

# **Response to the Press Release of the 'Rohingyas'**

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## **I. Introduction:**

After reading the press release of the 'Rohingyas' (see the other attachment), as a Rakhaing I am obliged to write the real Arakanese History during the Mrauk U Dynasty. Apart from that, I like to give some responses to that press release:

**First of all, in any case, the racial remarks of the Burmese Consul General in Hong Kong must be condemned, whoever these 'Rohingyas' are.**

In the mean time a new article appeared in Irrawaddy on 16<sup>th</sup> Feb. 09, mentioning that those 'Boat People' sailed from Bangladesh and not from Arakan as the media informed. They were caned by the sailors who took them to Thailand (See the attachment, migrants ---). Now it appears that these 'Boat People' have something to do with human trafficking. They are rather illegal immigrants seeking better fortune in more prosperous countries, the so-called "economic refugees" and NOT the political refugees of an ethnic minority group who were tortured and discriminated in their 'Mother Land'.

Here I would like to suggest all media, Burmese Oppositions, including Irrawaddy, Burma Digest and other newspapers or journals should study the Arakanese History as well as the reports of the British Colonial Officers of the then British India (i.e. including Burma as a part of British Indian Empire) because they were neither Burmese, Arakanese nor the people of the Subcontinent but British, that means they were neutral persons and most of their contributions were for administrative purposes and/or for scholarly researches, needless to say they were objective.

In this paper, the present author will scrutinize all available authentic historical and etymological facts and answer the statements in their press release scholarly without any prejudice by using compare and contrast method.

## **II. Responses to the press release:**

In their Press release, the 'Rohingyas' claimed that Muslims were in Arakan since the 10th Century:

1. Maurice Collis, however, wrote in his paper Arakan's Place in the Civilization of the Bay: "Bengal was absorbed into this polity [that is, Islam] in 1203 A.D. But it was its extreme eastern limit. It never passed into Indo-China; and its influence from its arrival in 1203 till 1430 was negligible upon Arakan".
2. In the 10th century A.D., even the biggest country in Southeast Asia with the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia, was under the Sri Vijaya Empire, which was a Hindu-Buddhist Empire.
3. In the tenth century A.D. Arakan was ruled by the Buddhist kings of the Dhanyawaddy Dynasty and that old city site can still be seen near the small town Kyauk Taw. There is not a single evidence of Arabic culture or Islam faith there. The only non-Buddhist evidence found there are the Hindu deities.

4. If their claims that their forefathers lived in Arakan since the 10th Century AD are true, there is no doubt that their descendants who stayed in Arakan at least ten centuries might have spoken Burmese/Arakanese fluently and known native traditions and cultures like the "Burmese Muslims" in Shwebo District, "Myay Du Muslims" in Thandwe District and "Kaman Muslims" in Arakan. Even the Arakanese (Rakhaings) living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts nowadays, where Bengali plays the role of the official language, can still speak, read and write Burmese. Unfortunately, however, the people who are now calling themselves "Rohingyas" do not know any Arakanese/Burmese language and culture. The only language they speak is Bengali Chittagong dialect and the only culture they know is Bengali Culture of Chittagong Area.

### **III. Was Arakan A Muslim State?**

Arakan was and is not a Muslim state. All Arakanese (Rakhaings) were and are devout Buddhists. The history of the Holy Maha Muni Image was and is a proof. Maha Muni Image, a colossal image cast in bronze and inlaid with gold, became the envy of almost all Burmese kings. Whenever they expanded their empire, they tried to rob this holy image. Starting from Anawratha (11th Century AD) to Bodaw U Waing (18th Century AD), most Burmese kings tried to snatch this statue. The Burmese Royal Armies looted this colossal image from the Arakan City or Mrauk U after the Burmese conquest of the Rakhaing Kingdom in the late 18th Century. They used the Arakanese prisoners of war, about thirty thousand including the last King of Arakan, Maha Thamada, as slave labour to carry that colossal image across the mountain range and for other slavery works like the reconstruction of Meikhlila Lake, the aborted war against Siam etc. etc. Till now some Arakanese, especially from Sittwe and Mro Haung call the Burmese as "Robbers and Thugs of the Holy Image, Maha Muni", 'Phaya Thukho, Phaya Damya'.

Arakan was well known to be "the Land of Pagodas and Temples". There is a famous Arakanese verse: Thazun pan Khaing ta mraing mraing Rakhaing Phara paung", which was nicely translated into English verse by Maung Tha Hla as: "The Thazun (a type of orchid) sprigs in sheer clusters, Sum the total of the pharas grandeur". According to this verse, there were 6352755 Pharas (Buddha Statues) in Arakan.

Maurice Collis described the situation of Buddhism in the year 1630 during the reign of Min Hayi (Man Hari) alias Thiri Thudhamma (Sri Suddhamma) who bore the Muslim Title Salem Shah the Second. In his book The Land of the Great Image in page 168 where it was written: "The Buddha had died in 543 B.C. Altogether 2173 years had elapsed since then, and for that immense period the image of the Founder of the Religion had remained on Sirigutta, the oldest, most mysterious, the most holy object in the world. The relics detailed to the disciples on Selagiri had all been found and enshrined. Arakan was a sacred country; it was the heart of Buddhism; and he (King Thiri Thudhamma) as its king, was the most notable Buddhist ruler in existence. Grave indeed was his responsibility. He had not only to maintain the state as the homeland of the Arakanese race, but as the one place on earth where an authentic shape of the Tathagata was preserved, a possession of greater potency than the most precious relics".

#### **A. The Mrauk-U Dynasty**

In the year A.D 1404 the king of Arakan was Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) and the capital city was Longkyet (Longkrat). He liked the very beautiful wife of a minister and requested that minister, his wife to be presented to the king and in exchange the minister would receive two pretty maids of honour. When the minister refused, the king offered to give four maids of honour as an exchange, but all in vain. Hence, the king took the minister's wife by force. Committing adultery with a married lady

is always a big scandal for a Buddhist, especially for a king. The husband of that lady and her brother went to Ava, the Burmese capital, and requested Min Gaung (Man Gaung), the Burmese king, that he should overthrow the disgraced Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) of Arakan. The Burmese kings of the Ava Empire, especially for King Min Gaung (Man Gaung), automatically considered Arakan as their vassal state because Arakan was feudatory to the Pagan Empire of the Burmese, and apart from that Min Gaung was a war-like king. During the reign of his father King Swa Saw Ke, the young prince Min Gaung personally did lead the Burmese invasion armies to Pegu, the Mon kingdom ruled by King Razadiriz.

So, in the year 1406, Min Gaung (Man Gaung), the king of the Burmese, sent his warrior son Min Ye Kyaw Zwa (Man Ree Kyaw Zwa) with a big army. Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan), the king of Arakan fled the kingdom and took refuge in Gaur, the capital of the Sultanate of Bengal. In this way Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) became the last king of the Longkyet (Longkrat) Dynasty and was given a nickname by later historians as "the King who took refuge in the Land of Kalas (Indians)".

The Burmese let their viceroy, a son in law of the Burmese king Min Gaung, rule Arakan. The Arakanese king's younger brother Min Kayi (Man Kari), "Duke of Thandwe", the crown prince then, went to Pegu, the Mon capital, and requested the Mons, archrival of the Burmese, for help. With the help of Razadiriz (*Raja di Raja*), king of the Mons, he liberated Longkrat, killed the Burmese viceroy. He also sent Min Gaung's daughter to Pegu as a gift to the Mon king. He could rule Arakan on behalf of his brother, but only for a short period. The second Burmese invasion in A.D 1408 headed by Min Ye Kyaw Zwa (Man Ree Kyaw Zwa) followed. This time the Burmese armies invaded Longkrat, Thandwe and the Kingdom of the Mons simultaneously. The Mon armies in Arakan had to go back to defend their own kingdom. The Arakanese king's younger brother Min Khayi (Man Khari), the prince regent then, had to take refuge by the Mons while his elder brother took refuge by the Sultan of Gaur.

Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) stayed in Gaur for more than 22 years. With the help of the Sultan of Bengal he regained his throne in A.D 1430, and built the new capital of Mrauk U, while the Burmese were very busy having wars against the Mons.

To show his gratitude to the Sultan he asked what he could do. The Sultan persuaded him to be converted into Islam but he refused; however, he promised the Sultan that the Arakanese kings would bear Pseudonym Muslim Titles.

The warrior Burmese prince Min Ye Kyaw Zwa (Man Ree Kyaw Zwa) was seriously wounded in a battle against the Mons and died later. Min Saw Mun's (Min Saw Muan) younger brother and throne successor Min Kayi (Man Kari) met his Burmese counterpart then, Narapati Gyi (Narapati Gri) of Ava at the border between two kingdoms and signed a friendship treaty with the Burmese.

## **B. Buddhists kings with Pseudonym Muslim Titles:**

The 'Rohingyas' claimed that Arakan was ruled by the Muslim kings from 1430 for about 100 years.

In fact, the Kingdom of Mrauk U was not established by the 'Rohingyas'. All kings of the Mrauk U dynasty were Buddhists. Some kings had assumed Muslim Titles because, as mentioned above, Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan), the founder of the Mrauk U City wanted to show his gratitude to the Sultan of Gaur who helped him to regain the Arakanese throne in 1430. Hence, he promised the Sultan that the Arakanese kings would bear Pseudonym Muslim Titles. But in fact, all of the Arakanese kings were donors of many temples in Mrauk U as well as in the other parts of Arakan. They did make coins, one side with Burmese/Arakanese scripts and the other side with Persian (NOT Bengali).

For example: Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan), the founder of the Mrauk U City with the assumed Muslim Title 'Suleiman Shah' built seven Buddhists temples in Mrauk U. One of them was Laymyetna Phaya (Leemyatna Phara) in Mrauk U (now Mrohaung). His successor and younger brother Min Khayi (Man Khari), who had an assumed Muslim Title 'Ali Khan', erected the Nyidaw Zedi, which can be roughly translated as 'The Pagoda built by the Younger Brother'. His son and successor King Ba Saw Phru alias Kaliman Shah constructed four Buddhists temples including the Maha Bodi Shwegu Pagoda. His son Dan Unga alias Daluya, who bore the Muslim Title Moguh Shah, was the donor of Thongyaik Tasu Temple (meaning the temple of Thirty One Buddhas). His successor Min Yan Aung (Man Ran Aung) alias Narui Shah founded the Htupayon Pagoda. Min Bin (Man Ban) had an assumed Muslim Title of Zabauk Shah; and was the donor of seven temples including Shit Thaung Phaya (Shite Thaung Phara) or the Temple of Eighty Thousand Buddha Statues. Min Phalaung (Man Phalaung) alias Secudah Shah was the donor of six temples including Htukkan Thein, his son Min Yaza Gyi (Man Raza Gri) with the Muslim Title Salem Shah donated Phaya Paw (Phara Paw) Pagoda and Pakhan Thein in Mrauk U and also Shwe Kyaung Pyin Monastery in Thandwe. Min Khamaung, who subjoined the Muslim Title Hussein Shah constructed Yatanapon (Ratanabon) and Yatana Pyethet (Ratana Prethat) Pagodas and his son Thri Thudhamma (meaning the Protector of Buddhist Religion) alias Salem Shah the Second, erected the Sekkya Manaung (Sakkya Manaung) Pagoda.

Muslim Sharia Law dictated the Muslim community to convert all 'infidels', i.e., all who supported any other religions except Islam. A Muslim who converts to another religion can be punishable with a death penalty. If those kings of the Mrauk U Dynasty were Muslims, they would have been condemned to death by the Mullahs for breach of the Islamic faith.

There was and is no Muslim ruler who undertook or undertakes to promote Buddhism or Christianity or any other religion. The Crusade Wars had proven this in history. In 2000, the Talibans of Afghanistan destroyed two 2000 years old gigantic Buddha Statues despite of the protests from the whole world. They could not keep those statues even as historical monuments. For them, those statues were the "Idols of the Infidels"!

See also: Jacques Leider, "Those Buddhist Kings with Muslim Titles", Scholars Column, [www.rakhapura.com](http://www.rakhapura.com).

Taking assumed Muslim Titles or a Muslim name did not and does not mean that that person must be a Muslim. Even President Obama of USA, a Christian, has a second name Hussein. One of the famous singers of the Burmese Classical Songs during the late Colonial Era and in the early 50's bore the name U Ali, but he was a Buddhist. Many people of Burma took and still have some Christian names though they were and are devoted Buddhists. The late Daw Khin May Than, wife of the late Dictator General Ne Win bore the Christian name Kitty Ba Than. A son of the first President of the Union of Burma, Sao Shwe Thaik, a Shan and a devout Buddhist had the name Eugene Thaik. Even the Prime Minister of the NCGUB, Dr. Sein Win, was called John Ba Win until 1959 in the then St. John's Diocesan Boys' School, Rangoon, though he is a Buddhist and his parents were devout Buddhists. His former classmate, the present author too has also a Christian name Peter Saw Maung, though I am a Buddhist and my parents were Buddhists.

There are many reasons for bearing a foreign name. It may be because of friendship, in some cases just for courtesy and sometimes just to show respect for that society. All members of 'the Thirty Comrades' had Japanese Pseudonyms. For example: Omoda (Aung san), Tani (Let Ya), Tagazuki (Ne Win). Most of the Burma Scholars of Foreign Origin have Burmese names. For Example: U Hla Thein (Prof. John Okell, London), Daw Khin Khin Chaw (Prof. Anna Allot, London), U Ba Tin (Prof. Vadim

Kasevitch, Russia), Daw Hnin Si (Dr. Annemarie Esche, Germany), Daw Than Than Win (Dr. Uta Gaertner, Germany).

#### **IV. British contributions about Muslims in Burma:**

I searched for the ethnic group 'Rohingyas' in all history books, literature, encyclopaedias and other publications published before 1953 and written by foreign scholars. Unfortunately, I did not find any. None of the British Colonial Officers recorded the name 'Rohingya', neither in the Indian Subcontinent nor in Burma.

To be honest, I had never heard of the word "Rohingya" until the late 1950's.

1. "The fact that there has never been a "Rohingya" ethnic group in Burma is quite evident. There is no such name as "Rohingya" in the Census of India, 1921 (Burma) compiled by G. G. Grantham, I.C.S., Superintendent of Census Operations Burma, or in the Burma Gazetteer, Akyab District (1924) compiled by R. B. Smart.
2. Even in Hobson-Jobson. "A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive" published by British Colonial Officers of British East India Company, Col. Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell (First Published 1886) the word "Rohingya" was not mentioned. Since this book was published by the Bengal Chamber Edition, Calcutta, India, and is an indispensable dictionary for those who want to study the history of India during the last 300 years and its impact on the East and West, it should be considered as a standard literature.
3. The well known author and scholar, Maurice Collis, who wrote many articles and books about Arakan, also never mentioned the word "Rohingya".
4. None of the British Colonial Officers' contributions about Burma and India mentioned that word "Rohingya", however, they mentioned about 'Zerabadi' the Indo-Burmese Hybrids or "Burmese Muslims", the Muslims in Shwebo and Yamethin Districts in Burma Proper, "Myay Du Muslims", "Kaman Muslims" and Bengali Muslim Settlers of Arakan.

#### **A. Kaman Muslims**

Some Muslim settlement began only after Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) regained the throne of Arakan in 1430 with the help of the Sultan of Gaur. There were some Muslim troops in Mrauk U to protect Min Saw Mun (Man Saw Muan) from the Burmese invasion. About two hundred years later, some followers of Mogul Prince Shah Shuja, who took refuge by the Arakanese king Sanda Thuddhama, joined the descendants of these soldiers. These groups of mercenaries were Afghans, Persians and Moguls. They were called "Kamans", meaning archers in Persian language. Their descendants still live in the Rakhine State, particularly in Akyab (Sittwe) District and Rambree Island. Now they are assimilated into the Arakanese society. Only in religion and complexion do they differ from the Arakanese (Rakhaing/Rakhine), they know the Arakanese language, literature and Buddhist traditions very well. Most of them have Burmese/Arakanese names. They rarely used their Muslim names.

#### **B. Myay Du Muslims**

There are some Muslims living in Thandwe District. These Muslims are called "Myay Du". They are the descendants of the former "Pagoda Slaves". When King Min Bin (Man Ban) alias Min Bargyi (Man

Bargri) reoccupied the Chittagong District in A.D. 1533, he brought back some Bengalis as prisoners of war and let them work as menial workers at Andaw, Nandaw and Sandaw Pagodas in Thandwe. Since they had to do menial works and were not free people anymore, they were called "Pagoda Slaves". In the year 1624, these Bengali "Pagoda Slaves" supported the 'Palace revolution' lead by the 'Duke of Thandwe' and the crown prince then, Min Khamaung, against his own father King Raza Gri. After the aborted revolution against the Arakanese king these 'Bengali Pagoda Slaves' and their families, all together about four thousand people, escaped to the Burmese kingdom of Ava to take refuge. The Burmese king accepted them as his subjects, gave them their freedom by royal orders declaring that they were no longer "Pagoda Slaves", and let them settle in the small town Myay Du. That's why they were known as "Myay Du Muslims". These "Myay Du Muslims", generation by generation, served in the Burmese Royal Army. When Bodaw Phaya's armies invaded Arakan in 1784, the descendants of these "Myay Du Muslims" came together with the Burmese Army at Thandwe front. When the Burmese occupied Arakan they let the "Myay Dus" resettle in Thandwe and nearby villages. Since these people had lived about 150 years in Upper Burma, these "Myay Dus" were assimilated into Burmese society. Although their descendants live in Thandwe District, they speak Burmese central dialect instead of Arakanese Thandwe Dialect. Only in complexion and faith do they differ from the Arakanese and Burmese, yet they know the Burmese language, culture and traditions very well. Officially, they have Burmese/Arakanese names. They rarely use their Muslim names in public. See also: Tydd, W.D., Burma Gazetteer, Sandoway District, Vol.A, Rangoon, 1926.

### **C. Bengali settlers after the British annexation of Arakan in 1826:**

Since Arakan has a direct land border with East Bengal many Chittagonian Bengalis were brought to Arakan by the British as cheap labourers. These latter settlers are called "Khawtaw Kalas" in both Burmese and Arakanese.

Some settlers learnt Arakanese and Burmese; hence, some of them were assimilated in the native society. However, these Chittagonian Bengalis differ from the Arakanese in their features, complexion and religion as well as in some customs which their religion directs; in writing they use Burmese but among themselves employ colloquially the language of their ancestors, either Urdu or Bengali. They never named themselves 'Rohingyas' but 'Arakan Muslims'. Since they were assimilated in the native society, Burmese as well as Arakanese (Rakhaings) did not call them Khawtaw Kala any more, but used the term Muslims, just to differentiate them from the natives who are Buddhists, Kamans and Myaydus. Though Kamans and Myaydus are Muslims they were already assimilated in the native society. When one hears the name Kaman or Myaydu, one knows automatically that they are Muslims.

Unfortunately, however, many latter settlers never tried to assimilate into the native society and therefore they were and are never welcomed by the natives, neither by the Burmese nor by the Arakanese society. Nor could they join even in the society of "Indigenous Muslims of Arakan", the "Kamans" and the "Myay Dus". That was the main reason why racial riots happened often during the whole colonial era and also in post-colonial era, especially in Northern Arakan. Burmese and Arakanese (Rakhaings) called them either Khawtaw Kala or Sittagaung Kala.

### **D. Mujahid Rebels**

After Burma had regained her independence, these settlers wanted to turn northern Arakan into an autonomous Muslim state. "Some members of the 'Juniyatu Olamai' religious association went to Karachi on a delegation to discuss the incorporation of Butheedaung, Maungdaw and also Rathedaung townships into East Pakistan. Some of them went underground and called themselves "Mujahid"

rebels. The leader of the "Mujahids rebels was Mir Cassim, an uneducated fisherman. It was only an illusion of an uneducated man like Cassim who wanted to turn a traditionally Buddhist land like Arakan into a Muslim state". As a result, in the 1950's these rebels were totally crushed by the Burma Armed Forces. Some surrendered while some fled to East Pakistan. Cassim fled to East Pakistan and he was shot dead in Cox Bazaar by an unknown person in 1966.

Both surrendered Mujahid and Bengali Muslim Settlers did not want to be called Khawtaw Kala or Kala which according to their own interpretation supposed to be derogatory because 'Kala' means 'dark' or 'Coloured' or 'Blackie' in the languages such as Hindi, Urdu, Bengali . In fact, the literal pronunciation of the Burmese as well as Arakanese word 'Kala' is 'Kula' and also written as 'Kula'. This term was derived from the Pali or Sanskrit word 'Kula Puttra' meaning 'the son of a noble race' because Lord Buddha himself was an Indian. Both Po and Sagaw Karen word for Indian is 'Kula' and the Thai word for Indian is 'Kal'. Hence, it is not derogatory instead it is 'a word of courtesy'!

Anyway, Bengali Muslim Settlers did not want to be called 'Kala'. As a result, they settled for the name "Rohingya". In the late 1950's, the demand for the statehood of the Rakhaings (Arakanese) and the Mons was at the peak. The Bengalis who started calling themselves "Rohingyas" asked for the same status as the Arakanese (Rakhaings). When their demands were turned down by the Burmese government on the grounds that they were not an indigenous race of Arakan, some educated Bengali Muslims like M. A. Tahir, well known through his Burmese name Ba Tha, Maung Than Lwin and some Bengali Muslim students from the University of Rangoon began to fabricate historical facts to prove that they were "Indigenous Arakanese Muslims" and started to fabricate stories that they and their ancestors belonged to Arakan historically.

## **V. Evolution of the word 'Rohingya'**

There are many stories fabricated by educated Bengali Muslims to prove that their ancestors were the indigenous ethnic minorities of Arakan but all of them are baseless.

The real etymology of the term 'Rohingya' can be traced as follows:

After the Second World War when British Administration restarted in Burma, all Bengalis who went back to Bengal during the war came back to Arakan. They brought many new settlers with them. Because of their immigration waves many Arakanese left their villages in Northern Arakan and moved southwards. These villages were named "Old or Deserted Villages", Ywa-Haun in Burmese (Rwa-Haun or Ra-haun in Arakanese pronunciation). The villagers of Ywa-Haun were called Ywa-Haun-Tha in Burmese (Ra-Haun-Tha in Arakanese pronunciation). Those Bengali new settlers could not pronounce 'Ra-Haun' as well as Ra-Haun-Tha properly and called with their Bengali accent "Ro-han" and the "Ro-han-za", respectively. Later it deviated to 'Ro-han-ja' and then 'Ro-hin-gya'.

### **A. Political way out of the AFPFL**

U Nu's government had a lot of political problems in the 50's. The political wing of the Rakhaings supported the oppositions. Just to punish the Rakhaings, U Nu and his deputy then U Ba Swe promised to grant the Ra-Haung-Tha, all together more than one hundred thousand people, Burmese citizenship. After that, with these newly granted Burmese citizens' votes some educated Bengali Muslims such as Mr. Sultan Mahmud, Mr. Abu Bawshaw, Mr. Abu Kai and Mr. Abdul Gahfar became MPs of U Nu's party from all constituencies of the frontier districts in 1956 elections. These four Muslim Members of Parliament neither named themselves nor their followers 'Rohingyas' at that time, instead they called themselves 'Arakan Muslims'.



U Nu and U Ba Swe started using the term 'Rohingya'. Since the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister started using the term 'Rohingya' others too started using this term. Even the famous history professor, Prof. G. C. Luce started using the term "Rohingyas" in his lectures for the Bengali settlers living in Northern Arakan, although he has never mentioned this terminology in his lectures in the pre-war days, and also in his books published before 1955.

There were two Muslim ministers in the AFPFL government. U Rashid was very close to U Nu and U Latiff alias U Khin Maung Latt was a protégé of U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein, the First and the Second Deputy Prime Ministers. Hence, the AFPFL government wanted to grant Burmese citizenship to more Bengali settlers, if they fell under the category of 'Yaw-haun-Tha' (Ra-Haun-Tha).

Since that time, all Chittagonian Bengalis, whether their ancestors had lived in Arakan before the Second World War or not, if they wanted to get Burmese citizenship they used the term "Rohanja" or 'Rohingya', which according to their pronunciation meaning Villagers of Rwa-Haun or 'Ra-Haun-Tha'.

The surrendered "Mujahids" too adopted that name to prove that they were the villagers of "Rahaung" (Rohan in their pronunciation), that means they had lived there since before or after the second world war so that they could claim Burmese citizenship.

### **B. Premier Nu's 'Pendulum Tactics' to remain in Power:**

U Nu and U Ba Swe might have planned to accept the name "Rohingyas" for the Chittagonian Bengalis who became Burmese citizens eventually with the hope that these people will vote for their party, however, they were afraid to accept them as an indigenous race of Burma.

Before all these could happen, however, the ruling party, the Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League (AFPFL) split into two factions, the Clean AFPFL headed by U Nu and the Stable AFPFL lead by U Ba Swe. U Ba Swe's fraction (the Stable) was supported by the majority of the AFPFL members of parliament (i.e. the ruling party). Seeing his danger by vote of no-confidence by his former comrades, U Nu promised to grant States for the Arakanese and the Mons, and he also promised to the "Arakan Muslims" leaders that he won't forget their gratitude if they could help him during that political crisis. In June 1958, U Nu's fraction narrowly escaped the vote of no-confidence submitted by U Ba Swe's fraction in the Burmese Lower House because the "Arakanese National Union Party", the party of the Mons and "Arakan Muslims" MPs together with the MPs of the main opposition party then, the leftist National United Front (NUF) party, voted for U Nu's fraction.

U Nu showed his gratitude by appointing his supporters as ministers in his new coalition government. Two NUF MPs called U Thein Pe Myint and Dr. E Maung, one Arakanese MP U Hla Tun Phru, one Mon MP U Mon Pho Cho and one "Arakan Muslim" MP Mr. Sultan Mahmud became ministers in this cabinet. Here, U Mon Pho Cho and U Hla Tun Phru were named Minister for Mon and Arakanese Affairs respectively apart from their other posts as the minister of their other ministries. Mr. Sultan Mahmud, on the other hand, was only the replacement for the other Muslim minister U Latiff *alias* U Khin Maung Latt who sided with the Stable Fraction of the AFPFL and voted against U Nu. Mr. Sultan Mahmud wanted to make hay while the sun shines, expected to get the lion's share and requested U Nu to name him "the Minister for Arakan Muslim Affairs". His request was turned down by U Nu on the grounds that the "Arakan Muslims" were in fact Chittagonian Bengalis; hence, their ancestors were settlers only and were never of the indigenous race of Arakan.

On 31st July 1958 U Nu offered an amnesty to all insurgents who would surrender themselves. Some Mujahids surrendered. They and other Bengali settlers ask for citizenship. However, this government



did not last long to grant them citizenship. The government was in power for three months and seventeen days only.

In September 1958, the three leading officers from the Burma Army, namely Brigadier Tin Pe, Colonel Aung Gyi and Colonel Maung Maung went to Premier Nu's resident and demanded to transfer power officially to the military or otherwise they could not prevent the military coup planned by other officers. In the mean time Brigadier Aung Shwe (now chairman of the opposition NLD Party, the party of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi), the then commander of the Southern Command ordered some of his troops to occupy the Mingaladon International Airport and Insein Town, both of them are only ten miles away from Rangoon City Centre. Prime Minister U Nu had no other choice, but to surrender power to a Caretaker Government headed by General Ne Win constitutionally through the parliament just to prevent the army coup d'état. The Caretaker Government ruled Burma until March 1960. The multi-party election was held in February 1960 in which U Nu's party won with landslide majority.

### **C. The first attempt of Bengali Muslims for the acceptance as an indigenous ethnic group**

Those Bengali leaders tried again to have their group accepted as "Indigenous Muslims" or as an "indigenous ethnic group" of Burma as well as many people to be granted citizenship again. This time they generally used the name "The Arakan Muslims", however, occasionally they also used the name "Rohingyas" as an attempt to prove that they are an "indigenous ethnic group" of Arakan. Unfortunately, the population of the "Rohingyas" given by them was much higher than the registered "Surrendered Mujahids" and the former villagers of Rwa Haung or Ra-Haun-Tha. The government answered that citizenship will be considered only for the people who were eligible, that means the former villagers of Rwa Haung, the former "Mujahids" and their descendants but not for the latter settlers. Their demand for an "indigenous ethnic group" was turned down again on the ground that Chittagonian Bengalis were never of the indigenous race of Arakan and they and their ancestors were settlers only, and therefore they could be considered in the same category as the Indians, the Pakistanis and the Chinese immigrants. Then their "History Professors" like Ba Tha and Maung Than Lwin began to fabricate the "Histories" as mentioned earlier.

The name "Rohingya" disappeared during the Caretaker Government. It reappeared in April 1960 when U Nu was re-elected as Prime Minister. U Nu, just to please the Arakan Muslim MPs and their followers who supported him in the election, allowed broadcasting in the "Rohingya" language in the Burma Broadcasting Station (BBS) under the Foreign Languages Programme in addition to English and Hindustani, but never allowed it in the National Languages Programme. In fact, the "Rohingya" language is a Bengali Chittagong dialect.

To regain back his power, U Nu had promised many things before the election which later became contradictory to each other. For example he promised to declare Buddhism as the State Religion without considering the fact that there are two Christian majority states in Burma, namely the Kachin and the Chin States, where at least 60% of the population are Christians. The Karen (Kayin) state, however, was and is not a Christian majority state. Only 30% of the Karens in Burma are Christians. At least 35 % of Karens are Buddhist and the rest are nature worshippers. When the MPs discussed in parliament to declare Buddhism as the state religion, his own party members of the Kachin and Chin States as well as his good friend the Muslim Minister U Rashid protested and voted against it, however, the majority of the MPs voted for it and Buddhism became state religion. After that many riots started between Buddhists and Muslims and also it was the 'Birth of the Kachin rebellion K.I.A (the Kachin Independence Army)'.

He promised to grant statehood to the Rakhaings and Mons, in the mean time he wanted to grant citizenship to many illegal Bengali Muslim immigrants with the name 'Rohingya', just to console his Muslim minister and MPs.

In the mean time the Shans and the Kayahs, due to their rights signed in the Panlong Conference in 1947, demanded to make some amendments in the constitution so that the States in the Union of Burma have more autonomy, have equal rights and become federal states.

There was political turmoil in Burma and U Nu was totally trapped in his own promises which he could not solve easily. It became the 'Golden opportunity' for the Usurper General Ne Win 'to make hay while the sun shines' and took the 'Lion's Share' and 'carried out the Army coup de tat on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1962.

At the beginning all foreign media were trapped by Ne Win. Many British and American sources wrote Ne Win's coup dé tat was necessary because the country was in a political dilemma.

When U Nu's government was overthrown by General Ne Win through a military coup in March 1962, the constitution was suspended. Buddhism was no more state religion, the name "Rohingya" disappeared from the Burmese political scene again. Hindustani and "Rohingya" broadcasts ended.

In 1972 the name "Rohingya" reappeared inside Burma, when the Revolutionary Council Government formed a commission called the Constitution Commission and this Commission requested citizens for suggestions. The "Rohingyas" took the opportunity and responded immediately by sending suggestions and proposals to grant them the rights of ethnic minorities and requested for an autonomous Muslim State in northern Arakan. They presented those "stories" and "created history" again. Their demands were turned down again on the ground that they and their ancestors were neither "Indigenous Muslims" nor Indigenous ethnic group of Arakan nor Burma. Some of their leaders went to Former East Pakistan and established the "Arakan Rohingya Liberation Front" under the slogan of "Rohingya National Liberation" on 15 July 1972. This "front" has very few members, not more than two hundred. They got a few help from fanatic Muslims and some rich Muslim countries but neither from the Pakistani nor Bangladeshi governments directly. After that nobody heard the name "Rohingya" again until 1978 after the first aborted 'Naga Min Operation'. Then, the name 'Rohingya' reappeared in 1991, after the second aborted 'Naga Min' Operation.

#### **D. 'Rohingya' population growth**

The population growth of the 'Rohingyas' is really a miracle.

Since the word "Rohan" is neither Arakanese nor Bengali word, but only the Bengali pronunciation of Ywa-Haun (Ra-Haun), today nobody can guess what this word means unless one knows the back ground of this word.

Most of the "Rohingyas" nowadays are no more the descendants of the 'Ra-haun-Tha' and the surrendered Mujahid Rebels, instead real illegal immigrants coming from Bangladesh for various reasons, settled down inside Burma in 1970 during the Bangladesh Liberation War and later.

Their population growth is a miracle and always happens after a cyclone hits Bangladesh. Most of them are illiterates, know nothing about history but have only heard the name "Rohingyas" and claim to be. Some Muslims in Burma and Bangladesh helping them also don't know the origin of this word and created fanciful stories. They even misinterpreted the word "Rohan" as the whole Arakan and

wrote in their journals that "Rohan" means "Arakan" in Arabic; they were the founders of Arakan and so forth.

#### **VI. Are the following Racial Statements or Comparing and Contrasting two groups of peoples?**

Time has changed and the ideas and thinking of people has changed. The terms once considered as 'normal' has become 'politically incorrect' and terms once considered derogatory can be normal nowadays. Now I would like to cite the following statements written by some British writers comparing the peoples of Burma and the peoples of the Subcontinent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). What kind of comments can we give nowadays? Are they racial statements or comparing and contrasting two groups of peoples?

1. The Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Government of India Bill. 1919, III. Clause 41: where it was written that "after hearing evidence the Committee have not advised that Burma should be included within the scheme. They do not doubt but that the Burmese have deserved and should receive a Constitution analogous to that provided in this Bill for their Indian fellow-subjects. But Burma is only by accident part of the responsibility of the Governor General of India. **The Burmese are as distinct from the Indians in race and language as they are from the British**".

Please note that, here the British used the term 'the Burmese', which according to their definition, represents all peoples of Burma including Arakanese. They did not use the term 'the Burman', which according to their definition, represents only the majority ethnic group, the Bamas.

2. The Report of the Indian Statutory Commission vol. II London, 1930, vol. II § 224: In 1927, The Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known as the "Simon Commission", was appointed under the chairmanship of Sir John Simon. This Commission gave its opinion that "we hold that the first step towards the attainment of full responsible government in Burma is the separation of Burma from the rest of British India....We would add that Burma's political connection with India is wholly arbitrary and unnatural. It was established by the British rulers of India by force of arms and being maintained for the sake of administrative convenience. It is not an association of two peoples having natural affinity tending towards union ... **there is nothing common between the two peoples.**
3. Captain Symes who was sent by the Viceroy of India on Embassy to the court of Bodawphaya in 1795 wrote: "**The general disposition or temperament of the Burmese is strikingly in contrast with that of the natives of India from whom they are separated only by a narrow range of mountains. The physical difference between these nations is also very great.** The Burmese are lively, inquisitive, active, grace, hot-tempered and impatient. The unworthy passion of jealousy, which makes most nations of the East hide their women within the walls of a harem and surround them with guards, seems to have no place in the minds of this extraordinary and more liberal people. Burmese wives and daughters are not concealed from the sight of men, and are allowed to mix as freely with the latter as in Europe. ----- Women in the Burman country are not only good housewives, but also manage the more important commercial affairs of their husbands and attend to their outdoor business matters. They are extremely industrious and are said to be good mothers and faithful wives."

#### **VII. Analysis of the 'Rohingya Problem'**

### **A. Why some writers were trapped by "Rohingyas":**

If one carefully scrutinizes all available authentic historical and etymological facts it comes out clearly that there was no ethnic group called "Rohingya" in Arakan as well as in Burma, and it is only an invented name in the late 1950's. Arakan was and is not a Muslim state. The Kingdom of Mrauk U was not established by the 'Rohingyas' as they claimed. All kings of the Mrauk U dynasty were Buddhists. Some kings had assumed Muslim Titles but all of them were donors of many temples in Mrauk U as well as in other parts of Arakan.

Even though, some of the international journalists favoured the dishonest claims of the 'Rohingyas'. Why?

The answer is very clear. Most of them are only writers and neither etymological scholars nor historical researchers. They don't know the real history of Arakan as well as the history of Burma, however, they made their conclusions based only on many correct points; that the present government in Burma (SLORC earlier and SPDC later) is a military dictatorship, did not surrender the power to the party who won in the election in 1990, put the opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest for no reason, discriminating other ethnic minorities of Burma and violating a lot of human rights. The news about the military abuses against the 'Rohingyas' was also more or less true. Hence, they concluded that all claims of the 'Rohingyas' to be the truth.

### **B. Bad Image of the various Burmese Military Governments since 1962**

The various Burmese Military Governments of Burma since 1962 have and never had a good reputation and image, neither in the internal nor in the international media. They are well known for never respecting human rights. To maintain their power, the various military authorities in Burma used and still use tanks and machine guns to brutally crush down any anti-government demonstration of the majority population and students even those demonstrations organized, led and participated in by Buddhists monks.

On this basis the international media neither trusted the SLORC/SPDC nor the various Burmese Military Juntas, even if sometimes, though very rarely, the statement of the junta could be true.

Therefore, it is no wonder; some of the writers unwittingly supported the "Rohingyas" and their claims. Some Muslims backing them were also trapped, when they issued their "fantastic historical claims".

### **C. Who immigrate to where:**

If we compare Burma and Bangladesh by means of population density, we will see that Bangladesh has one of the highest in the world while Burma has a very low one. Natural catastrophes, like storms, cyclones and floods hit Bangladesh every year, but rarely Burma. Soil fertility in the Rakhine State is much better than that of Bangladesh. Burma was a very rich country compared to East Pakistan (later Bangladesh). Even now, although Burma has become a poor country, the way of life in Burma is much easier than that in Bangladesh. Besides, Burma has more space, so logically who immigrates where does not need to be explained.

During East Pakistan's struggle for independence from West Pakistan to establish a new nation which is now Bangladesh, many war refugees ran to Arakan (the Rakhine State of Burma). It was the main reason why Burma immediately recognised the new nation, disregarding the anger and objections of

Pakistan. As usual, however, the then military government of Burma (The Revolutionary Council headed by Gen. Ne Win) did not like any UN observers, particularly from the UNHCR, coming to Burma. So, they did not report anything about the refugees, preferring a solution through bilateral agreements. Some refugees returned to Bangladesh as a result, but eventually they went back to the Rakhine State of Burma (Arakan). Many of them were arrested as illegal immigrants. Almost all of them had to learn the Burmese language in the jails because they could not speak Burmese as well as any other language of Burma, although Burmese language is the official language of Burma as well as the 'Lingua Franca' or 'the Language of Communication' between one ethnic minority group to the other group. The only language they could speak was Chittagonian Bengali!

Since the border of Burma was neither properly controlled nor well guarded with barbed wires and walls, nobody can say when they came over to Burma or since when they have lived there. Had they invited UN observers during the time of the civil war in East Pakistan, this problem would not have evolved.

Both "Rohingyas" problems, 1978 and 1991, came about a few months after a cyclone hit Bangladesh. Even India, the world's largest democracy, whose people are of the same historical and racial background as those people from Bangladesh, raised barbed wires along their borders with Bangladesh to prevent illegal immigration towards their side.

In the case of the 'Boat People', it is human nature for the people of a poor country to seek their fortune in a more prosperous country. Nowadays, there are about two million Burmese and other ethnic minorities working in Thailand and Malaysia either as legal or illegal immigrant workers.

Many Mexicans entered into USA illegally, African Boat People wanted to enter one of the soils of EU, many Afghans, Chinese and Subcontinent people were taken by human traffickers as illegal immigrants to Western Europe, USA, Canada and Australia.

Bangladesh is a poor country and very overpopulated. Malaysia is the nearest rich Muslim country. Hence, no wonder, most of the poor Bangladeshis wanted to go to Malaysia to seek their luck. If they said the truth that they were from Bangladesh, they would be considered only as illegal immigrants and turned back. Since 'Rohingyas' speak the same language and have the same culture as the Chittagonian Bengalis, it is 'the golden opportunity' for them to 'make hay while the sun shines' and claimed to be 'Rohingyas' as they were taught by the human traffickers.

Similarly, some asylum seekers in Germany coming with Burmese Passports, claimed to be from the Shan State of Burma, however, they could neither speak Shan nor Burmese, the only language they could speak was Chinese! Later, it appeared that they came from China, bought fake Burmese passports and asked for asylum. This happens only because the military government of Burma has a very bad image which many people from contiguous countries can take advantage of.

#### **D. 'Rohingyas' for Burmese Citizenship:**

Some liberal foreign journalist, Burma Scholars, politicians and writers argued that the "Rohingyas", even if most of them were the descendants of illegal immigrants and many war refugees of the East Pakistan Independence War in 1970, deserve to have the right to be naturalized as citizens of Burma since they have lived inside Burmese territory for more than ten years.

To that suggestion, the present author personally have no objection as long as the 'Rohingyas' want to live peacefully side by side with the Buddhists Rakhaings who are the natives of Arakan and 'Bummi Puttras' of that region and as long as 'Rohingyas' do not make dishonest claims and want to turn the

traditional Buddhist land into a Muslim state. I don't know what the majority of Rakhaings would say. I don't represent any organisation and therefore I cannot speak for them, but can only suggest. I hope it may also be possible that many Rakhaings would share my view. However, it will not be easy under this present government. The present Military Junta is well known as hard liners, very xenophobic and too ethno-centric. It may be easier to do this under a democratically elected government through "give and take" policy.

In any case, one should not forget the fact that every sovereign nation has their own immigration and naturalization laws which others should respect, for example Malaysia has the 'Bummi Puttra' law. We should not forget the fact that Burma is not an immigrant land. In spite of that, in the past, in 1950's U Nu was so generous and had granted about 150000 (one hundred and fifty thousand) illegal immigrants of East Pakistan Burmese citizenship and the rest were tolerated to stay in Burma without any identity or as foreigners.

Even "the most democratic country on the earth", the United States of America" do not grant citizenship automatically to many offspring of the Mexicans who were born inside the U.S.A., because their parents came illegally to the U.S.A., and lived there as illegal immigrants. They usually live in California, Arizona and Texas, and everybody knows that these territories historically belonged to Mexico.

It is also a similar problem for the People of the Subcontinent, Sri Lanka and the West Indies who reside in The United Kingdom, "the Mother of Democracy" although these people belong to the "British Common Wealth". Many of them demonstrated in the U.K. with the slogan "We are here because you were there!"

So do many Turks in Germany. Some of them came to Germany as 'Guest Workers' invited by the then West-German Government in the 1950's. Some of them live there more than 40 years and their children were born in Germany, however, these children won't be granted German citizenship automatically, unless or otherwise they apply for that and go through some legal procedures.

Here, the present author likes to point out a very similar situation. There are two Muslim-dominated districts in Berlin, namely Kreuzberg and Neukoelln Districts. Assuming, the Turks had asked for the rights of 'Indigenous Muslims of Germany', their Autonomous Region and issued fabricated histories such as they had established the above mentioned two districts because Muslims lived in Berlin since the time of German Emperors because Ottoman Empire and German Empire (Deutsche Reich) were Military Allies and so on, how would the German populace react?

#### **E. Liberal groups of "Rohingyas", their approaches and responses:**

Some liberal groups of "Rohingyas" have changed their tactics. They admitted that the term "Rohingya" was not a historical name instead it is an invented name in the 1950's. However, they wished that the new or the invented name "Rohingya" should be accepted because the name of an ethnic group can be changed if that group wishes. They argued that the ethnic group who used to be called "Talaings" by the Burmese in the Burmese chronicles are now called 'Mons' due to their request, and also an ethnic group called "Shan-Tayok" (Tai-Chinese) are now renamed as "Ko-kant". Therefore, Chittagonian Bengali Muslims could be accepted as "Rohingyas", a new indigenous ethnic group in Burma.

They tried to make emergency courses for these 'Rohingyas' to learn written and spoken Burmese which is the official language of communication in the Union of Burma, to enable their people to

communicate with other Burmese citizens and assimilate with other peoples of Burma, because till now almost all 'Rohingyas' can speak only their mother tongue which is the Bengali Chittagong Dialect. Apart from that, many of them are illiterates.

For that issue, not only the Military Government, but also many people of Burma, especially the Buddhists, particularly the Rakhaings, on the other hand, counter-argued that the "Rohingyas" do not fall in the same category as the Mons and the Ko-kants because they were and are not an indigenous ethnic group of Burma like the Mons and the Ko-kants. Mon is the historical ethnic group of Burma. They came to Burma even earlier than the Burmese, had the civilization and established Mon Kingdoms in the place called Lower Burma nowadays. Burmese adapted Theravada Buddhism as well as scripts from the Mons. The names Mon and Talaing were parallel used since the Pagan Dynasty. Hence, if they do not like to be called Talaings but only Mon, it is their wish and it must be accepted. Ko-kants People are named due to the region where they live. However, 'Rohingya' is neither the name of the region of their origin nor a historical name.

'Rohingya' people were new settlers and therefore their descendants can be considered to be citizens but not as an indigenous ethnic group. This is very similar to the "Bhummi Puttra" (literally, "Son of the Motherland", here it means indigenous ethnic group) Law in Malaysia.

Hence, according to them, the name "Rohingya" could be accepted as an ethnic group now living in Burma like Chinese, Indian, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, but neither as a historical ethnic group nor can be recognized as an indigenous ethnic group of Burma.

Hence, the solution to the 'Rohingya' problem may be easy to say, however, difficult to manage. Both sides have to compromise, otherwise it will be a political dead-end.

## **VII. Conclusion:**

If one carefully scrutinizes all available authentic historical and etymological facts it comes out clearly that there was no ethnic group called "Rohingya" in Arakan as well as in Burma, and it is only an invented name in the 1950's. All claims of the "Rohingyas" are baseless and found out to be incorrect.

Boat People came direct from Bangladesh and not from Arakan. They were caned by the human traffickers. Just to get asylum in an ASEAN country they have to fabricate some tragic stories and had to claim to be 'Rohingyas'.

In any case, I have to be very careful to present this article in a very neutral way so that the paper does not read either as an attack on "Rohingyas" or as a polemical piece aimed at "Rohingyas", nor be seen as a racial writing. The biggest worry for me is: This article might be misinterpreted as an indirect support for the position of the very brutal Burmese Military Junta.

Here, I sincerely suggest to the "Rohingyas" to change their tactics. Instead of attacking all people who do not support their dishonest claims they should attack the Burmese Military Junta only. In the mean time they should learn to speak, read and write Burmese, especially the Rakhaing Dialect, and make friends with other ethnic groups of Burma, particularly with the Rakhaings who are the natives and majority of that state. Instead of demanding for the rights of an indigenous ethnic minority of Arakan by inventing fabricated and fanciful histories and trying to turn the traditional Buddhist land of Arakan into a Muslim state, they should be honest and just request to be granted the right to permanent residential status and then the right to be naturalized citizens of Burma step by step to which the Arakanese people (Rakhaings) will have no objection.



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