

## Text of Email circulated on 16 June 2017 about the 1973 Census of Burma

**From:** Derek Tonkin [mailto:d.tonkin@btinternet.com]

**Sent:** 16 June 2017 18:14

**Subject:** 1973 and 1983 Censuses in Burma

Dear Friends,

On 10 June I circulated copies of the 1973 and two of the 15 volumes of the 1983 Census Reports which are to be found at:

[http://www.dop.gov.mm/moip/index.php?route=product/category&path=54\\_49](http://www.dop.gov.mm/moip/index.php?route=product/category&path=54_49)

Now it is possible that some servers may discourage you from connecting with 'DOP' pages because their security certificate is not up to standard. In that event, you can take a risk, as I did, and connect. Or, if you are blocked altogether, you may need to seek a link via a proxy server.

Another alternative is to go to this link at Dropbox where I have uploaded the 1973 and 1983 files, as well as a 1988 comparison by S Gunasekaran and Mya Than of the 1973 and 1983 Censuses and a 1996 analysis by M Israel Khin Maung of the 1973 Census:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/yhyipub1ichslu0/AAAtRFbvy0FmD-IQSnqCzfBa?dl=0>

made available to anyone who has this link, provided they join Dropbox, which is free (for the basic version, which is all I have).

MIK Maung's analysis may also be found at:

[http://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/1973\\_Census\\_-\\_Khin.pdf](http://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/1973_Census_-_Khin.pdf)

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The 1973 Census Report (in Burmese only) has hitherto not been available widely outside Myanmar. It is not as sophisticated as the 1983 Census Report which benefited from advice and support from UNDP, UNFPA, USAID and the Government of Norway.

I have received a number of helpful comments on the Reports. The following points, for which I alone take responsibility, sprang to my mind on a first reading:

1. The 1973 Census was the first nation-wide Census after independence in 1948. A partial census was held in 1953 and 1954, but was not completed in 1955 because of the insecure state of the country. [Union Book Introduction I-1 - 1983]
2. "The methods and concepts used in the 1983 Census were almost identical to those which were used in the 1973 Census....." [Union Book Page I-6 - 1983]
3. The population recorded are those regarded as permanently resident in Burma at the time. [Union Book Page I-6 - 1983]

4. The 1973 Census records on Page 21 the citizenship of those enumerated. There is no identical table in the 1983 Census. It is most unusual for citizenship to be recorded in Census Reports in any country as this is almost impossible for enumerators to verify. I doubt that this was influenced by the 1982 Citizenship Law. It is much more likely that the omission was due to advice from UN agencies, USAID and Norway about standard international practice. Preparations for the 1983 Census had in any case started in late 1980, two years before the Law was enacted.  
[Introduction I-2 - 1983]
5. The table of citizenship on Page 21 of the 1973 Census records that 98.9% of all residents were enumerated as “Myanmar” citizens. The remaining 1.1% covered all remaining non-Burmese citizens permanently resident in Burma. Bangladeshi citizens were only a fraction of a percentage. **This can only mean that all Muslims in Arakan, apart from a very small number of foreigners, were in the 1973 Census recognised and recorded as “Myanmar” citizens, which was both nationally and internationally well understood at the time.**
6. The bulk of Muslims in Arakan in the 1973 Census would have been listed under “Other Foreign Races” which is Item 14 on Page 19. I assume that the majority of these OFRs would have been Muslims in Arakan. On Page 130 (1973 Census) “Other Foreign Races” numbered 233,713. Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalese are listed separately. In the 1983 Census most Muslims in Arakan were listed as “Bangladeshis” and numbered 497,208, out of a total country-wide of 567,985. This means that some 70,777 residents outside Arakan were in 1983 thought to be of the same Bangladeshi ancestry.
7. In Arakan, only Rakhine-Chittagonian (known historically to the British as “Arakan Muslim” and to the Burmese as Yakhain-kala), Kaman, Myedu and Burmese Muslims (pre 1941 Zerbaidi) , would have been counted under “Other Indigenous Races” on page 19 of the 1973 Census. These minority “indigenous” (pre-1823) national races were included in the [1972 instructions for the 1973 census](#). No details of these minorities however found their way into the Census Report itself. In the 1931 Census under British rule, “Arakan Muslims” numbered only 51,612 against 201,912 Chittagonians/Bengalis. By 1973, the numbers of self-identifying “Arakan Muslims” could have diminished significantly because of their steady integration with the large numbers of legal ([U Thein Sein 2012](#)) Chittagonian migrants during British rule and because of [the ethnic cleansing in 1942](#) of Muslims in the Sittwe/Mrauk-U region.
8. The percentage of Mixed and Foreign Race Groups is broadly the same in both Censuses: 5.4% in 1973 and 5.3% in 1983 [Table A-6 Page I-21 - 1983]. It is not known whether the list of 144 national races used for the 1973 Census was also used for the 1983 Census. The current list of 135 national races was first published only in 1990  
[ [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2015\\_12.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2015_12.pdf) - Note 17].
9. The non-Burmese races listed on Page II-45 (Rakhine State -1983) as Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepalese etc. reflect political-geographic, not citizenship designations. Nepal, for example, has many and varied races/ethnicities, while the name “Pakistan” was only devised in 1933. The bulk of Muslims in Arakan would simply have been listed as originating historically in what has today become Bangladesh, thus indicating that their ancestry is to be found in that region, areas of which were, until the Mughal invasion of 1666, part of the former Kingdom of Arakan which fell to Burman forces in 1795. This does not however mean that in 1983 they

were, or were not, regarded as Myanmar citizens. The matter of citizenship was no longer considered appropriate for inclusion in the 1983 Census, as it had been in 1973.

10. Both the 1973 and 1983 Censuses were technical, not propaganda exercises. Though the 1983 Census makes reference to the organs of the Burma Socialist Programme Party, it is important to view the exercise as a whole, and not in the narrow perspective of what it may or may not tell us about the Muslim population of Arakan.
11. On Page 8 of his book "The Rohingyas", Azeem Ibrahim says that Muslims in Arakan "are described as Rohingyas in the 1961 census, indicating an ongoing recognition of their existence as an ethnic group under that description". I have found no evidence in either the 1973 or 1983 Census reports or in any other source that there was a census in 1961 or that Rohingya, whoever they might be, were ever listed in any Burmese legislative act as a national race. [My own view is close to that of [Moshe Yegar - Note 1 Page 95 at this link](#) - who distinguished between Rohingya as descendants of the old (pre 1823) settlers and Chittagonians as new settlers under British rule.]

If anyone has any further comments on the two reports or on my comments, I would be most interested to hear. My knowledge of written Burmese is poor, but I have the latest dictionaries and machine translations via Google are now available in the Burmese/Myanmar language.

With kind regards,

Derek

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