Transcript
The Scotsman - 18 May 1949

Burmese Border 'War'

Moslems' Fear of the Arakanese: Pakistan's Attitude

From Michael Davidson: "The Scotsman" Special Correspondent

Akyab (Arakan) Tuesday — A peace mission to North Arakan (which lies towards the Pakistan border) is trying to end "the Moslem war" which is one of the Burmese Government's many headaches.

Moslem elders, carrying an order from Prime Minister Thakin Nu, are in contact with the insurgent Moslems, and the latest reports from these emissaries say that some Moslems have already laid down their arms. These guerrilla operations are less a Moslem insurrection against the Government than "communal" action against the Arakanese — a prolongation of the Muslim-Buddhist riots of 1942. The Moslems — natives of Chittagong in East Bengal, now part of Pakistan — fear oppression by the Arakanese. The Arakanese, an intensely clannish community less than a million strong, hate their Burmese kith and kin, and are afraid of losing their identity in the growing Chittagongese population. Neither trusts the other.

A dangerous aspect of the fighting is its international aspect: Moslem insurgents have been carrying the Pakistan flag, and many of them clamour for the incorporation of this end of Arakan with Pakistan. It was suspected that they drew arms from across the border; the Government is, however, now satisfied that their rifles and ammunition are old stocks left behind by the Japanese and the British. An official of a neutral Embassy told me recently that Pakistan's attitude is entirely "correct" — though if Burma were to disintegrate, Pakistan would doubtless step in. The great majority of Arakan Moslems are said to be really Pakistanis from Chittagong, even if they have been settled here for a generation. Of the 130,000 Moslems here, 80,000 are still Pakistani citizens.

Touchy "Nationalists"

The educated Arakanese are vigorously "nationalist"; they display that touchy assertiveness common to all infant nationalism. But their resentment is no longer against an Imperialist Power — to-day it is against their own Burmese flesh and blood, from which they have too long been cut off by the Yomas mountain.

Indeed, they want Burma (if they are to remain part of it) inside the Commonwealth — some even aspire to become a separate Dominion. But the Arakan "movement" does not seem to extend much beyond the upper class. Arakanese insurgents are not fighting under a "national" banner. They are not simply members of "bandit" groups; there are different political labels. There is no Arakan unity in the field, and the Government is not perturbed by Arakan nationalism.

Here in Arakan, as in the rest of Burma, are bands of dacoits calling themselves Red Communists, White Communists, or erstwhile followers of Aung San, who have disorganised the country, deprived the Government of its revenues, and ruined the rice trade.
The Government controls most of the townships and administrative centres — but there is no administration outside. Beyond town limits it is all Tom Tiddler’s ground. You can travel almost anywhere, if you don’t mind a few bullets now and then — even up the Kaladan river, whose banks are mainly controlled by Communists of two different factions.

**Red and White Communists**

On one side, Red Communists seize the cargoes of paddy; on the other, White Communists are content to levy “Customs” dues. In Akyab itself — a township of bamboo houses where smashed aeroplanes, wrecked ships, vanished buildings, and skeletons of landing barges still bear witness to the Japanese and British occupations, there is law, but not much order. Often two sets of Government guards shoot each other up by mistake.

Government leaders here say they could clear Arakan of insurgents quickly, if they had more troops and ammunition. The regular battalions were withdrawn to defend Rangoon when the Burma civil war became grave. Arakan must make do with irregular police and the “private army of Pimya Thih, a yellow-robed monk, who fought the Japanese as parachutist with the British-led underground “Force 136”, and whose great religious influence keeps whole districts loyal to the Burmese Government.
BURMESE BORDER "WAR"

Moslems' Fear of the Arakanese

PAKISTAN'S ATTITUDE

From MICHAEI DAVIES,

This correspondent's Special Correspondent

A peculiar feature of the present fighting in the Burmese border region is that it has not been accompanied by any large-scale movement of refugees. The bulk of the fighting has been concentrated in areas where there are large Moslem populations, and the fighting has been between Moslem and Burmese forces. It is estimated that about 10,000 Moslems have already left their homes due to the fighting.

Moslem leaders, including an elder from the Moslem-dominated Chittagong Hill Tracts, have expressed their concern that the fighting will result in the displacement of large numbers of Moslems. The Moslem leaders have appealed to the Pakistani government to take steps to prevent the spread of the fighting into the Pakistani territories.

The Pakiastani government has indicated that it will not interfere with the fighting in the Burmese border region, but it has also expressed concern about the possibility of a larger-scale conflict. The Pakiastani government has urged the Moslem leaders to remain calm and to avoid any actions that could escalate the situation.

A significant aspect of the fighting is the presence of Moslem insurgents who have been fighting for the independence of the Arakanese from Burma. The insurgents have been supported by a small number of Pakistanis, but they have not received significant assistance.

The fighting has caused widespread concern among the Moslem community in the Burmese border region. Many Moslems have expressed their fear of being driven out of their homes and of losing their land and property. The situation has been described as a "humanitarian crisis."
TOUGH NATIONALISTS" -  

The embattled Arakans are vigorously nationalistic, yet they display a healthy discernment common to all infant nationalism. But their resentment is no longer against an imperial power: today it is against their own Burmese rulers and the British who have been long since cut off by the Yoma mountain.

Indeed, they want Burma: if they are to remain part of it, inside the Commonwealth, or even aspire to become a separate Dominion. But the Arakan "movement" is no longer much beyond the upper classes. Arakanese insurgents are not fighting under an "independent banner." They are not simply members of "bandit" groups; there are various different political labels.

There is no Arakan valley in the field, and the Government is not preoccupied by Arakan nationalism.

Here in Arakan, as in the rest of Burma, the hands of the British influence over the Communist party. Many followers of Aung San, who were disenchanted by the country's treatment of the Government of the Union, have taken to the Communist way.

The Government creates more of its own administration and more enlightened by the British. The people of Arakan have shown a marked improvement in literacy and education recently. In the past few years, the number of schools has increased substantially.