road for some time.

Q: How did you get to Rangoon?

A: When I went there, first from here [southeastern Bangladesh] to Akyab, and from Akyab to Taungup, I got on a boat, a launch. Then to Rangoon by car.

Q: When you're travelling, how is it with the authorities?

A: It's easy.

Q: Did you have to pay tax on the way?

A: If you have baggage, you have to pay. But if you are alone, without anything, it's not necessary to pay.

Q: And when you're coming back?

A: On my way back, also it's not difficult. We had to weigh all our goods and packages, and pay money according to the weight. After giving money according to the regulations, we just give them [the goods] to the transport and then we'll get all our things in Taungup again and put them on the launch or steamer.

Q: The taxes, have they gone up or down in the last couple of years?

A: Now it's very much different than the last two or three years, because now it's very much higher. We have to deal with the authorities more, especially this time. Sometimes they are unjustified, they demand some extra "tips". So we have to deal with them, sometimes by presenting beer or drinks, we have to give gifts.

Q: Are the authorities polite to you?

A: Not too polite, but not too rude. They just indirectly ask for the bribes. When we met them, this is not the high authorities, but the second or third grade authorities, as go-betweens. And he explains, "Oh, if you confront our superior,

it will be very difficult. I will make peace between you and your group, and the authorities. So please arrange the tins of beer and everything, so it will be OK." For bribes. From our side, we must not be rude, just to request politely, because we have our business.

Q: Do you usually deal with the same authorities?

A: Yes. But this time I had one difficulty on the checkpoint near Maungdaw, when our goods were loaded on the bus. At the checkpoint they asked for some "tips". Usually they ask for some, but this time, when they saw some expensive clothing and other materials, they demanded extra money. About 500 kyat, something like that. They wanted to examine all the goods thoroughly. But I didn't want to let them see all the material I had brought, so I had to give them more money than before.

Q: What kinds of things were you bringing in?

A: Not too much this time, I went in alone, only six bottles of Horlick's [malted drink mix].

Q: How much does a bottle of Horlick's cost on this side of the border?

A: In Bangladesh, one bottle is 82 takas. And when I sell it in Burma, it's 184 kyat.

[Exchange rate for border trade was 100 takas to 180 kyats at that time]

Q: Coming out of Burma this time, what kinds of things did you bring?

A: This time I brought a variety: longyi [sarongs] for men and women, and some bedsheets, bone carvings, leather bags.

Q: What did the men's longyis cost on the Burma side?

A: 125 kyat each.

Q: On the Bangladesh side?

A: 90 takas.

Q: The women's longyis on the Burma side?

A: We bought them for 120 kyat, but selling for 160 taka, they are special -- the "Aung San Suu Kyi style" -- with embroidery.

Q: What did the bedsheets cost?

A: Double sheets, buying in Burma, cost 360 kyat, and now selling in Bangladesh at 350 takas per piece.

Q: The leather handbags cost?

A: We bought a variety, some 140 kyat each and selling for 130 takas, some 120 kyats and selling here for 110 or 115.

Q: Where are the men's longyis made?

A: Made in Burma.

Q: And where are the women's longyis made?

A: Also Burma, but the bedsheets are made in China and come through the China border.

Q: Where do the bone carvings come from?

A: They collect bone from all over Burma, and when they order a kind of design, the craftsmen and factories are in Mandalay. Usually crafts and such kind of work is done in Mandalay.

Q: This is bone from what animals?

A: I don't know, mostly buffalo and cows' bones. But some of the small pieces, more finely detailed, it looks like goat.

Q: Do they have the same kind of thing made from elephant ivory?

A: Yes, that's right, but it's too much expensive. Just mostly for the export quality through the official level. These bone carvings are a low-priced craft.

Q: When you were in Akyab, how much did a tin of rice cost?

A: Six kyats per share -- 400 grams, a little less than a kilo.

Q: Has that price gone up or down?

A: It's coming up. Now there are rumors that there will be more [price] increases before long in Arakan.

Q: What does tea cost there now?

A: In price, most of the commodities, tea and everything, has been increased, unlimitedly.

Q: If you buy drinking glasses in Burma, where are they made?

A: Mostly from China.

Q: What about [enamel] metal dishes?

A: The same, from China.

Q: Where do the radios come from?

A: I think such kind of things are from the Thai border.

Q: Blankets?

A: Most of the blankets are made in Burma. But some, especially with nice designs and very beautiful ones, come from China.

Q: Slippers [sandals]?

A: Some of the leather slippers are made in Burma, and the rubber slippers are usually from Thailand and China.

Q: Are there any things from India or Bangladesh that go into Burma?

A: I usually don't notice things from India and Bangladesh, but this time when I went there [Burma] I saw some milk powder, Red Cow, so I wondered if it was from Bangladesh.

Q: The things from Thailand, are they good quality or not?

A: Most of the products from Thailand have high prices. And when it was 100 kyats before, now it's 200 or 250. Sport shirts, jeans, other things. Usually they are the best quality. They are much more expensive than last year. Even in weeks and day by day they change the prices.

Q: Are the goods from China high or low quality?

A: From China, the quality is also good, and the price is also increasing. But the main problem is -- most of the foreign products are good although the price is high -- but in Burma they made some imitations. Sometimes they make imitations of Thai products, sometimes of Chinese products. So usually the people get not the genuine one.

Q: When you were in Arakan, did you notice how the authorities were behaving to the local people?

A: Yes, when I came along the way, I saw on television, "Everything is alright". But with the local people there are some little rumors. But we just kept to ourselves.

13) Male, aged 42; Rakhine activist; born in Akyab, Arakan.

Q: How old were you when you got involved in politics?

A: At that time I was 22.

Q: How did you get involved?

A: As I was a university student, we studied our history and nationalism was rising since I was in class 8, in Akyab. Since that period our national spirit was gradually growing up. So during university life, even though I was a medical student, I was an activist like an Arts and Science student. Active in our cultural movement, literature movement, and social movement also. Since then we formed up an underground nucleus in 1968 -- that is ARF, Arakan Revolutionary Force. Led by Major Son Kyaw Tun. In Mandalay University and Bassein College, we formed up nucleus there, and after that, February 17th, we gave up our university life and went into the underground, to Kachin-land. In the university period we had contact with the Kachin underground. Their independence strategy, we are also the same, so our contact was very well positioned with them. We reached the Kachin revolutionary area on 3rd March 1970. Then we prepared for recruiting.

On May 20, 1970, we formed AIO (Arakan Independence Organization). AIO was now arranged to form up an army. After that we took training in northern Shan State [Kachin Independence Organization] 1st Brigade area. At the end of '70, we went up to northern Kachin State, and we spent one year there, practicing field experience. The first week of November, 1971, we came down to our fatherland, Arakan, reaching it at the end of February 1972. I stayed in Arakan about nine months, and then had to come to Bangladesh.

Q: What was the Arakan cultural and literary movement?

A: The cultural movement, that was during our university life. That was participating in traditional dances. We mobilized our female and male students to participate in the cultural movement, like Rakhine drumming, and female group dancing.

Q: How did that relate to the political movement?

A: From the cultural movement, gradually our spirit became political. From this very beginning, we felt ourselves a nation in history. An independent country in history, annexed in 1784 by the Burmese forces, then we became a colony. During that period, the Burmese forces killed lots of Arakanese people, and they carried the Maha Muni statue to Mandalay. They killed and they ruled very brutally in Burma for forty years, then in 1824 the British and Burma began the First Anglo-Burmese War. During that forty years, the Arakanese people did not sleep idly. Bo Kyaw Twe, he was the first resistance leader of our Arakan people. But in 1785, Mrauk-Oo fell under the Burmese forces. Then Bo Chaun Byan, "King Bering", was a revolutionary leader. But at the end of 1784, our sovereignty and independence were lost, our kingdom lost.

Q: During 1988, what was the situation in Arakan?

A: The Arakan situation was very tense. During the 1988 democracy movement, in Arakan, the entire Arakanese people were involved, mainly based on national spirit. So our people also understood that democratic movement is the main aim, the basic necessity for our national movement. That's why it was our duty to participate in the democratic movement, consciously.

Q: What response did the government have?

A: During August [1988], the student-led democracy movement, and also former political leaders were involved in this mass movement. And also the intellectual people. In our Arakan side, especially Akyab, the BSPP [Burma Socialist Program Party] members voluntarily resigned their party membership. And they claimed they supported this democracy movement, they joined the people. Not secretly, but in public meetings, they declared it and tore up their [BSPP] membership cards. The military also, at that time, said, "OK - but don't do destructive action. You can be in the democracy movement, processions, no problem. But don't destroy national property." And the demonstrators followed their request, so no clash between the Army and the public in Akyab. In September, demonstrations were also going on, but they declared martial law from September 18th. A curfew order and no gatherings allowed.

Q: What was the situation in Arakan last year during the election period?

A: Most of the intellectual people, they were involved in the political movement. Especially Arakanese people from Rangoon. The most familiar organization is ALD (Arakan League for Democracy). Because people from all parts of Arakan who lived in Rangoon organized the ALD. So this group was broader than the others. And by just hearing the name, the people in Arakan supported the ALD. That was their national spirit, I think. They were always politically conscious under the dictatorship rule, they had to hide their feelings. So even without organizing the people, the ALD won the majority of seats. The second majority was NLD [National League for Democracy, overwhelming winner throughout Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi's party]. The NLD won about nine seats in Arakan, I think, the ALD won fourteen.

Q: During the election period, what was the military government's response?

A: There was a very popularly well-known person, an "Arakanese Burmese pundit", U Tha Htun. He was very well-known in Arakan, and also in Burma and to foreign scholars. He was the only Arakanese [Rakhine] historian, a prominent figure of our nation. So when he joined ALD, everybody gave him respect. Any patriots, like me, had been under the training of U Tha Htun. He explained and taught us very sensitively. And he stood from constituency #2 from Kyauktaw township, as the ALD candidate. The NUP [National Unity Party; government associated] candidate was Brigadier General Saw Phru. He is also Arakanese [Rakhine]. Ex Air Force Vice Marshall, I think. A few days before the election, U Tha Htun was arrested. That is a political conspiracy. They charged him when he gave a speech, explaining the history. The SLORC [State Law and Order Restoration Council; junta] charged him with "making disintegration of the Union." He was tried and given three years vigorous imprisonment [at hard labor].

Q: How old was he?

A: He was 82. At that place, the Mro Nationality Party, one candidate stood also. U Tha Htun was arrested and Brigadier Saw Phru thought if the ALD candidate was arrested, he must win. But the Arakanese people all gave the votes to the Mro party. So the Mro candidate won. Then on August 14, 1990, U Tha Htun died in prison. He was sent to hospital for post mortem, but they were saying nothing. Just after he expired, a few minutes after death, his complexion changed to blackish. Because of this, some people suspect it was poisoning.

Q: How did the local people react when he died?

A: The ALD party men came to the jail and [U Tha Htun's] daughter came, to see his body. The party men arranged buses to carry people for the funeral ceremony. Then the body was carried by the jail men, police, putting the corpse in a jail bus. The in-charge of the prison followed the body and other police accompanied him. So after that, nine buses arranged by the ALD followed to the graveyard. Many people -- villagers and urban people -- about ten thousand, followed on foot. But at the gate of the graveyard, the Army guarded. Army men waiting in ambush position. The people said, "We should see the body" and "Let us enter the graveyard." But not allowed.

Q: What is the current situation in Arakan?

A: In Kyauktaw township, eastern or western [side of] Kaladan River, there are many cattle stolen. Gangs of former BSPP agents manage the capture of buffaloes and cows. Former militia and BSPP men, they involve in these miscreant activities. The SLORC is watching them and not taking any action, because they are their men. The general public is feeling very much in a painful position.

Q: What do you think will happen in Arakan in the future?

A: "Hidden colonies" is the concept of our AIO, because AIO's Secretary General, Maj. San Kyaw Htun, did this research work and political thesis, and claimed we are now a hidden colony. After the 1948 Parliamentary democracy period. The Burmese political parties captured the majority seats and gave no equality. No share in politics, economy, defense. Gradually they created a Burmanized parliamentary system.

Q: So how can a hidden colony either stop being hidden or stop being a colony?

A: In the thesis, we said they used official nationalism first and created shifting of economic centers to the Burmese side. And then they carried out colonialist assimilation policies. In future, we believe we should get independence first [for Arakan]. But, if we have equality and the right of secession, we would join this voluntary association and as a state, integrate in a Federal Republic of the Union of Burma. That means we don't favor separation, secessionist movement.

Q: What do you want the outside world to know about Arakan in 1991?

A: I have informed many underground movements [about Arakan]. And human rights violations in Arakan, so far as I get these informations, I am sending all these reports to the outside world. Because human rights violations are very much spreading in Arakan. But our land is like a neglected land. We have no outside contact. Isolated area.

14) Male, aged 40; Rohingya activist; born in Maungdaw township, Arakan.

Q: What is your name?

A: Saiful Islam.

Q: What group are you in, and what position do you hold?

A: Vice President of RSO (Rohingya Solidarity Organization), Arakan, Burma.

Q: When did you first become involved in politics?

A: 1982. The Burmese government didn't allow human rights, political rights. So I was compelled to join this movement.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: '82.

Q: In 1988, what was your opinion about the democracy movement?

A: When the democracy movement had started there, I was hopeful for a good future and I encouraged the people to participate in the movement.

Q: What is the aim of RSO?

A: Our goal is self-determination.

Q: Do you have alliances with other groups?

A: Particularly, no. But with many we have understandings.

Q: How is RSO financed?

A: Our organization members, they are helping, and our well-wishers. We are depending on this.

Q: How many members does RSO have?

A: Our members are in three categories. The first category are 7,000. In second and third are many, many.

Q: Are your differences with other Rohingya groups because of ideology or leadership, or other reasons?

A: These are factors, and there are many factors.

Q: Are there more or fewer refugees from Arakan now?

A: This year is more, because of the increase of oppression and persecution. Forced labor, looting by the Army, arrests, killing, women are not secure. Even the families are driven from their homes, become shelterless.

Q: What would RSO like to see in the future for Arakan?

A: When all the ethnic movement becomes stronger in the future, when we can create pressure on the regime, at that time we [want] autonomous state with self-determination. Every ethnic group can gain that sort of thing in the future, when we are becoming stronger. And human rights, political rights.

Q: What do you want the outside world to know about Arakan, Burma?

A: In Burma it is not like other countries. Not any news agencies or any journalists are allowed to visit ethnic areas, especially Arakan. No one comes there. The violation of human rights that happens in this area is quite different from other parts of the country. What is done here, no-one knows about this. Village and villagers, and group and groups of the people are killed. Villages uprooted. It is not a one-day [event], it is a [long] time job, it is a continuing job. But the world does not know. Therefore we want to invite those who are giving sympathy to these people, who can make their journey up to a place where they can get information, then they can make assessment. Then we can gain the world opinion.

15) Male, aged 38; Rohingya monk activist; born Monbra subdivision, Arakan.

Q: What is your name?

A: Kyaw Mra Thein.

Q: In 1988, at the time of the demonstrations, what work were you doing?

A: The BSPP [Burma Socialist Program Party] led by General Ne Win, ruled Burma twenty-six years. The people in Burma didn't want the ruling system of BSPP.

So the people in Burma wanted to establish the rights of human beings to parliamentary system, and multi-party system and human rights. They wanted to bring down the socialist rule, this regime. When the general strike boiled over Burma, I was a school teacher in the State High School of Minbya. I heard about the demonstrations in [central] Burma. Our people and the students told me to make demonstrations to bring down this system too. I advised them, "This is a military regime. They will shoot us dead in the street. We have to confront great difficulties." So we had to wait for some time. We waited until May 1988, when we heard many kinds of information coming from Burma proper to our Rakhine [Arakan] State. Then we heard the brutal actions of the military commanders and soldiers. Our people called me to lead them to make demonstrations in our region. In this way, I tried, firstly, to make a meeting, and I called my friends from other townships and I called the student leaders, and we made many meetings. And we ordered some students to test a demonstration around the township and villages, and then remote areas, and then every area of Rakhine [Arakan] State. Some were arrested. Now some are still imprisoned. The brother of the ABSDF [All Burma Students' Democratic Front] coming from India, is imprisoned in Akyab. I advised him to escape when the military regime took power [martial law] but he didn't want to leave from Burma. I called many meetings with students and leaders of the people and we formed a demonstration committee. And we formed many subcommittees -- for health and culture, for information, for finance. Just like a small government. Sometimes we went to the Brigade Commander [Burmese Army] of the Rakhine region. Then we told them to collaborate. By that time in the region there was no administration. The civil administration was breaking down. The party members of the BSPP, council members, were not able to have any administrative power. On the other hand, the township and villages were boiling over with dacoits and extremists. So we formed just like a civil administration board. From May, June, July, very peacefully, we ruled. And sometimes we made a demonstration very peacefully. We marched to the government. By that time the [central] government was led by Dr. Maung Maung, a right hand of Ne Win. And we demanded -- we sent many telegrams to the central government junta, demanding about the parliamentary democracy and the multi-party system, human rights. We demanded the unity of the union of the people. Because the government led by Ne Win had done nothing for the people's development. Just now, the military government [SLORC] is just like that too. It is carrying out the many projects and plans "for the people", but these are mockeries. They are not actually making them. You see in Arakan they give a radio broadcast that there is a plan to build a hydro-power station there. But actually they didn't build it. Actually they don't do anything. But they give radio broadcasts, many projects, fraudulently. We ourselves ruled from May to September 1988 just like a civil administration. In 18th September, General Saw Maung took power and the people advised us to escape. We have some stories that in the last twenty-six years, many political leaders were arrested and persecuted, sometimes killed in the jungle, too. They made no investigation officially. You see, in 1990 our famous historian, Mr. U Tha Htun, was arrested. He was a candidate of Parliament. People respected him very much. He was a very gentle man. And he was brought into the Akyab prison. We suspect regarding his death, he was dead in the prison. It is not easy to forget for us. At present, if we go back to Burma, they are very sure to arrest us, to make persecution. Because we have some evidence, because some of our students went back to Burma -- they were arrested, brought to the prison and some were brutally beaten, and some, their hands, legs were broken. After General Saw Maung took power, there were over 200 [dissidents] exiled in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government had already given a message: the President [Ershad] said to a press conference, "There are no Burmese exiles in Bangladesh" -- in 1988, after we reached Bangladesh. We understand that in this way we have to stay here very hideously. In this way they avoid to give us any help, any donations, any relief, still today. And then, I tried to leave for India two times, but I failed. Somebody who was to guide me to India stole my money.

Q: When did you become a monk?

A: When I arranged to leave for India, I converted to a Buddhist monk. Because some of my friends advised me, "If dressed as a Buddhist monk, it's OK to make a long journey." And in this way, I can study some Buddhist doctrine. We have no intention to make violent demandings and fightings with the government. We want to change the military government very peacefully. We are supporting Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, she is our leader. Now she is under house arrest in Rangoon. When I reached Teknaf [Bangladesh], I saw many students and others exiled from Burma, and we made another meeting: how we had to stay in Bangladesh. Many students were trying to make a connection with NUFA [National United Front of Arakan]. But I disliked this advice. Because NUFA made unity by [allying] many kinds of parties. Some parties have socialist philosophy, some democratic philosophy, some have narrow-minded nationalist philosophy, some parties have communist philosophy. It is impossible. So NUFA is not able to get its goal very easily. And then, after two years later, the NLD won the election. Some of my friends became Parliamentary members, elected. Then I tried to make connections with the social welfare organizations of the world. Last July I saw the [Bangladesh] representative of the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees], three times. He would not be able to give any help, and last October he was transferred to Geneva or somewhere. I wrote some letters to the Embassies, USA and Britain. There are over one hundred students, democracy exiles, [in Bangladesh]. Some joined the ABSDF, but many are living in various kinds of areas in Bangladesh. There are no safeguards.

Q: What do you hope for the future?

A: I believe that one day, we will be able to establish democracy and human rights in Burma. Because the people in Burma are still trying their best. We believe the friends, international, and personnel and organizations and governments will be able to help us in our democracy movement in Burma. And if we have to stay here for some years, in trouble and poverty, it does not matter, we will try. Now, why do we try to get international help here? Because we have to stay here a long time. It will not be easy to get the military to hand over State power to the new government led by elected NLD members. So we have to stay here. If it is needed, we have to form many committees, many demonstrations, and then exile relief committees. Have to try and make pressure. But we believe we will try very peacefully for changes.

16) Male, aged 38; Rohingya refugee; born in Buthidaung, Arakan. T

Q: What work do you do?

A: I'm a rice-shop [restaurant] owner.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: Six years ago.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: while we were living there, the Burmese military personnel often came to beat us, or sometimes grab us and use us as porters. If we had money in our pockets, they took it and never returned it. If we asked, if we tried to have a legal presentation, they flatly denied it and just beat us up. Because of this persecution, we fled.

Q: Did you or your family ever get taken by the military?

A: No.

Q: What in particular made you decide to leave?

A: No particular incident, but we were just feeling that we didn't want to stay anymore.

Q: Did you own any land then?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you sell it when you left?

A: No, we just left it.

Q: In your community, were the mosques able to operate freely?

A: The military government destroyed seven mosques. And they didn't let us worship freely. And now, I've heard at present there is harassment of taking property and you have to give them bribe money just to be free to walk in public. Or they grab them and make them do hard labor, and beat them, take their belongings.

Q: Did you have ID cards or registration with your religion listed?

A: Yes.

Q: Could you get Islamic books?

A: Yes, we had it.

Q: Did people from your village make the Haj?

A: There was a kind of arrangement where some were selected by the government to be sent for the Haj to Saudi Arabia. But we couldn't get any permission to go as we wished.

Q: When the authorities spoke to you, were they polite?

A: Whenever they saw the Moslems, they just treated us harshly and with rude manners and insults. But when they see the Arakanese Buddhists [Rakhines] they are on good terms. They usually took as porters, the Moslems, not the Buddhists, in that western Buthidaung region.

Q: How long did the porters go away for?

A: Fifteen, twenty days, or one month, and they would not give any pay.

Q: What was your opinion of the 1988 democracy movement?

A: We also had hopes, and when there's democracy, it's better, we know, so we supported the democracy movement.

Q: What do you hope for, for Arakan and Burma?

A: I have no ability to give such an opinion, but I have my feeling that there will be a lot of trouble in Burma in the future.

Q: Do you think you or your children will go back to Burma someday?

A: Actually it is my homeland, so we are very eager to go back.

17) Male, aged 36; Rakhine activist; born in Minbya, Arakan.

Q: How long ago did you come to Bangladesh?

A: At the time the military government took power, I left the 25th of September, 1988.

Q: What kind of work were you doing in Burma?

A: At the time I was an agriculture inspector.

Q: What were you doing during the demonstrations of 1988?

A: My township is very famous and notorious, because the ACP [Arakan Communist Party] occupied my township in 1984. So [since then] there are many [government] soldiers in my township. In Arakan State there are seventeen townships. Among them, my town was very strict. Because of the rebels having sometimes occupied it. In 1988, during the rainy season, I was working in my office. And all of the university and college students were taking part in the demonstration. They were going around the town. They cannot do that demonstration without discipline. So they asked us to help them. Because I had done the demonstrations in [central] Burma in my university life. So I led the university students and people. On 13th August, when I went into the meeting, some police arrested me. I stayed in the jail about 22 days.

Q: How did the police act when they brought you to jail?

A: I was a famous man in my township, my family are all graduates. So the police could not be beating me.

Q: Did they take other people to jail, besides you?

A: Yes. And the students were staging the demonstrations when I was in the jail. When I was freed from the jail, there were about 300 students at my house and they wanted to do another demonstration. The township chairman [BSPP] and the Army majors gave me the white paper to sign. There was no writing [on it]. I did sign, and then I was freed. So then we did the demonstration. I led them in my township. There were very good conditions. We were controlling my town. We went to the houses of the BSPP chairman, secretary and members. We told them, "Please sign [resignation]. We are controlling the town, so there is no duty for you. If you do not sign, I cannot talk about your future." We prepared the paper and asked the members of the council and party to resign to the democratic movement. They were afraid. Most of the members put their signature. Then the Army took the force. In some towns, the Armies were together with the people, I heard. But in my township, the Army is very separate. In 24th of September, the government took the military power. They were drinking wildly, overly. They started to fire the guns to the sky. So the students and democratic activists and people stayed ready with the jinglees [slingshots]. That day they [Army] did not dare to enter the town. At 9:00 at night, they entered in the town and they fired at my house. About 24 bullets.

Q: Were you in the house?

A: No, I transferred my family to another house. And I stayed at the Democratic office. There was no one at my house. On the morning of the 25th of September, my brother advised me to leave the town. We went to another village and left by boat from the sea.

Q: What do you want the outside world to know about Burma?

A: They made some elections and the NLD won the elections, but they did not take power. Some of my friends have returned to Burma. I heard that they are still living in the town, but if they want to go to other towns, they must give notice to the government. If they don't allow, they cannot go. I think there will be some problems with the regime in Burma in the future. If there is some problem, they again will be arrested. It is so bad in Burma. We try to get refugee [status] here. There is no medicine and our members are living separately, some as schoolteachers.

Q: Do you think peaceful demonstrations are a good idea?

A: My intent is first to try to get democracy and human rights. If Burma is the democratic country, I must return to Burma. Arakanese, we want independence for our Arakan. We are still living as a colony. We want independence, but the first step is to get democracy. Step by step. Second step, we must fight for independence for the Arakanese. If we ask for democracy peacefully, the SLORC government, I think they will not give democracy. If we want it, we must ask for democracy by fighting.

18) Male, aged 35; Rohingya activist; born in Maungdaw, Arakan.

Q: What is your name?

A: Mohammed Ali.

Q: How did you first become involved in politics?

A: During my university life in the 1970s. I graduated in 1974, I got a degree in economics from Rangoon University, at that time I was also involved in politics, an underground group in 1975. But I directly entered the jungle in 1977. Under the leadership of the late Mr. Jaffar Habib. He was president of Rohingya Patriotic Front (RPF), but he died in 1985.

Q: What was the goal of RPF?

A: Its goal was self-determination of the Rohingya people of Arakan.

Q: Did you have a position in RPF?

A: I was Vice President. Also I was Secretary General in ARIF later on, in 1986.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: In 1977. We were organizing politically, militarily, and making international contact, especially the Organization of Islamic Conferences, United Nations, human rights groups in Geneva. We had newsletters, "Rohingyas' Outcry and Demand", and "The Call of Rohingyas". And during ARIF we published "Arakan" magazine. And during RSO, we publish newsletters and so many pamphlets. I am editing. I am now working in the Information Department of RSO.

Q: What was your reaction to the 1988 uprising?

A: We were guiding our people inside Arakan. Also, we had some relations in Rangoon, student groups. Some Rohingyas also died in Rangoon during the demonstrations. The military, the Army killing indiscriminately. And the Rohingyas established some organizations to contest in the election, 1990. We got about four seats in Arakan State, one Human Rights and Democratic Party of Rohingya People, another Mayu Youth and Development Organization. After the election, these military, they don't want to hand over power to the elected parties, especially the NLD led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. But the MPs are silent, they are afraid of the military regime, SLORC, led by General Saw Maung. They are now quiet, following their orders, inside Arakan, like all over Burma. And some NLD members formed a parallel government in the Karen area, at Manerplaw.

Q: Do you think the Rohingya groups have good relations with other opposition groups?

A: They are trying for coordination and coalition, to reach their aims and objectives. RSO, this group is trying to cooperate with Buddhist groups and other, tribal people in Arakan, also Moslem groups, the NDF, DAB, and parallel government. To get some solution in Burma, politically or militarily.

Q: What is RSO's military situation?

A: RSO is very strong. 1,000 regulars. And modern arms: M16, Kalashnikov.

Q: How is RSO financed?

A: They depend on people. Mostly refugees living in Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Pakistan, also Bangladesh. And some donations from inside Arakan.

Q: What is the current situation in Arakan?

A: It is worse than before. In 1978 there was a refugee problem, about 300,000 refugees fled to Bangladesh. They established about fourteen refugee camps along the Bangladesh/Burma border. At that time, the UNHCR came, also some Islamic organizations. Also the President of Bangladesh took some interest. It was the [Burmese government's] "King Dragon Operation." That [was an] immigration inquiry against the Moslems of Arakan, backed by Arakanese police and BSPP authorities. But this time, it is a purely military operation against the Moslems of Arakan. Military personnel and the local SLORC authorities, directed, ordered from Rangoon, led by General Saw Maung. We feel it will become a great burden for Bangladesh also. Because refugees are coming but there is not yet any international help for them. We heard about 700 families already crossed to Bangladesh in March and April. One of the villages in Laweta, about 5,000 households, is already uprooted. The 23rd and 24th Infantry Regiments have established cantonments in this area. New camps, about ten miles from Buthidaung township. Also they rape women, they drag away people as forced labor. And the people have no food, they are very much poor, they are immigrating day by day to Bangladesh for safe shelter.

Q: What kind of labor is going on?

A: Military barracks and other facilities, also road communications. So many barracks and hospitals and houses for military officers. Construction work. Without any pay. As slaves, they are doing it. Also the military are building some dams for prawn-culture and fish, and they have animal husbandry there, also farms, they produce potatoes. It is the military doing that and working it are the Rohingyas as labor without any money. The land belonged to the Moslems. But this land was seized by the military.

Q: What do you hope for, in the future, for Arakan, Burma?

A: I want to tell President George Bush, also Secretary of State Baker, and [US Congressman] Stephen Solarz. To give some attention to Arakan. And to involve directly to save these Rohingya people. Because these people are suffering for a long time. Since 1947 they have started this revolution in Arakan, but without any help they could not overcome it. So I want to request our American brothers, as they are assisting all over the world, for human rights, for giving shelter -- now the Americans are playing a good role in the Kurds' area. They liberated Kuwait. Giving help to the Afghan mujihadeen. Almost all of the oppressed people, the Americans are giving sincere help to these people. So I want to request the government of America to involve in Arakan also. To liberate the Rohingya people to get their self-determination and also to get some democratic changes all over Burma. To help these people, the Karens, the Kachins, the DAB, the parallel government, and the revolutionary forces of the Buddhists -- everyone. America is capable at this moment in the world to give democratic changes in Burma, so the oppressed peoples of Burma can get some fresh air of democracy.

Q: If things change, would you go back to Burma?

A: Yes, yes, I don't want to stay a minute in a foreign land. I was a graduate in Rangoon, my family and everything is in Arakan, under the pressure of the Burmese regime. We want to establish, to build our nation. I want to do something for the Rohingya people of Arakan. We can do many things in Burma: politics, development, administrative. I have some experience, about five years I worked as a government civil servant. There is no communication, no development at all. Politically, culturally, these people are very poor, they don't know what is going on in the world -- Thailand, Bangladesh, Singapore. All Burmese people are in the concentration camp. Under the yoke of the Burmese Army. About 26 years, Ne Win ruled, since 1988 also the military. This generation of military ruling Burma, whose people are now in a cave. So as soon as we get a chance, we will go to Arakan, for building the country.

19) Female, aged 32; Rakhine ex-BCP; born in Mrauk-Oo, Arakan. T

Q: How old were you when you became involved in politics?

A: About twelve. I met my older sister, she had already joined the [Burmese Communist] Party, so I followed her there.

Q: When you joined, did they give you some kind of training?

A: At first, I had training for typing and staff work.

Q: Who was the BCP leader then?

A: Kyaw Mya.

Q: What area were you in?

A: In Arakan side, regional office.

Q: Did they tell you anything special about Arakan or the Rakhine people?

A: They had no specific information about Rakhines, they just trained us as a unit, all the ethnic minorities.

Q: What were some of the political ideas you learned at the time?

A: Concepts like: that you have to do work for the others, and good things, but not for your own sake. And we have to sacrifice for others. And we have to care for the whole country. And individual interests will be subordinated to the general interest of the whole country.

Q: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

A: Five.

Q: Did any of the others join the BCP?

A: Only us. The rest, our brothers, have been working on their farmland in our own village.

Q: Were your parents farmers?

A: Yes.

Q: When you joined the BCP, were you still in school?

A: I was still in school, class five, and when I was on holiday to come back to my own village, I met my sister and joined the Party.

Q: Did you or your sister ever take military training?

A: Yes, we did.

Q: Did you ever go on any operations?

A: No, because I was assigned to office staff, so I had to stay at headquarters.

Q: What was it like to live at headquarters?

A: We had abundant rice then, the 1971 to 1975 period. But after that, we have retreated to the border. So I worked up to '74 as office staff, and after that, since '75-'76, I was trained as a nurse, assigned at the headquarters.

Q: What were you treating?

A: Malaria, almost always. And sometimes we had to treat the wounded soldiers and others.

Q: Did you ever get sick?

A: Yes, some temporary fever. And regularly I had headaches.

Q: Did the hospital usually have enough medicine?

A: Not enough.

Q: How did the BCP get money in Arakan?

A: Usually based on the contributions of the villagers and the taxation of the fields.

Q: What did your group think about the other groups in Arakan?

A: We had a friendly attitude towards other armed groups. On the grounds of common cause. If maybe we had some ideological differences, we had to at least try to get common ground and common strategy to topple the common enemy.

Q: In 1988, were you in the BCP?

A: No, I was staying in Bangladesh.

Q: When you met your husband, were you in the BCP?

A: Yes, he was also a member of the Party.

Q: Why did you leave the BCP and come to Bangladesh?

A: As we were married and had our family, we are trying for our own maintenance, so we felt we could not do for the others, we must try for our own selves. We didn't want to disturb the Party and organization, so we just discharged from the Party and came to stay here.

Q: The BCP in the north has stopped operating, what is your opinion about that?

A: I think there was a wrong approach, especially in the leadership role. And I think there was division in the Party leadership in the center. It broke down all their structure at the time.

Q: Where is your husband now?

A: Actually, the facts are not sure, whether he was killed, or missing, or just going for a long trip. I have no evidence so far.

Q: How old are your children?

A: The boy is six years old, the second, girl, is four years, this one is one year.

Q: How many times a day do you eat rice?

A: Two times.

Q: What do you eat with your rice?

A: Vegetables that I grow.

Q: What is your hope for the future?

A: For now, I have no desire to go to Arakan, under such circumstances of repression in Burma, so I will try to stay here as possible, together with the revolutionary friends here. And if they are all going back, then I would also have to go back. But until then, we are still trying here for the revolution. In the future, for the children as they grow up, maybe I'll have to change my mind. For their sake, for their education and other facilities, maybe I'll have to find a new way. In that case, it is not sure for me, what to do next.

20) Male, aged 30; Rohingya refugee; born in Akyab, Arakan. T

Q: What work do you do?

A: My family had some land, but I usually stayed in Akyab and was a boxer [prizefighter].

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: One month ago.

Q: Why did you decide to leave Burma?

A: As we were harassed and segregated by the Rakhine community there, so we couldn't do our work anymore. So I decided to flee with my family.

Q: When non-Moslems spoke to you there, were they polite or not?

A: No, not polite. They tell us to go to Bangladesh, they say, "You Moslems are not natives of Burma, so you have to go to your native land." And "You should not stay here anymore." Such harassment. And we explained that, "Oh, we are born here and we have nowhere else to go." But they say, "Though you are born here, you are coming from that western side. Go back to your own land." And they take, confiscate, our belongings, land, property, houses, under the pretext of construction of a new road. So as we had no farm or anything, we left.

Q: What kind of people told you these things?

A: This was sometimes by the local inhabitants. But whenever we raised the question to the authorities, they ignore us, and just drive us out, saying, "This is your business, you solve your problems yourself." They do not accept any complaint.

Q: Who did the road construction work?

A: Usually a plan with the higher authority and the secretary of the local LORC [Law and Order Restoration Council; sub-junta], they take one of them [residents] to go for labor and the others have to go out for their own earning. Sometimes the police and armed forces block the roads and just grabbed them. They say, "We know our government business, so you have to go and work there."

Q: Do they pay them, feed them?

A: No, nothing.

Q: How much land did your family have?

A: Nearly one acre, we had, and they took it. They gave reasons that they had to make a government road and buildings, so they just took it. Not only our own land, only one acre, but they took all the adjoining area.

Q: Did the mosques operate freely?

A: Now they have destroyed most of our mosques already. First the Army comes and surrounds the whole area, and then they command the forced labor to destroy everything.

Q: In 1988, did you see the demonstrations in Akyab?

A: We took part in the demonstrations at first. But the Army personnel came and explained to us not to make any demonstrations, but "If you want democracy, there will be democracy in the future, so you had better be quiet and stay away from the demonstrations." So we just witnessed what was happening in Rangoon and we knew they had a lot of trouble there. As we are a minority people and we cannot influence the whole majority, we were not in a leading role in the demonstrations at that time.

Q: Were you able to vote in the election last year?

A: Yes.

Q: What do you hope for Burma and Arakan in the future?

A: My opinion is that there will be no peace in Burma, there will be some more trouble. One sign is that they killed the college students there in 1988. So if the people cannot get the real democracy, there will be a trouble and the students will not be satisfied. So I think there will be no peace in Burma in the future.

Q: Do you think you or your children will go back to Burma?

A: We want to go back, we don't want to stay here, this is not our home country.

21) Female, aged 30; Rohingya refugee; born in Laweta village, Buthidaung, Arakan. T

Q: What work did you do in Burma?

A: We were farmers.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: Two months ago.

Q: How did you come here?

A: By boat.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: The military occupied our land and oppressed us. The military raped women, and arrested, and killed.

Q: When they took your land, did they give you any money, or a new place?

A: Nothing.

Q: What happened to your own family?

A: They arrested people from my family, but not raped or killed. But at another nearby house, they raped them.

Q: Were the mosques allowed to operate freely?

A: The Burmese Army destroyed the mosques.

Q: When they arrest people, what do they do?

A: Labor. To work, construction of the houses, cutting bamboo, and making roads. And the Burmese Army took our sampans, without any payment, to cross rivers.

Q: What are your living conditions here in Bangladesh?

A: Not good conditions. No rice, no medicine, no house. And when the storm [April 29, 1991 cyclone] came, we went in the neighbor's house. Our belongings were all washed away.

Q: If the military left your area in Burma, would you go back or stay here?

A: I would go back.

22) Female, aged 28; Rakhine activist; born in Rathedaung township, Arakan.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: I've lived in Bangladesh since 1988.

Q: What were you doing during the democracy movement in 1988?

A: I was the Vice President of Rathedaung township's democracy movement. I was a junior teacher then.

Q: How did you get involved in the democracy movement?

A: I started in Akyab. I was a leader of the democracy movement there, the 8th of August.

Q: What kinds of things were you doing?

A: We were in armed struggle with jinglees [slingshots]. I organized it, one of the organizers. I was the General Secretary of the teacher's union.

Q: Why did you need to have the jinglees?

A: It was to fight against the M16 and G3 [rifles] of the Burmese government.

Q: At the beginning, what tactics did you use?

A: In Rathedaung township, the democracy movement started the 16th of August, with a march and speeches. A procession of all members. In Rathedaung township, all the people. And we occupied all offices in Rathedaung since August 23rd.

Q: Did you make some speeches?

A: Yes. I said, "There must be unity in our Arakan State," and "We must be in revolution against our government."

Q: Later, when you had the jinglee defense, did the Army come there?

A: Yes. We had united as strong as an army, ourselves. 250 members, holding jinglees. The Burmese Army entered our town with guns. They caught everybody. Villagers and other people.

Q: Did they catch you?

A: No.

Q: What did you do?

A: September 20th, I arranged to leave to Bangladesh, and pick up our comrades and search for a small boat. I left at 11:00 pm on September 23rd, with twelve comrades. Across the Bangla Ocean [Bay of Bengal] to here. I gave the command to two comrades to search for the other members, and they picked up four more. So all sixteen Rathedaung committee members were here in Bangladesh, so we formed a unit, National Democratic Force of Arakan (NDFA). At present I am the leader of NDFA, Chairman. And I am a representative of NUFA [National United Front of Arakan].

Q: What are the goals of NDFA?

A: We joined with NUFA. A branch. Our main aims are real federalism, and revolution against the government.

Q: Do people of Arakan have any special problems?

A: At present I have no separate aims.

Q: How many members do you have in NDFA?

A: About forty members. But we are very poor. My force is very poor here. So we scattered to stay anywhere we can and get jobs.

Q: Is it possible to have revolution without guns?

A: At present, in the world, there is now a democracy movement everywhere, so we hope the world will be kind to us.

Q: Does the NDFA have contacts inside Burma?

A: Yes, I have contacts.

Q: What do you want the outside world to know about Arakan?

A: The Burmese government very much oppresses all minority people and our Arakanese people. I wish all the world to pressure the Burmese government.

23) Male, aged 27; Rakhine ABSDF activist; born in Mrauk-Oo, Arakan. T

Q: In 1988, what work were you doing?

A: At the demonstration times in March 1988, I was working in Mrauk-Oo. I was a bank's account staffer. In August 8th, we participated in demonstrations in Mrauk-Oo. Our slogans were, "Denounce totalitarian government," "Denounce one-party system," and "Form interim government." We were shouting the anti-government slogans.

Q: In Mrauk-Oo, did they have large or small demonstrations?

A: At the first stage, only fifteen persons started the demonstrations. And then, the next day's demonstrations were maybe 30,000 people who demonstrated and shouted anti-government slogans. I was included in the first fifteen persons.

Q: Your bank co-workers, did they also demonstrate?

A: At the first stage, they didn't demonstrate because they are civil service [government bank]. But the bigger stage, all walks of workers, civil service, all are participating in general strike, in Mrauk-Oo.

Q: What did the government and Army do?

A: At the demonstration time, the Army was silent, they only stayed in their camp. The BSPP township chairmen, they called in the students and discussed, and told them not to participate in the demonstrations. Most of the police were at ready stations. But they didn't fire.

Q: What happened that September?

A: September 1988, I left Burma for Bangladesh, by smuggler's boat. I stayed in a monastery, then the student camp.

Q: When you came to the student campsite [ABSDF], what did you eat?

A: Very little rice, with wild plants that are available in the rainy season.

Q: Did you ever get sick?

A: Yes, malaria. For two months. No medicine, no doctor.

Q: Have you always stayed in the camps?

A: Yes, up to now.

Q: What kind of food do you usually eat now?

A: Some vegetables. No nga-pi [fish-paste], no salt, no oil. No meat. Just rice with boiled vegetables.

Q: Are you growing vegetables?

A: At the former camp, nearer the Burma border, I was growing vegetables. Now we have some paddy fields and hill fields [rice].

Q: Do you get any help from outside?

A: Only from BRC [Burmese Relief Centre].

Q: What is the situation in Arakan?

A: Inside Arakan, the Arakanese feel the loss of democracy and human rights. They wanted to restore democracy, but the Army government suppressed the struggle.

Q: What would you want the outside world to know?

A: I want to say to the outside world, with the humanitarian grounds, to help, more assistance. I want to tell the world that Burmese people are very, very poor and have no democracy, no human rights. So we want to tell the [foreign] governments to spread our aims and hopes.

24) Male, aged 27; Rakhine ABSDF activist; born in Rathedaung township, Arakan.

Q: When you were in Burma, what work did you do? I was a student, of Burmese language and literature.

Q: What was your experience in 1988?

A: I was in the democracy movement in Rangoon. In March 1988, I was back in Arakan State. Then in June, the first week, I came back to Rangoon. I lived in Rangoon with three friends in a house. One friend, on March 16th, had been in the democracy movement demonstrations near the Inya Lake, and the police arrested him. So as I heard this news, I also wanted to be in this movement. On July 16th, Ne Win resigned his Presidency. Then U Sein Lwin became president of BSPP. He was known very much for killing students. Our slogan, "Democracy -- to win democracy is our cause" was backed very strongly by every student in Rangoon, and U Sein Lwin resigned and Dr. Maung Maung became president of BSPP. "To form interim government is our cause," was another of our slogans. "To have Student Union, is our cause," "Transfer the power of the people to the people," and "We don't want the murderer government."

Q: What were you doing during that August?

A: In August, demonstrations were boiling out all over the country. So every student was shouting slogans, demonstrating on the streets of Rangoon. So I was also involved with the students. Many students were separated in many, many groups. We collected the students near us.

Q: And what happened in September?

A: I believed that this democracy movement was concerned with every nationality of Burma. So in the movement for participation of Arakanese people, I was an organizer of the Arakan Young Men's Organization. I organized the Arakan people especially. There were very much Arakanese people in Rangoon, nearly 500,000 living there.

Q: Did the Arakanese people march together in demonstrations?

A: Yes. And we had signs, and torches. And pictures of our national leader, U Ottama, the monk leader [anti-British resistance]. I did not flee. We did not believe the military would seize the power of Burma. But unexpectedly, they suddenly took power. The military junta declared their seizing of power at noon of September 18th, 1988. They shot many monks, students, and workers, the 19th of September. I saw them fire and hit someone in the stomach, and blood and organs falling out. People's sandals and schoolbags were all dropped on the roadside. Soldiers would order us not to stand up more than three feet off the ground, they were firing that high. So I was crawling on the ground, saying, "No! No! No!" That day, the 19th, was the last day. We had been preparing to demonstrate on September 21, including all nationalities -- Chin, Kachin, Shan -- all together. But before it, on September 18th they [junta] took the power. On September 19, at 9:00, all the people were very angry, without fear of the killing, all were demonstrating on the street.

Q: After that, did you stay in Rangoon?

A: The first week of November, I went to Akyab by airplane. And in Mrauk-Oo, I was the student leader of a secret organization, and then I went to Bangladesh on November 16th. I arrived by boat with two friends.

Q: Did you start a group in Bangladesh?

A: We tried to secretly form the Arakan Patriotic Youth Front, in Rangoon. Then, in Bangladesh, I met a new organization, All Arakan Student Union of Burma. That group was only the students, but I liked monks, workers, all walks of life, to participate. I told them I wanted students and workers in one group, but the politicians didn't like it, so I did not join. So with some people who had the same idea, we formed another organization, People's Student's Democratic Front of Burma (PSDFB).

Q: What group are you in now?

A: All Burma Student's Democratic Front (ABSDF), Arakan. I'm the General Secretary. The PSDFB, they stayed with the BCP and we had no unity. So we left it and worked as teachers in Bangladesh. Because I don't like leftists, I like the democracy movement. Then in 1989, all students got unity under the ABSDF. In Burma, during the demonstration period, we all demonstrated together. So we decided to work together, to unite. So we contacted ABSDF headquarters [Thailand/Burma border].

Q: Did the ABSDF members stay in one place?

A: The students lived in different places.

Q: Was there military training?

A: In 1989, first week of January, we had military training.

Q: Did you have weapons?

A: The wooden weapons. [wooden replica rifles for drill training]

Q: The ABSDF Arakan people, are some revolutionary soldiers now?

A: During 1989, three students carried on operations with NUFA and entered into Burma. But there have been no ABSDF operations [Bangladesh/Burma border region].

Q: How many members does ABSDF Arakan have?

A: 58.

Q: What are your living conditions like?

A: Bangladesh does not allow us [officially] to live here, but now they don't make any trouble to us. But we have post office problems. They have taken the letters. In the Thai Nation newspaper [Agence France Press report] they have written about our ABSDF Arakan, and the intelligence bureau inspected and questioned us. That Thai newspaper said that some students live in Bangladesh to fight against the Burmese military regime, like soldiers, as guerillas.

Q: Is that true?

A: It's true that we are trying to fight against the Burmese government, but now we cannot make any operation. We believe there is only one way to win democracy in Burma, this is armed struggle. This is because they did not transfer the power to the legally elected representative parties. They already arrested the leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and our student leader Min Ko Naing, and monk leaders. All are arrested in Rangoon. We cannot get democracy easily. We can only win democracy by fighting, by sacrificing ourselves. I don't like war, but for example: Iraq and America, because America was fighting, now there's peace.

Q: What do you want the outside world to know about Burma and Arakan?

A: We have no security living in Bangladesh. So we want to ask the government here not to make any harm to us. We want to tell the rest of the world to sympathise with us, to give support, humanitarian help. To put pressure on the military government to get away from Burma.

25) Male, aged 26; Rakhine ABSDF activist; born in Akyab, Arakan.

Q: In 1988, what work were you doing?

A: I was a student of Rangoon University, studying my final year of Bachelor of Science, in Physics.

Q: What was your experience in the first demonstrations in 1988?

A: They came up from the grass and fired at the students with tear gas, and beat the students with sticks. I think ten or fifteen students died on the spot. And nearly 180 students were arrested. I also was included in that problem, arrested at one or two o'clock. They put us in a very small car, very crowded. It was very difficult to breathe. After one or two hours, they

brought us to Insein Jail, at nearly 4:00. We were very badly beaten and very tortured. They question and question, and torture, and then they question and torture again. The next day, March 17, students were also arrested, nearly 1,000 people. I was arrested March 16, I escaped July 7. They called me again and again, and they tortured me like "riding motorcycle." We stand and bend our knees, and we must also make a motorcycle sound, "rrrrhh." Every time they call me and make me do that. And they made a very rough road with pieces of gravel, and we must walk it "like a tortoise", on our knees and elbows. Again and again they do this. And beat me, also. Sometimes they held my head in the big water ponds. They force my head, it is very difficult to breathe. And then I escaped on July 7th, I also participated in the anti-government [activities] then.

Q: How did you escape?

A: With bail. I posted a bond not to participate in anti-government movement. But I wasn't afraid. After jail I also participated continuously. In September 1988, before the military took over, I was Chairman of the township student union in Mrauk-Oo. When I escaped from jail I came back to Arakan because then I was not allowed to live in Rangoon. Before the military coup I participated in demonstrations and talking about the anti-government [movement], speeches. Most of the populace supported us. September 18th, the military took power, I ran away to Bangladesh. I stayed in the jungle secretly three or four days outside of our township. Then I went to Bangladesh on the ocean route, by the smuggler boat. I stayed only one month, and it was very difficult, because at that time it was the rainy season. No shelter. Most of the students were living at a monastery. We had no organization, we couldn't live together. But we were always thinking about forming an association. We formed the All Arakan Student Union of Burma. I was the Joint Secretary. And then I went to Rangoon to get some funds from the Arakanese traders, but we got nothing. How could I come back to Bangladesh empty-handed? I was in touch with a Burmese student union member, and he said, "The situation is very bad inside Burma, so you must not stay here. So let's go to India." I said, "OK, let's go to India."

[In December 1988] I went to India. Mandalay to Tamu, then to Manipur and we tried to get to the refugee camp [for students from Burma]. We were trying to get refugee status in India. But the camp leader did not know us, so we had a very difficult time to enter the camp. So at the border I worked as a porter, a coolie. Because I had no money for food and shelter. I did that fifteen, twenty days, and then I got permission to enter the refugee camp. I lived there one month and fifteen days. But this was very bad conditions. We boiled the rice because it was not sufficient. No curry, only that [rice gruel]. Most of the people went back to Burma, and some surrendered. But we didn't surrender. We went from Manipur to Mizoram [Northeast India]. But on the way I was arrested according to the Indian Foreigner Acts 14A, and they sent me to Imphal, Manipur State's capital, the central jail. I spent nearly a year and six months in Manipur jail. With the help of a lady advocate from Delhi, I got bail, and they brought me to Delhi. In September we applied to UNHCR and I got refugee status, in 1989. They have issued me a certificate. I am the representative to India from this ABSDF [Arakan] so I've come to contact this [Bangladesh] camp.

Q: On the western side [of Burma] are there any ABSDF forces that do armed operations?

A: Nothing yet.

Q: Does the ABSDF Arakan do political work inside Burma?

A: Now we are trying to propagate, we send some letters inside Arakan. We would also like to recruit new members. Maybe two, three people, we send in to the underground.

Q: What do you want to tell the outside world?

A: I want them to give more support, more help. Because our situation is very bad. It is very difficult to do our best. We need more assistance, not just words, but for real work. Most of the international societies are just talking, not working.

26) Male, aged 25; Rakhine ex Burmese Army soldier; born in Pauktaw township, Mrai Ngu island, Arakan. T

Q: What kind of work did you do before coming to Bangladesh?

A: Tatmadaw. [Burmese Army].

Q: When did you join the Tatmadaw?

A: 1986.

Q: Why did you decide to join?

A: Because we had some problems with getting a job, and [hanging around] and our parents scolded us. My friends and I had no intent to join the Army, but we just contacted the Army anyway.

Q: When you were trained, did the officers treat you the same as others?

A: Yes, the same.

Q: On operations, were you sent to the war zone?

A: Yes.

Q: What did your officers tell you that you were going to do?

A: At the Shan [State] frontier, the army officers said there were a lot of "Pa-O white" and "Pa-O red" [non-communist and communist Pa-O tribe] insurgency areas.

Q: What rank were you?

A: A private in the infantry.

Q: When you went to the front, did they bring any civilians with you?

A: Yes, they took some civilians from the Shan State. They arrested civilians and commanded them to work as our porters.

Q: What kind of fighting was it, on the Shan front?

A: Sometimes in the valley towns, and sometimes in the mountain areas.

Q: What were the enemy forces like?

A: Nearly 800 to 900 from the Pa-O white and Pa-O red. They were good fighters.

Q: Did your side have many casualties?

A: Yes. Sometimes a bullet hits.

Q: Did anything happening on the Shan front surprise you?

A: No.

Q: What did you think about the war you were fighting?

A: Good or bad, justice or injustice, I could not decide by myself. But we were happy to fight.

Q: In 1988, did you hear about the democracy movement happening?

A: I didn't hear anything.

Q: When did you leave the Tatmadaw?

A: February 1991.

Q: Why did you come to Bangladesh?

A: As we were oppressed in the Army, I didn't want to stay in it any longer, so I fled away here.

Q: In what way were you oppressed in the Army?

A: They had prejudice against the Arakanese [Rakhine] minority. While they were talking, they usually insulted us. Because I couldn't speak Burmese fluently. [nb: the Rakhine language is closely related to, but not quite the same as Burmese].

Q: Were there many soldiers from Arakan in the Army?

A: Not much. Maybe forty or fifty in the battalion.

Q: What is your hope for the future of Burma, Arakan?

A: I don't know about the future. But I don't want to be oppressed under their control.

27) Male, aged 24; Rakhine ABSDF activist; born in Mrauk-Oo, Arakan.

Q: In 1988, what work were you doing?

A: I was a final year student in English, in 1987. When I was taking the examination, we had finished one paper when they [demonetized] our currency. The government has declared the 75 kyat notes unusable. So we had no money for our food, we felt so angry, frustrated. So we demonstrated. We burned the examination room chairs. We shouted and demonstrated in our hostel. This was the first time, September 1987. They closed the University and we had to return home.

Q: Did you go back?

A: After they reopened, we sat the examination again. They had closed nearly two months, Rangoon University.

Q: In March, 1988, what happened?

A: In March, I had passed my final exam. So I was working as a clerk in Rangoon. The students of Rangoon Institute of Technology, they had a riot break out. The Lon Htein security police shot at the students on March 13th. So the students were very angry. Then in June and July we demonstrated in front of Burma Broadcasting Company. They fired with gas bombs, that goes in our eyes. August 1st, the democracy movement, the really young ones demonstrated. The Army came and surrounded the students, then sympathisers came and united with our movement and it became greater and greater. Personally, I was in the demonstrations because I knew the history of Burma very well. Since Ne Win took power in 1962, he destroyed our student union and killed many students. And at U Thant's burial, he killed many, many students again. On 8 August, 1988, the students asked the whole nation to demonstrate. So the military government prepared to destroy us. In the streets they had set up the Army, so we could not demonstrate in the morning. We demonstrated in the evening, at Shwe Dagon Pagoda, and on August 9th they killed many students. We were collecting the free-press Burmese newspapers then, and we also shouted to tell the people the conditions of Burma. At that time, we tried to form the Arakan Patriotic Youth Front. Our aim was to oppose the government and to contact with guerillas. After "four number eights" [8/8/88] it was the regime of Dr. Maung Maung and we could demonstrate freely. Aung San Suu Kyi preached to the people at Shwe Dagon Pagoda on 26th August. On 27, one day after Aung San Suu Kyi's speech, we formed All Burma Student Union. I was representative of Mrauk-Oo township. My duty was to inform the Mrauk-Oo students of our situation in Rangoon. Then I went on October 10, 1988, to Bangladesh, by the sea.

Q: When you came to Bangladesh, what happened?

A: We saw many students, they hadn't formed a student organization, so we tried to form one. But the students who had arrived earlier than me didn't accept us because we were graduates. So we formed another organization, People's Student's Democratic Front of Burma. Our aim was to overthrow the military regime. We wanted democracy. But most of the students were staying with NUFA. At first they did not accept democracy, they only wanted [Arakan's] independence. We didn't want separation, we only wanted unity. By unity we can overthrow the military government. But they didn't accept that.

Most of the students, they organized to fight only for independence, separatism. At that time there were Moslem groups, BCP, and NUFA. NUFA had the idea that the #1 enemy was the Burmese regime, the second enemy was the BCP. But our theory is "the enemy of our enemy is our friend." So BCP was our friend, NUFA also our friend, all Moslem forces who are fighting against the military regime are also our friends. The BCP accepted our democratic movement, so we stayed with the BCP. But we had initial problems, food problems, we could not feed our students. So we had to scatter. We decided to live in the villages as teachers. So we had to cancel our organization. At that time I entered into the holy sphere: I became a junior monk. I lived in the monastery, teaching students. Then the student groups formed ABSDF. But they demanded one discipline, that every student must live together. But I was a monk, I couldn't live in the jungle, so I could not become a member of ABSDF. Then I went to India, to contact other students from Burma. I crossed the borderline secretly, with another monk, to Tripura State, India. I arrived with no money. I couldn't journey on to Mizoram where there was a student camp. I had to remain two months in Tripura, collecting donations. When I had money, I went to Mizoram, and I went to a government official. I told him I came from Bangladesh, to inform him legally that I wanted to take shelter in India. But they thought I was a spy and arrested me. For nearly one month they asked me many questions. They only slapped me three times. Then they prepared to push me back to Burma. I begged them not to push me back to Burma, because I came to India from Bangladesh. But they pushed me back to Burma, near the border. With me there were thirteen Burmese young men who were in a logging camp near the border. But the village they put me in was just seven miles from the student camp. So two young Burmese brought me to the student camp. But in that camp there were also many problems. There was a murder case, with a Chin and a Burman. The Chin killed two Burman students, because the Chin suspected them as Burmese Intelligence agents. So Burman students had left the camp and were living in Aizawl [capital of Mizoram State]. I was very weak and thin, my health was very bad. I begged them to let me stay with them, but they did not allow it. They gave me an address for working at a workshop. There, we did not get any government supplies, we had to stand on our own two feet. Working hard labor, digging the ground, construction, in the hills. We got some money, 40 rupees a day. And I came back to Bangladesh, August 1990. I contacted the students and became a member of ABSDF.

Q: When did you stop being a monk?

A: July 1990.

Q: What is the current situation in Arakan?

A: We believe our movement will become greater and greater inside, because the government does not hand over the power. The NLD won the election: 392 seats. We support the NLD, Aung San Suu Kyi. Now the NLD's U Tin Oo serves three years with hard labor, U Kyi Maung of the NLD, also three years. Also Arakan League for Democracy organizers and representatives, they were convicted. And U Tha Htun, the very prominent historian of Arakan, the Army arrested him in Akyab and he was killed there. Many NLD members, ALD members, arrested. In Mrauk-Oo, five students, young ones, were arrested and given seven to thirteen years in prison. Just high school students. The people of Burma so bitterly hate that government. But the government opposes the people by force. If they utter one word they arrest them. If they write a letter without permission, they will arrest and they will torture. So the people cannot move our democracy movement. We have only one way, this is armed struggle. We have peacefully demonstrated, they killed many students. We legally demanded democracy, inside, according to the law of Burma, but they did not hand over the power.

Q: What do you want the outside world to know?

A: In politics there are two forces, the internal and the external. For internal forces, the whole people support us. But we cannot overthrow the government and we have no arms. Though the international radio stations are paying lip-service, the external forces don't give us one dollar. The Japanese government gave nine billion to Kuwait, but they never gave us one dollar. From BRC is our only aid. So we have a shortage of food. We have no money. One of our young members has got malaria, but we have had no medicine. His fever became very high, and he was unconscious. We have had many problems. We would accept the help of international organizations, countries from the outside world. Their humanitarian assistance, their spiritual encouragements to us. Without help of external forces, we cannot overthrow this government. But if we get international help, we hope we can win democracy. If we have money and arms, we can open up this western front.

28) Male, aged 23; Rakhine ABSDF activist; born in Akyab, Arakan. T

Q: In Burma, were you a student?

A: I finished Ninth Standard.

Q: When did you begin to study Karate?

A: When I was twelve.

Q: Why did you want to study Karate then?

A: I did not want to be bullied by other people, or oppressed, or tortured.

Q: When did you get your black belt?

A: At the 1988 Karate competition of Arakan, I won four medals there.

Q: What was your experience in the 1988 demonstrations?

A: When the people were rising up inside Akyab, we gave security to the people. At the time, Akyab was very heated up. We lived in the Mra Cinema Hall, together for our own security. Two days each week we were on duty for the people. I participated in the breaking open of the jail, to free the political prisoners. And I was also involved when three Burmese Intelligence men were killed. We tried to control the crowd, to stop them from killing those MI [Military Intelligence] men. My Karate club joined the "Ra La Ba Sa" organization -- All Arakan Youth Central Organization. At the beginning of the demonstrations, the karate club joined the defense committee. There were three martial arts groups, so we united and served for the security of the people. When Saw Maung seized power, his Western Regiment came, and the soldiers arrested five people from my quarter of Akyab, and they also chased to arrest me. About the MI case. I was accused of the killing. Since that time, I came to Bangladesh, to escape from the hands of MI and the Army.

Q: When you were doing the security work, what kinds of problems were there?

A: The civil administration of the people [democracy organization] asked the Army, will you control the city, or must we control it?" So the Army answered, "You continue the work, preserve your conditions." But people crossed the river by boats, and the Army said to remove the boats. The Army threatened the people, so they were angry and threw stones at the soldiers. So the Army fired at the people and two men died there. Then they commanded the people to go in their own houses, and they fired along the road, from their trucks. From that time the democracy security forces were destroyed, broken. The military soldiers went all over to arrest the people.

Q: What kind of work do you do now?

A: I want to show Karate to the people, so I teach it. I teach Karate for the ABSDF students, and others from the villages.

Q: Why is it good to learn Karate?

A: Learning Karate is good for health, and also good for military purposes.

Q: What is your hope for the future of Burma and Arakan?

A: We must achieve democracy by fighting. If we must fight without weapons, we can fight with our bare hands. But if we can get weapons, we will fight with them. I have many people in Arakan that I can call here anytime [to join], but because we have a food problem here, I cannot call them. When I was living in Arakan, I went to the rural areas and talked to the people, and I was involved in politics, opposing the government. If we receive help from outside, we can enter into Arakan and organize the people. We have many problems, but if we have money and help, we can carry on our work inside.

29) Male, aged "20 or 21"; Rohingya refugee; born in Buthidaung, Arakan. T

Q: What work did your family do in Burma?

A: Farmers.

Q: Did you go to school there?

A: No.

Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?

A: Seven days ago.

Q: Why did you leave Burma?

A: Because the Burmese military oppressed us and occupied our land and seized our paddy [harvested rice]. They grab us and take us as porters.

Q: Did you ever do forced labor?

A: Yes, I did. If we're not willing to do the labor, the Burmese Army will kill us. So we must do it.

Q: What kind of work did you do for the military?

A: Digging fields, building houses and making roads.

Q: Did they give you any payment?

A: No.

Q: Did they give you food and water?

A: They did not give food and water, so we had to "donate" 400, 500 kyat to the Burmese Army for it. Many times we did not eat or have a drop of water to drink.

Q: If somebody was too tired or too sick to work, what happened?

A: Many people were sick, but they had no medicine.

Q: Did your family have land in Burma?

A: Yes, we had land and a house. The Burmese military took it and already constructed an Army camp house on it.

Q: How did you come to Bangladesh?

A: In a small boat.

Q: Did you have any problem from the cyclone [three days after arrival]?

A: No.

Q: If the military left Buthidaung, would you go back, or stay here?

A: I don't want to go back.

Q: How many people from your village have come to the Bangladesh side?

A: I don't know. Our relatives and other villagers, I think about a thousand people already came to the Bangladesh side.

Q: Whose idea was it to come to Bangladesh?

A: We all together decided to come to Bangladesh. The Burmese military occupied our land, fields, everything. So we asked the military, "Please, you give us land, house." And the military replied, "As you like, you can go to Bangladesh." Many people came here to Bangladesh before we came.

Q: Are there more military in your area than last year?

A: Yes. This year, the military came from Rangoon and built their buildings. On our own land.

30) Male, aged 19; Rakhine ABSDF activist; born in Akyab, Arakan. T

Q: What was your experience in 1988?

A: On August 8, I participated in demonstrations in Akyab. Then on September 13th, we helped prisoners escape from jail. Only the political prisoners, no corruption people, thieves or robbers. Only innocent persons put there by the Burmese government. I was a Tenth Standard student then.

Q: How did the Army and police act?

A: After the military took power, they ordered the townships to take care of security. So most of the people of Akyab took night security, they blocked the roads against cars and buses. At the time the military took action with a patrol car. The soldiers told the people to remove the roadblock. They told them to go inside their homes. But the people said, "We are making security for our homes, how can we remove it?" Some small boys shot jinglees [slingshots] directly at the Army men in the patrol car. And then the soldiers came out of the car and they fired automatic rifles. The boys [included] my friend Maung Maung, the bullet directly hit his head, the left side and came out the right side. And another two people were shot. I saw it clearly. So we ran away. Most of the people from Akyab, *they took part*, to bring ~~the~~ corpses to the cemetery. The police and soldiers said not to go to the cemetery. They blocked the demonstrators. The fire-extinguishing truck came along and fired water at us. We put plastic over us to keep the water off us. Monks were with us, too. They were constantly shooting the water, but we all moved together. So the soldiers fired in the air with their rifles. Then the police looked for demonstrators to arrest. So I ran away, and came to Bangladesh with my six friends. We arrived on September 24, 1988.

Q: Where did you stay?

A: At a monastery. And then we contacted another group that ran away from Arakan, they said they would go to NUFA, but they didn't know exactly what to do. We were very confused about going to NUFA or to student groups. We met another person who suggested that we go to the ACP [Arakan Communist Party]. But we didn't. Then on September 29, a man from my neighborhood said we should go to NUFA, so we did. We came from Arakan to take up armed struggle, so we were very hopeful that NUFA could help us with that. And then we saw NUFA, and NUFA had nothing. The ABSDF was not formed, so we stayed at the NUFA camp and we took armed training, in October. Then the student groups separated from NUFA at U Kyaw Hlaing's suggestion, and ABSDF Arakan was formed. At training time, 194 people took arms training, including NUFA and ABSDF Arakan. The training commander chose two people to train in telecommunications. The other one and I went to ALP [Arakan Liberation Party, a NUFA member group] headquarters and took communications training. Wireless and international telegraph. We departed from NUFA in April 1989 and contacted the student group and are in the ABSDF to now.

Q: Do you stay at the camp or outside?

A: I helped build the first camp. It was very hard labor. 64 people lived there. We didn't get the BRC help then. It was very difficult to struggle for survival. It was hard to get medicine.

Q: Did you ever get sick?

A: We all got seriously ill in that camp. But we had a very strong will. I had malaria. Sometimes now I'm not feeling well, with some other kinds of fever.

Q: Normally, what food do you eat?

A: Bamboo shoots, they're very important here. Mixed with different kinds of plants. And snails from the riverbank.

Q: How often do you eat rice each day?

A: Two times a day. Lunch and dinner. We have no breakfast.

Q: Do you have tea to drink?

A: No tea.

Q: Salt?

A: Not much.

Q: Nga-pi [fish-paste]?

A: No.

Q: Chilis?

A: Sometimes, not always.

Q: You have how many longyis [men's sarongs]?

A: Only one.

Q: How many uniforms?

A: One set of uniform. And two t-shirts.

Q: Do you have a rifle?

A: I have no gun.

Q: Do you have a wireless at the camp?

A: No. The ALP have a wireless.

Q: What would you want the outside world to know?

A: The people of the world, they know only about the eastern side of Burma, the Karen and other rebels there. They don't know anything about the western side, Arakan side. We hope people will realize about our side of the struggle for democracy in Burma. So many people are killed. Demonstrators and the anti-government resistance are killed, and some arrested. So I want to tell the people of the world to realize our feelings.

31) Male, aged 14; Rakhine ABSDF activist; born in Rathedaung, Arakan. T

Q: In 1988, were you a student?

A: At State High School, Eighth Standard.

Q: What was your experience in the democracy movement?

A: On 8/8/88, there was a demonstration in Rathedaung. We demonstrated in the streets. We demanded the government permit us to form a student union officially. And then we had slogans to denounce the military rule, the one-party rule.

Q: What did the police and Army do?

A: The police and soldiers were silent at first, but the next two or three days, even the police took part in the demonstrations in Rathedaung.

Q: What happened that September?

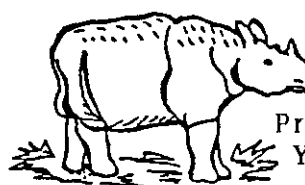
A: After the military coup, the Military Intelligence people searched for student activists. So I came to Bangladesh. I stayed in a Buddhist monastery and I didn't get in contact with student groups. Most people sympathised with me because I was very young. So people gave me food in the morning, although I was not a monk. After two months, I contacted the student groups and they came for me and I went to the ABSDF camp.

Q: At the camp, did you ever get sick?
 A: Yes, very. At the old camp I got bad malaria. And now I get a little sick. One day, two days, sick.
 Q: Do you have any medicine?
 A: I have no money to buy medicine, so I don't have it.
 Q: Normally, how many times a day do you eat rice?
 A: Two meals.
 Q: What do you eat with your rice?
 A: In the rainy season, we get bamboo shoots and snails. Now, in the dry season it is very difficult to get vegetables, so we eat some wild fruits.
 Q: What kind of work do you do at this camp?
 A: We clean the camp compound and clear the mountain to build the camp and grow paddy and some vegetables.
 Q: What clothes do you have?
 A: One set of uniform, two shirts, one longyi [men's sarong].
 Q: Do you have a rifle?
 A: Not yet.
 Q: What do you want to tell the outside world?
 A: I want to ask the other countries to give supplies -- arms and the money to buy arms -- for us to fight to restore democracy to Burma.
 Q: Do you have any contact with your family?
 A: My mother came to the border and asked me to come back to Arakan.
 Q: After liberation, what work do you want to do in Burma?
 A: I would serve in the people's army. A new form of army.

32) Female, aged 13; Rohingya refugee; born in Laweta village, Buthidaung, Arakan. T

Q: What work did your family do in Burma?
 A: Farming.
 Q: Did you go to school in Burma?
 A: Arabic school [Koran instruction].
 Q: When did you come to Bangladesh?
 A: Two months ago.
 Q: Why did your family come to Bangladesh?
 A: The Burmese military wanted to take me away and rape me.
 Q: Did you see Burmese Army soldiers, and did they speak to you?
 A: Many saw me and talked to me.
 Q: Were they polite when they spoke?
 A: Not polite at all.
 Q: How did you come to Bangladesh?
 A: By sampan.
 Q: Does your family have a house in Bangladesh now?
 A: No.
 Q: Did the cyclone cause any problems?
 A: Everything floated away.
 Q: If the military left Buthidaung, would you go back, or stay here?
 A: I would not go back to Burma. I want to go to school here in Bangladesh.

end.



Project Maje
Year V