

## **Articles by “ASMI” (U Thaung Myine) on “The State of Arakan”**

### **The Guardian Magazine 1954**

The author of the four articles in the Guardian Magazine of August, September, October and November 1954 was U Thaung Myine, a political journalist in U Nu's political party the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) which was also the party of General Aung San. U Nu was well disposed towards Arakan's Muslims as they supported the AFPFL against Rakhine politicians like U Kyaw Min, one of only eight Burmese accepted into the ranks of the prestigious Indian Civil Service. The author writes under the pen-name “ASMI”. Subsequent issues of the Guardian Magazine carried further articles by U Thaung Myine, who was the leading AFPFL specialist on the minorities, on Shan, Kachin and Chin affairs.

The extract below is from the third of ASMI's four articles on Arakan.

### **The State of Arakan**

#### **(3) Years of Suspense:**

.....

#### **The Muslims**

The Muslim leaders claim that the Muslim population are indigenous “Rowangyas” descended from Arab settlers who took service under the Arakanese kings but there is little ethnological or historical evidence to support it. The apparent fact is that a greater number of Muslims than the Muslim leaders would concede belong to the annual influx of cheap Chittagonian labour brought in by the Arakanese landowners to help till the soil, harvest the paddy crop, transport and convey in the paddy trade, and permitted by the British administration to settle down in Arakan. In the course of years with the rapid growth of Muslim population and consequently with this immense pressure on the land which the Arakanese cultivators steadily lost to the more industrious Muslims, the complacent Arakanese attitude towards the Muslims as a source of cheap and compliant manual labour changed into that of hostility as winning competitors in the economic and racial field. On their side the Muslim settlers had developed a strong sense of grievance against the Arakanese whom they call “Maghs”, a historical appellation which the Arakanese had earned in their turbulent history by their predatory habit of raiding the coast of Bengal and enslaving Muslims. The Muslims considered that the Arakanese in government service were in concert

out to humiliate them and evict them from their hard-won land. In consequence there obtained a situation pregnant with communal enmity which only needed an outside event to touch off an all open fight.

### **The Touch Off**

The outbreak of World War II supplied the required event. When the Japanese invasion of Burma spread to Arakan the scanty British forces stationed there were easily routed and the British administration folded up. Before the Arakanese leaders could gain control of the situation the lawless bands, wearing the garb of patriotic revolt, filled the vacuum and preyed [preyed] on the unarmed populace. Naturally, the worst sufferers were the Muslim cultivators and traders living in the predominantly Arakanese areas. The Muslim refugees escaping to Maungdaw Sub-division with harrowing tales of Arakanese cruelty inflamed the local Muslim population. With firearms procured from the fleeing Indian soldiers the Muslims of Maungdaw turned savagely on the Arakanese minority in their midst. The Arakanese population disappeared in days in mass killings or migrations to the Bengal province of India. When the Japanese army reached Maungdaw on the right bank of the Naaf river, they found the Muslims in control of Maungdaw Subdivision.

The British forces rallied on the opposite bank of the river and set themselves to woo the Muslims in Maungdaw area as the first necessary step in gaining a firm base in North Arakan.

\*\*\*\*\*

*This is the inside story of Arakan told [by keen and objective observer. The war laid Arakan open to many disruptive forces, but the AFPFL was able to organise, consolidate and hold power at its end. However, this could not be for long. The disruptive forces were still too many and communists and separatists made capital of the situation. The AFPFL broke up, and "independents" won their electoral victories. The writer, who has made on-the-spot studies of the situation in Arakan, gives his analysis of —*

## THE STATE OF ARAKAN

by "ASMI"

THE time I touched down at Akyab in 1950 in the wake of the monsoon the town was in the throes of a bye-election. An urban seat in the Constituent Assembly had been vacated by the AFPFL member and the Arakan AFPFL and U Kyaw Min were contesting it, not so much because the seat was important as it was a good occasion to test the popularity of the AFPFL in Arakan as well as to measure the gathering strength of the anti-AFPFL sentiment.

### RISE OF AFPFL

To the Arakanese by and large U Kyaw Min symbolised the consummation of Arakanese manhood. He had a topflight education, had gained entrance into the I.C.S. from which he retired as a Commissioner and he had proved himself a successful businessman. He had no platform or programme for the electorate but the fact that he was U Kyaw Min plus reaction against the AFPFL, it was felt, would win the seat for him.

With the prestige acquired by resistance against the Japanese during the war and struggle for independence after British re-occupation, the all Arakan AFPFL led by the monk U Pyinnyathiha with a strong element of the P.V.Os had emerged as the sole repository of political wisdom and the only effective political organization. At the time of the general election the Arakan AFPFL nominated its members to all the seats in Arakan except in the Muslim fringe of Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships. The leaders and the rank and file of the P.V.O. were absorbed into the newly created 1st. Battalion of the Union Military Police, charged with the

responsibility for the internal security of the Arakan Division. It seemed therefore as if the adherents of the AFPFL had come into power to stay.

### DISINTEGRATION

By the time U Kyaw Min contested the bye-election the once all-powerful All Arakan A.F.P.F.L. had virtually disintegrated. True the party leaders were entrenched in the administration of the districts as Special Deputy Commissioners; the late Myochit U Kyaw U in Akyab, U Ba Saw (now Minister for Social Welfare) in Kyaukpadaung and U Ba Hlaing who had already lost his charge, Sandoway district, to the insurgents. But the armed branch of the party and a large number of AFPFL adherents had disowned them and joined the multi-coloured insurrection. Bo San Tha Gyaw, son-in-law of the Arakanese Minister U Aung Zan Wai and a commander of the U.M.P. had seized Sandoway district while the Commandant of the 1st. Battalion of the U.M.P., Major Maung Gale and the powerful P.V.O. chief Bo Kra Hla Aung were in occupation of half the Akyab district in Myinbya and Myohoung subdivisions. In the north in

Maungdaw subdivision adjacent to the Pakistan border the Muslim populace were in active Mujahid rebellion and its ever creeping menace was like a brooding nightmare to the Arakanese in Akyab district.

### TACTICAL ERRORS

In this sombre atmosphere of general lawlessness the All Arakan AFPFL put up an innocuous woman candidate, Daw Saw Mra, to fight U Kyaw Min, and began a bellicose and blustering electioneering campaign, the special Deputy Commissioner U Kyaw U urging the electorate to vote for Daw Saw Mra. It was a curious way of fighting an election under unfavourable conditions. It failed signally to impress the electorate consisting mainly of traders, brokers and millers in the rice business and the clerks in government offices.

The urgency of the situation warranted a visit to Akyab of the Prime Minister Thakin Nu who in his talk to the electorate outlined the dangers that still beset the Union as a whole and expatiated on reasons for unity and teamwork. He advised the electorate to remain within the fold of the AFPFL

and fight for the things they wanted rather than vote for a lone man of flashy brilliance like U Kyaw Min. The electorate, however, were in no mood for reason and took the Prime Minister's advice amiss as a slight to their intelligence.

The bye-election was a great tribute



to the personality of U Kyaw Min and a crushing defeat for the All Arakan AFPFL whose candidate lost the seat and her deposit of money.

### POSITIVE RESULTS

Yet the holding of the bye-election in Arakan was productive of positive results. For one thing, apart from the antics of the Special Deputy Commissioner, the Arakanese people in general were impressed with the fair and free manner in which the Government conducted its first bye-election. The visit of the Prime Minister produced the resignations of Myochit U Kyaw U, U Ba Saw and U Ba Hlaing from the posts of Special Deputy Commissioner, thus removing politics from the sphere of day to day administration. Career civil servants were immediately posted to the charge of the two districts and as the immediate threat of the Communist and the K.N.D.O. insurrection to the security of the rest of the Union receded regular army troops in sufficient numbers and arms could be sent to Arakan to recapture Sandoway district and other areas lost to the insurgents. The All Arakan AFPFL rent by personal rivalries and mismanagement, underwent a period of quiet but drastic change and reconstruction on drastic district basis.

### MAKING CAPITAL

To the Arakanese of Akyab district deterioration of administration consequent on the appointment of political Deputy Commissioners and the delay in the rehabilitation of the economy of the division and restoration of communications badly shattered by war were sore grounds for grievances. U Kyaw Min and his supporters were not slow in seizing these grievances and representing them to the people as callous neglect of Arakan by the Union Government. Later U Kyaw Min and his group were to develop these grievances into the concept of a separate state for Arakan. The negative idea caught on in towns and villages of Arakan and subsequently turned out to be a good platform winning many seats for U Kyaw Min's group in the general elections to the first parliament of the Union of Burma.

### WAR'S AFTERMATH

During the last war the allied and the Japanese armies on the run or on the march left scattered a large quantity of arms and ammunition in many parts of Arakan, most of which are difficult of access. The resistance movement was heavily infiltrated with Communist elements while in the northernmost part of Arakan dominantly populated by the Muslims, the British, to reinforce their precarious hold of the area, declared Maungdaw subdivision a Muslim national area and the Muslims were encouraged to take up arms against the Japanese invaders.

After the war the Communists in Arakan, like the Communists in metropolitan Burma, refused to turn in their firearms and in sullen disobedience infiltrated into towns, infested the jungles and roamed about the villages led by the belligerent extremist, the phongyi U, Seinda, inciting the populace to

defy local administration by non-payment of revenue. In Maungdaw subdivision efforts at resettlement of the original Arakanese villages, destroyed during the savage communal riots in the first stages of the war, and uprooting the new Chittagonian settlers roused the resentment of the Muslims who had been promised a national area by the British. The Arakanese Subdivisional Officer was murdered and armed Muslims clashed with government forces on many occasions. Many Muslims had begun to entertain hopes of detaching Maungdaw subdivision from Burma and incorporating it in the Muslim state of Pakistan which had emerged across the border.

Thus, many months before the AFPFL came into power in Burma, Arakan was already in a virtual state of chaos. The administration was paralysed; the Communist campaign of lawlessness and non-payment of revenue halted rehabilitation; roads remained unrepaired and steamers, and even country crafts remained stationary at a few safe ports.

(to be continued)

The advertisement for GYEE HWET & CO displays a collection of optical and photographic equipment. At the top center is a 'CINE PROJECTOR' with the brand name 'ALMO 16' written below it. To the left is a 'SOUND MOVIE PROJECTOR' also labeled 'OP16'. Below these are a 'PRECISION ENLARGER' and a 'fixarel CAMERA'. The company name 'GYEE HWET & CO' is prominently displayed in the center, with the address '602 D'ALMEIDA STREET, RANGOON' underneath. The phrase 'TRADE ENQUIRIES:' is written to the left of the company name. The background of the advertisement is decorated with stylized circular patterns and a central illustration of a person operating a projector.



## THE STATE OF ARAKAN

by "ASMI"

THE disquieting events in Arakan caused much anxiety to Bogyoke Aung San and other AFPFL leaders but they could do very little for Arakan at a time when they themselves were wholly engaged in the struggle against British rule. So Arakan was caught between the inadequacy of the British Administration on the one hand and the destructive activities of her youth and political shortsightedness of her leaders on the other.

However, on the morrow of the country-wide strike of government

*Continuing his inside story of Arakan, "Asmi" traces the series of costly mistakes that had led to the troubles in Arakan.*

*Beginning with events from pre-independence days he shows that lack of spirit of accommodation on both sides leading to misunderstanding plus communist interference with overstrict governmental security measures coincident with the overall rebellion in Burma proper and the Muslim minority's attitude brought about this unhealthy state of affairs.*

servants when the AFPFL came into power there were hopes of restoring normal conditions in Arakan. The Arakanese in the AFPFL movement and those in the government service could now work together for the pacification and rehabilitation of their homeland. At the economic conference held at Sorongto Villa when the AFPFL leaders formulated plans for reconstruction of the country, schemes were included to set aright the top-sided economy of Arakan by industrialization. U Saw Tun, brilliant chemical engineer and himself an Arakanese, conducted aerial and terrestrial surveys of the Saingdin area in the heart of Akyab District preliminary to startling hydro-electric and paper factory projects.

### HOSTILITY OF COMMUNISTS.

In the political field Bogyoke Aung San made a special tour of Arakan to assist the local AFPFL in settling political issues. His transparent sincerity and unassuming ways endeared Bogyoke to the Arakanese common man who received him with acclamation and aspirations.

But even Bogyoke Aung San failed to win over the Communists to his cause of attainment of indepen-

dence and peaceful reconstruction thereafter. In their blind hatred of government of whatever aspiration or composition, U Seinda and other Communist freebooters greeted Bogyoke at Myebon with hostile demonstrations and subversive speeches. Thus the Communists by their contumacious attitude and contumacious acts made it abundantly clear to Bogyoke that the problem of Arakan was initially and essentially that of suppression of disorder irrespective of who caused it.

On the return of Bogyoke from Arakan orders for the arrest of U Seinda and Communist leaders were issued and Burma Army units sent to Arakan to assist the civil police in maintenance of public order. The communist leaders were detained, agitators ferreted out from places of habitation and unlawful assemblies were dispersed with force. Ironically it fell to the lot of an English Superintendent of police at Kynakpya district to arrest and jail U Seinda. The energetic and judicious employment of police action removed the main source of unrest and once again semblance of peace appeared in Arakan. By the time the country gained independence the conditions in Arakan had almost returned to normal except in the far North where the Muslims had taken up



arms and defied government authority.

#### ALL ARAKANESE

By January, 1948, various departments of the Union Government in Arakan including the civil police were manned wholly by the Arakanese except the army units from metropolitan Burma and the Commissionership of Reconstruction of Arakan which was filled by an eminent journalist who had resigned from the subordinate civil service in 1946. The AFPFL leaders and the Arakanese Minister in the cabinet now felt that the time had come for the Arakanese to shoulder full responsibility in military matters as well. The Officer cadre and other ranks of the Union Military Police were quickly thrown open, evidently without due care and attention in the matter of proper vetting of personnel to the members of the resistance movement and later entrants to the P.V.O. which contained disruptive elements and Communist sympathisers. The Burma Army units were withdrawn as the formations of newly recruited Military Police took over the task of defence.

The triangle relations between the Commissioner of Reconstruction, the Civil Administration and the Military proved difficult and discordant due to absence of co-ordination in common spheres of authority and action. The Commissioner of Reconstruction had no means of implementing his schemes. In the event he was profuse in advice which lacked specific performance. In the end he felt himself redundant and resigned in frustration.

#### IMPASSE IN ADMINISTRATION

There was complete lack of sympathy but abundance of suspicion in the dealings of the Arakanese officers of the Civil Administration with the Arakanese Commanders of the UMP and *vice versa*. The Akyab-educated civil officers hitherto used only to dealings with small units of Indian or Chin soldiers had no experience with provincial lads educated in the hard school of national politics and now turned professional soldiers. The spirit of accommodation born

of mental adjustment on both sides so necessary in such a situation was slow and tardy in coming. In the meantime both sides worked at cross purposes and impasse in administrative affairs was soon reached. It was all the more tragic for Arakan that the Arakanese failed to work together for the common purpose of maintaining public order and general reconstruction. To make matters worse, in metropolitan Burma the Communist Party had by then risen in general rebellion and the insurrection began to impinge on the affairs in Arakan. In Maungdaw Subdivision the state of *malaise* in administration contributed to the spread of Mujahid rising.

The Union Government watched the crumbling situation in Arakan with grave concern. At the same time the Government were constrained to act on the advice of the Arakanese Minister in the cabinet and probably it was felt that the problem should be basically susceptible of local solution with the least interference from outside of Arakan. The all Arakan AFPFL became insistent that to achieve harmony in the administration of Arakan and to co-ordinate measures against mounting forces of rebellion it was necessary to appoint politicians at the head of the administration.

#### ERA OF SPECIAL ADMINISTRATORS

Therefore the Arakanese Minister for Minorities became Special Commissioner for Arakan while Myochit U Kyaw U, U Ba Saw and U Ba Hlaing became Special Deputy Commissioners of Akyab, Kyaukpyu and Sandoway districts respectively; in Gwa township of Sandoway district even a Special Township Officer was appointed. The former heads of the district administration belonging to the civil service were relegated to the secondary and advisory posts of Additional Deputy Commissioners. Before long demoted Arakanese officers chose to go on retirement or transfer and the Government had to send out relatively junior non-Arakanese civil servants who could be counted on to serve under the new set-up loyally.

The era of the Special Administrators was the era of well meaning and sometimes short-sighted efforts subverted by internal betrayal or carried out to excess by over zealous partisans.

In the early stages the Special Administrators set themselves to the task of recruitment of Special Police Reserve from among their young followers. The functions and areas of the new force overlapped to a certain extent with those of the regular Civil Police and the U.M.P.: this had the regrettable effect of causing demoralization among the police personnel and resentment among the U.M.P.

With the appearance of the new force, detention of individuals without trial under section 5 of the Public Order Preservation Act (commonly known as POPA) became frequent and numerous. A great many cases of arrest and imprisonment were doubtless necessary and justifiable in the conditions then prevailing but isolated cases of arrests of persons belonging to the educated or articulate class of the Arakanese savoured of vindictiveness or revenge. By the security measures the new administration in Arakan district acquired for itself a bad odour.

The special administration also sought to regulate trade and adjust movement of goods by executive orders and these orders in many instances had the effect of hampering trade or restricting the flow of goods. In the result the powerful class of rural and urban traders, brokers and rice millers in Akyab was alienated from the administration.

#### MISTAKES IN STRATEGY

Much later in 1949 when the abortive strike of the ministerial servants and policemen in protest against the emergency cut of salaries occurred, the ferocity with which the Special Deputy Commissioner of Akyab suppressed the strike and sacked the personnel involved earned him and the organization he represented the hatred of the government servant class as a whole.

Immersed as they were in the affairs of day-to-day administration, the special administrators failed in the politically essential task of effective organization of working class movement in urban areas and peasant movement in rural regions. The special administrators and the AFPFL in Arakan thereby gradually lost the means of retaining their popularity because the town workers and peasants fell under the influence of communalist-minded class of merchants, paddy brokers and landowners. This cardinal mistake in political strategy cost the AFPFL the loss of decisive votes in almost the whole of Akyab district and partly in Kyaukpyu and Sandoway.

Soon after the special administrators took office they were confronted with an unusual and delicate situation. Their comrades in the U.M.P. had become restless, irked by the rigour of discipline in military life. The U.M.P. commanders fell prey to their

erstwhile comrade-in-arms the PVOs and the Communists who promised autonomy and Communist paradise in Arakan. They were dazzled by the ease with which the mutinous 1st Battalion of the Burma Rifles took over the district town of Thayetmyo, which was the training ground of the Arakan UMP, and bagged the entire government treasury.

The UMP and PVO leaders approached their new civil colleagues to sell them the idea of taking over Arakan Division and setting up a government of their own. The new administrators, loyal to the Union, were aghast at the enormity of the treasonable proposal but they were powerless to oppose it outright. The special administrators resorted to the stratagem of holding interminable conferences with the would-be rebels where the details of the projected government were thrashed out, the while fashioning an armed force of their own.

## Land of The Free

By John Loeb

NEW YORK.

**A**N American janitor was arguing in a saloon with another man here.

The janitor was praising the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team, the other man liked the New York Yankees team better.

Then the janitor stopped arguing long enough to tell a Polish immigrant:

"Ya see, that's what America is like: a free country! He's for the Yankees, I'm for the Dodgers—we both got the right to disagree—we got free speech here!"

Sorry, the janitor was dead serious.

The janitor might have added that Americans, having no big labour or socialist party, also have the "right" to elect members of either the capitalist Democratic Party or the capitalist Republican Party—and it makes little difference whichever reactionary party wins the electoral "ballgame."

And while Americans have the right to "disagree" on the merits of rival baseball teams, any disagreement with the American capitalist government gets a person branded as a vicious socialist or Communist, in these days of the witch hunt.

When Left-wingers are not sent to prison on trumped-up charges, they lose their jobs. Employers are following the lead of the American government in refusing to hire Left-wingers.

The American government's witch hunt is one reason most American democratic socialists oppose the American government camp as well as Stalinism—and support the *THIRD CAMP* of world labour.

Incidentally, socialists here think *THIRD CAMP* a better term than "third force"—because the latter term is often used to describe a Centre coalition against "extremes" on a purely national scale. But *THIRD CAMP* means all workers and colonial peoples throughout the world who oppose the Kremlin and Wall Street war camps.

—(c)—



**SPARKLING**

**REFRESHING**

**AND**

**APPETISING**

**VIMTO**

*make sure you get it*

Sole bottlers for Burma:  
**IMPERIAL AERATED WATER FACTORY.**

# THE STATE OF ARAKAN

by  
"ASMI"

## (3) YEARS OF SUSPENSE

THOSE were the days of suspense and confusion, with the fate of Arakan hanging in the balance. The U. M. P. leaders moved the military stores to Myohoung, the old capital of Arakanese Kings, and concentrated their men in Sandoway district. The Special Administrators strove desperately to retrieve whatever firearms they could lay their hands on and rally the elements of the U. M. P. and the P. V. O. that still remained loyal. At last the U. M. P. and P. V. O. leaders grew suspicious and weary of negotiations and resolved on direct action. They seized Myohoung and Sandoway, came out in open rebellion and called upon the administrators to do likewise.

The Special Administrators answered the challenge by withdrawing the loyal partisans from vulnerable places and turning the Akyab and Kyaukpyu islands into bastions of defence. The Kyaukpyu defences fell into rebel hands for a time but prompt police and naval action repaired the situation there. A full scale fratricidal fight was on with the Arakanese loyal to the Union standing with their backs against the wall, risking their lives in warding off the rebels who sought to overwhelm them. Arakan Division was truncated but it is to the great credit of the Special Administrators alone like U Ba Saw and Myochit U Kyaw U that they saved Arakan from the measureless disaster of total separation from the rest of the Union of Burma.

### DANGER SHY

It is significant and symptomatic that U Kyaw Min and his group took no part whatsoever in the momentous struggle, preferring to live out the crucial days in safety behind doors in Akyab or in relative security of Rangoon. Only when peace of a sort was restored were they to come out to public gaze with prescriptions for a separate state for Arakan as

panacea for all the ills the Arakanese had recently gone through, conveniently ignoring or forgetting the fact that the identical ills were brought about by those who tried to foist a separate government on Arakan.

### A DIFFERENT DRAMA

While the Special Administrators and the Arakanese loyal to the Union were holding out in Akyab and Kyaukpyu, a different drama was being played out in Maungdaw Subdivision in the North where the 5th Burma Rifles with local civilian support broke the backbone of the first Mujahid rebellion and swept the scattered rebels to the hills and jungles. As the Mujahid trouble is independent of affiliation or connection with insurrection in the rest of Arakan, it will be convenient to set down here the events that took place in Maungdaw Subdivision.

Maungdaw Subdivision comprises two townships; Maungdaw township with 526 square miles in area and 124 village tracts and Buthidaung township with 790 square miles and 84 village tracts. The disturbing feature which caused communal difficulties and economic disequilibrium in this slice of Arakan is the predominance of Muslim population of foreign descent. In the 1931 census the British listed 51,252 avowed Indian Muslims and 38,816 Arakanese in Buthidaung township and 79,272 Indian Muslims and 27,361 Arakanese in Maungdaw township. By the end of World War II the Arakanese population in the area had well nigh disappeared while the Muslim population had trebled, and all claiming to be Burma nationals.

### THE MUSLIMS

The Muslim leaders claim that the Muslim population are indigenous "Rowangyas" descended from Arab settlers who took service under the Arakanese kings but there

is little ethnological or historical evidence to support it. The apparent fact is that a greater number of Muslims than the Muslim leaders would concede belong to the annual influx of cheap Chittagonian labour brought in by the Arakanese landowners and traders to help till the soil, harvest the paddy crop, transport and convey in the paddy trade, and permitted by the British administration to settle down in Arakan. In the course of years with the rapid growth of Muslim population and consequently with its immense pressure on the land which the Arakanese cultivators steadily lost to the more industrious Muslims, the complacent Arakanese attitude towards the Muslims as a source of cheap and compliant manual labour changed into that of hostility as winning competitors in the economic and racial field. On their side the Muslim settlers had developed a strong sense of grievance against the Arakanese whom they call "Maghs", a historical appellation which the Arakanese had earned in their turbulent history by their predatory habit of raiding the coast of Bengal and enslaving the Muslims. The Muslim considered that the Arakanese in government service and in private walks of life were in concert out to humiliate them and evict them from their hard-won land. In consequence there obtained a situation pregnant with communal enmity which only needed an outside event to touch off an all-out open fight.

### THE TOUCH OFF

The outbreak of World War II supplied the required event. When the Japanese invasion of Burma spread to Arakan the scanty British forces stationed there were easily routed and the British administration folded up. Before the Arakanese leaders could gain control of the situation the lawless bands, wearing the garb of patriotic revolt, filled the vacuum and prayed on the unarmed populace. Naturally, the worst sufferers were



the Muslim cultivators and traders living in the predominantly Arakanese areas. The Muslim refugees escaping to Maungdaw Sub-division with harrowing tales of Arakanese cruelty inflamed the local Muslim population. With firearms procured from the fleeing Indian soldiers the Muslims of Maungdaw turned savagely on the Arakanese minority in their midst. The Arakanese population disappeared in a matter of days in mass killings or migrations to the Bengal province of India. When the Japanese army reached Maungdaw on the right bank of the Naaf river they found the Muslims in armed control of Maungdaw Subdivision.

The British forces rallied on the opposite bank of the river and set themselves to woo the Muslims in Maungdaw area as the first necessary step in gaining a firm base in North Arakan.

#### LURE OF BRITISH GOLD

Military proclamations over the signature of Lt.-Col. D. C. P. Phelps appeared declaring the Maungdaw Sub-division a Muslim national area. Muslim officers and emissaries were sent to work among the Muslims temporarily brought under the Japanese occupation. The most active among them was one Mr. Shah of the Indian Civil Service who envisaged incorporating Maungdaw Subdivision in the Muslim province of Bengal and he laboured with a zealot's spirit to that end.

Lured by British gold and British promises the Maungdaw Muslims espoused the British cause, contributing their huge reserves of manpower in the formation of 'V Force' and labour corps and in ancillary war activities. By the time the war came to an end the Muslims were in possession of knowledge of military combat and of dumps of firearms scattered in many jungle battle fields which the British were unwilling or unable to remove. Young Muslim peasants and coolies reluctant to return to inglorious peacetime labour banded themselves together and practised

banditry, specialising in piracy off the Arakan coast. Among them was Abdul Kasim of Thinbawgwe village on the sea coast, who later served his time in Akyab jail for piracy and on his release joined the Mujahids, to emerge eventually a formidable leader.

#### UNEASY INTERIM...

On the withdrawal of military administration and the setting up of civil government, temporary wartime Muslim officers were removed and the Arakanese officers reinstated in their places. The Arakanese Administrative officers understandably concerned themselves first with rehabilitating the Arakanese villages forced to be abandoned during the war. The displaced Arakanese population



were brought in and the Muslims who had occupied the Arakanese-owned land made to go away. With the recent British promise of a national area still fresh in their minds, the Muslims were incensed at their eviction from the Arakanese owned land and obstructed the work of the civil authorities in every way. The returning Arakanese villagers were harassed beyond endurance by economic boycott on the part of the Muslims such as denial of drinking water and food supplies, and by criminal intimidation. Above all, the Muslims began to move about openly with illicit firearms and at times came into conflict with the civil police.

#### PROPHETS OF "HOLY WAR"

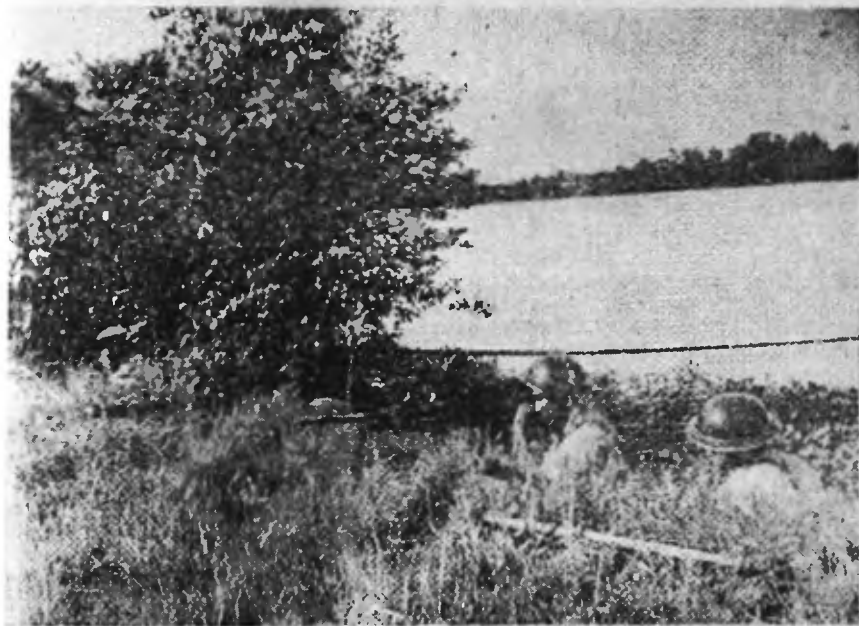
The communal and village life of the Maungdaw Muslims centers around discourses of their *moulvis* or religious preachers and singing of the wandering minstrels. As the resentment against the civil govern-

ment grew on the score of land question, the *moulvis* began preaching *jeihad* or holy war against the infidel Arakanese by forming bands of Mujahids (crusaders). The minstrels improvised songs of Arakanese oppression and the glory of revolt. Such a songster was Zaffar who moved from village to village inciting the Muslim youth with his crudely composed songs of fiery words to rise in rebellion against the government personified by Arakanese officers. Before the year 1948 was out a large crowd of young Muslims under Shukoor took up arms and collected together with their wandering bard at a place below Taung Bazaar on the Kalapanzin river. When the civil authorities sent a patrol boat with armed police personnel up the river the Muslims resisted the passage of the boat. There was a heavy exchange of fire, the police suffered casualties and the patrol boat had to turn back. The Mujahid rising was on.

#### 5TH BURMA RIFLES

The rising spread to four corners of Maungdaw Subdivision. The responsible and more moderate Muslim leaders failed in their efforts to restrain their restive followers. The Muslims overran far-flung UMP and police outposts and surged forward to the township headquarters of Maungdaw and Buthidaung, driving before them the newly settled Arakanese villagers fleeing to the towns in terror. The small garrisons of the 5th Burma Rifles in Maungdaw and Buthidaung met the massive Mujahid onslaught, held their ground, and when reinforcements and naval assistance reached them, threw back the attacking Mujahids in a series of fierce gun-battles. The 5th Burifs wrote for themselves a brilliant page of military history when they raised the siege of the towns lasting over two months and in one big sweep rolled back the defeated Mujahids right up to the Pakistan frontier.

It is unfortunate for Arakan that before the 5th Burifs were done with mopping up the remnant *Mujahids*, they were hastily recalled from Maungdaw area to



*from the sea...*

Insein, to fight the KNDOs then knocking at the gates of Rangoon.

#### NEW LEASE OF LIFE

The hastily recruited Arakanese Territorial Force who took the place of the 5th. Burifs were not equal to the task of putting down the Mujahids or pacifying the Muslim population. In fact the Arakanese units by their gross misbehaviour in their dealings with the Muslim populace gave a fresh lease of life to the moribund Mujahid movement and delivered a powerful propaganda weapon into the hands of those Muslims outside the country who were bent on removal of the authority of the Union Government from Maungdaw area. The Arakanese Force were accused of murders, rapes and banditry in Maungdaw area and those Muslim leaders who had kept themselves away from the Mujahids now came forward with a demand for the formation of a separate administrative district of Maungdaw directly supervised by the Union government.

#### ORGANISED CRIME

Afforded respite by the departure of the 5th. Burifs the Mujahid regrouped themselves in the extreme

North and South of Maungdaw Subdivision. While the newly arrived Arakanese force remained ineffectual by their inexperience and their hostile attitude towards the Muslim population as a whole, the Mujahids had achieved cohesion by the elimination of the educated elements from their leadership and the emergence of ruthless and criminal types of leaders. Led by the convicted pirate Abul Kasim

and his relatives the Mujahids embarked upon a career of wholesale murder, rapine and extortion directed against the Arakanese and Muslims alike. The educated cranks and religious fanatics were cynically relegated to the role of explaining away Kasim's excesses and writing propaganda tracts on the justification of the Mujahid rising as a bulwark against Communism! The Arakanese units retaliated by indiscriminate and savage reprisals with the result that the situation in this corner of Arakan first became untenable.

#### TIMELY VISIT

The situation was saved by the timely visit of Prime Minister U Nu to Maungdaw in 1949. Bringing with him the Pakistani Ambassador, the Prime Minister made an on-the-spot study of the difficult situation. There followed a complete shake up of the administrative and security arrangements in the Subdivision; non-partisan civil officers and tested units of the Burma Army were sent into the area to build up anew a *cordon sanitaire*.

The 3rd. Burma Regiment in 1951 and the 5th. and 22nd. Burma Regiments in late 1952 launched major offensive against the Mujahids who lost their stronghold first in the South and later in the



*and across the land, the government forces closed in...*

North. The success of these military operations can be gauged from the fact that today the Mujahid leader Abul Kasim languishes in an East Pakistan jail, awaiting possible extradition to Burma while the lesser Mujahids have been dispersed and broken up into small gangs of dacoits preying on outlying villages. Much remains to be done to eradicate Mujahid growth root and branch but the civil officers of the area by patient and impartial work have won over the greater number of the Muslims to the cause of the Union.

#### JAMIAT-UL-ULEMA

The Muslims of Maungdaw Subdivision have their own organization to look after their political and religious affairs. The political side of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema (literally assembly of wisemen) is dominated by a handful of educated and monied Muslims while the religious department is in the hands of moulvis and mullahs who are often fanatical or bigoted.

The Jamiat has not formulated a clear-cut policy but it can fairly be said that it stands for Muslim representation in Parliament. Increased share of the Muslims in the administration. Government recognition of the Muslim residents as citizens and religious freedom. Above all, the Jamiat is avowedly opposed to Arakanese officialdom in local administration and Arakanese influence in local politics.

When British rule ceased in the area, many Jamiat leaders, attracted by the emergence of an Islamic state across the frontier and repelled by the Arakanese character of the administration in Maungdaw Subdivision, gave sympathy, if not direction, to the Mujahid movement in its early stage. However, when the Mujahids openly took up arms against the Government, many Muslim leaders chose to stand back and professed to help the government in efforts of pacification.

#### SOLID AGAINST SEPARATE STATE

The Maungdaw Muslims through the Jamiat-ul-Ulema, had sent two

representatives to the Constituent Assembly and have four members in the present Parliament of the Union. The four Muslim M. Ps form a group of their own independent of the Arakan A.F.P.F.L. but support the Union Government in all matters. The government in return have recognised the group as auxiliary to the A.F.P.F.L. and appointed its leader as a Parliamentary Secretary in the Government.

Latterly, the All Burma Peasant Organization (commonly known as Ba-Ta-La-Sa from its Burmese abbreviation) affiliated to the A.F.P.F.L. has gained a good number of Muslim adherents in the Subdivision by its legal rights and

powers to form village land committees and to effect equitable distribution of tenancies to the land.

Both the Jamiat-ul-Ulema and the All Burma Peasant Organization in their annual conventions have repeatedly passed resolutions opposing U Kyaw Min's Arakanese Group demand for a separate state in Arakan.

If today a plebiscite be held in Arakan on the question of separate state for Arakan, there can be no doubt that the people in Maungdaw Subdivision numbering a quarter million would vote solidly against it.

**SPARKLING**

**REFRESHING**

**AND**

**APPETISING**

**VIMTO**

*make sure you get it*

Sole bottlers for Burma:  
**IMPERIAL AERATED WATER FACTORY.**



Concluding the series, "Asmi" shows that the Arakanese are basically Burmese, and that more fraternisation would bring better understanding.

## THE STATE OF ARAKAN

by  
"ASMI"

SOON after the last General Election where they won nearly fifty percent of the parliamentary seats in Arakan, U Kyaw Min and his followers made prodigious efforts to organise an all-Arakanese parliamentary party. They wooed the A.F.P.F.L. M. Ps with the promise of frontline leadership in the party and predominant share in local and Union politics. They made overtures to the Muslim M. Ps, offering to forget the past and promising them a State Ministership in the Arakan state yet to be constituted.

The A.F.P.F.L. M.Ps turned down U Kyaw Min's dubious offer with disdain. The Muslim M. Ps did the same with deep suspicion.

U Kyaw Min and his group reacted to this rebuff quickly and characteristically. They called a convention in their stronghold—the Akyab town—announced the formation of the Independent Arakanese Parliamentary Group and set their policy of attaining the State of Arakan.

So they attended the first session of the Parliament where they sat in the opposition benches and allied themselves with the M. Ps of the Burma Workers and Peasants Party who are ever willing to fish in troubled waters. Having had little opportunity or opening in the Parliament to seize political power in Arakan and possibly a seat in the Union cabinet, the group organised a meeting at the Rangoon City Hall and told the Burmese public that the Muslim Mujahid rebellion was a greater menace to the Union than the K. M. T incursion. Then they went home to play golf or follow their profitable business pursuits.

### AT PYIDAWTHA CONFERENCE

In August 1952 the Union Government convened the all-Union Pyidawtha conference and invited also the members of the I.A.P.G

to attend. At the preliminary divisional meeting of the conference the members of the I.A.P.G. quarrelled with the members of the Akyab A.F.P.F.L. over the allocation of seats to the various select committees of the conference and retired from the meeting in a body in high dudgeon. They stayed away from the first few sessions of the conference with the explanation that their presence at the conference was made impossible by the personal attitude of Arakanese Minister U Ba Saw. Later, their pride salved by a heart-to-heart talk with the Prime Minister U Nu, U Kyaw Min and his followers returned to the premises of the Rangoon Turf Club where the conference was held and participated in speeches supporting the Pyidawtha resolutions sponsored by the Government and which set a number of priorities for Arakan, notably in the field of education, health, industries and transport.

The Independent Arakanese Group had further meetings with the A.F.P.F.L. leaders in the Government, with the result that the members of the I.A.P.G resident in their constituencies were nominated to the various Pyidawtha committees.

### COLD RECEPTION

The Pyidawtha Committees in Arakan, especially in Akyab District started work slowly and badly. Personal prejudices even in the A.F.P.F.L. and parochial outlook were given free play, a wording in a harmless proposal or a smallest issue oftentimes being made a subject of long and bitter debates. Above all, the shortage of building materials, even such basic material as teak or pyinkadoe wood which is produced only in Sandoway district, together with difficult communications made for delay in construction programmes.

Then the I.A.P.G members made loud complaints in Rangoon that they were denied of playing their legitimate and useful part in the work of the Pyidawtha committees.

Therefore a ministerial team headed by the Prime Minister U Nu took passage on the first Arakan-run of the state-owned coastal steamer S. S. Pyidawtha, the first fruit off the Pyidawtha plan to speed up the restoration of transport services in Arakan. Apparently, the Prime Minister and his colleagues intended to inspect, assess and advise on the Pyidawtha programmes in Arakan, and also to seek ways and means of fuller participation of members of the I.A.P.G. in Pyidawtha efforts.

On the eve of the visit of the ministerial team, U Kyaw Min made a violent and personal attack against a member of the team Minister U Ba Saw, in newspaper which rendered it impossible for U Kyaw Min to accompany the ministerial team as arranged.

The ministers sailed for Akyab, stopping over at Sandoway and Kyaukpau where the people received them with warmth and enthusiasm. Their arrival at Akyab was different; posters demanding Arakan state appeared on the walls and a demonstration of Akyab youths was attempted.

Thus deprived of the I.A.P.G. assistance and co-operation, the Ministerial party perforce conferred with the officials and adherents of the A.F.P.F.L. in Arakan regarding the implementation of the Pyidawtha schemes.

### TOWARDS PYIDAWTHA

In the result the final and costly survey of the Saingdin area for a hydraulic project was speeded up and plans for quick construction of a pulp factory at Ponnagyun



took shape. As a timely touch of balance in the uniform development of Arakan, the location of higher educational and medical institutions such as Teachers' Training College, the Intermediate College and the Regional Hospital was changed from Akyab to centrally-located Kyaukpyu.

All over rural towns and villages of Arakan the cry "Pyidawtha" went up from many a mouth of the people, if not from the heart, as the A.F.P.F.L. and the government officials assisted them in their tasks of building a new school, repairing an old road or digging a much-needed well for water supply.

#### A BITTER DEMAND

Meanwhile the Independent Arakanese Parliamentary Group steadily drifted away from fruitful co-operation with the Union Government in rehabilitating Arakan. The group became bitter and destructive with harsh denunciations of the inevitable failures and shortcomings of the government and the government personnel in particular instances. Their demand for a separate state became proportionately strident on every excuse and occasion. It is yet to be seen whether the I.A.P.G. with their negative sentiments and conflicting interests can breathe into the minds of the Arakanese a positive general will for a separate state of Arakan and carry them to the polls at the next election.

The term "Arakanese" obtains different connotations depending on whether it is used locally in Arakan or in the rest of Burma. In Arakan the term "Arakanese" is applied strictly to those persons descended from the original settlers of Akyab area. The rest of the population of the present day Arakan Division are either Yanbyes or Chaungthas. In this context therefore the Census of 1931 enumerated 188, 308 pure Arakanese, 326, 639 Yanbye and 47,120 Chaungtha in Arakan Division.

#### BASICALLY BURMESE

Long before the reign of Anawratha (1044-1077 A.D.) from their Kyaukse base the Burmese spread out in several directions. On such Burmese wave reached the Pondaung Range and the Chin

Hills, and ultimately Akyab area. The Arakanese, therefore, are basically Burmese in race as well as in religion. Their language is an early form of Burmese or a variant of Burmese. The Arakanese developed a calendar of their own and struck their own coinage from about 1660.

That the Arakanese managed to maintain a kingdom of their own until almost the end of the eighteenth century was mainly due to the geographical position of Arakan. Arakan was cut off from the rest of Burma by Arakan Yoma, through which there were only two practicable passes, the An connecting with Upper Burma and the Taungup connecting with Prome. Later, after the British annexation of Burma also Arakan was denied of rail and road links with metropolitan Burma owing to the strong opposition of the British vested interest in coastal shipping.

#### REMOVAL OF THE GREAT IMAGE

The kings of Pagan extended their authority over Arakan until 1287. Thereafter the overlordship of the Burmese kings in Arakan

was intermittent and in 1430 the Arakanese King Naramaikha founded Mrohung and grew in power. In the sixteenth century Arakan became a seapower of some importance. The Arakanese kingdom reached the zenith of power in Burma when in the reign of Minyazagri (1593-1612) the Arakanese participated in the sack of Pegu and obtained a vast loot together with the Pegu king Nandabayin's daughter and the white elephant.

After the reign of Sandhathudamma (1652-84) anarchy prevailed in Arakan, relieved only by orderly but brief rule of Sandawizaya (1700-31). After 1731 the Arakanese chieftains often appeared before the kings of Ava inviting intervention in distracted Arakan. However, only Bodawpaya in 1784 lent himself to the Arakanese persuasion and effected the conquest of Arakan in that year. Bodawpaya also removed the Great Image Mahamuni from Arakan and enshrined it at the Arakan Pagoda at Mandalay.

#### THE ANGLO-BURMESE WAR

Bodawpaya's annexation of Arakan brought no peace to

**THE FINEST GIFT**  
*For Every Housewife*



**USHA**

SEWING MACHINES

*The Best, yet the Cheapest*

SOLE AGENTS:

**ARJAN SINGH BROS.**

301, MADUL STREET, RANGOON.

Arakan but caused friction with the British in Bengal who perhaps had their own designs on Arakan. The British suffered the Arakanese to collect themselves in their territory, and to commit depredations across the frontier in Arakan. The most notorious of the Arakanese marauders was Chin Byan who collected a force in British territory, crossed the frontier in 1811 and captured Mrohung by surprise. Chin Byan then offered to bring Arakan under the British rule in return for recognition and help. Chin Byan's offer embarrassed the British who rejected it outright. But when Chin Byan was defeated the British failed in their promise to stop Chin Byan's return to their territory.

The troubles in Arakan directly led to the outbreak of Anglo-Burmese war in 1824 which cost Burma the loss of Tenasserim and Arakan.

In Arakan the British imposed their colonial rule and it was transferred to the Government of Bengal. In 1828 the Superintendent of Arakan was placed under the control of the Commissioner of Chittagong and the network of the existing administrative system of Bengal was extended over Arakan.

For several years after the British annexation conditions in Arakan remained unsettled. The chieftains, who had helped the British against the indigenous rule, proved equally hostile to the British. Arakan continued to be racked by a series of petty risings which culminated in a widespread serious revolt in 1836. The British suppressed this rebellion promptly and energetically, and there was no further serious disturbance.

#### GRANTEES

From the earliest days of their rule the British fostered expansion of cultivation for export by giving away large tracts of land, known as "Grants", to persons of standing, known as "Grantees", and by encouraging Indian immigration. In this way the forefathers of the I. A. P. G. leaders came into possession of huge estates in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Kyauktaw and Mrohung areas which, in pursuance of the land policy of the

Union Government, are to be broken up by distribution to the peasants.

The flood of immigration from Bengal drove the indigenous population into the more distant towns and villages, where they lived their customary life. Most of the people were peasants cultivating small holdings, and the distinctive feature of the agricultural economy of Arakan was that, as in no other part of Burma, the growth of population led to fragmentation of holdings.

#### SERIOUS AGRARIAN PROBLEM

At the end of the British rule, the Government of Independent Burma inherited a serious agrarian problem in Arakan and a tremendous task of equitable redistribution of land which was made all the more difficult by the attitude of the landowners and extreme leftists alike. Today the members of the A.F.P.F.L. and the A.B.P.C. on the various land committees are tackling the land problem under the provisions of the Tenancy Disposal Act, from the village to the divisional level, with commendable energy and enthusiasm.

The landed and mercantile gentry of the Arakanese community resident in Akyab town but with wide ramifications in other localities of Arakan Division still exercise political and commercial influence out of proportion to their number. They have long held the field in commerce, the legal profession and the administrative services of Arakan. The Arakanese, Yanbyes, Chaungthas, Kyunthas, all alike have long looked to them for leadership and guidance. During the stirring days of resistance and independence movements the common people learned to choose their own leaders and fashion their own organizations. But when the A.F.P.F.L. got lost in internal dissensions and broke up, the Akyab gentry seized their opportunity and filled the vacuum. The A.F.P.F.L. in Arakan yet needs stronger discipline and greater cohesion among its ranks and harder and more sincere work among the people if it is to eliminate the separatist influence of the Akyab group. The heartening picture is that the A.F.P.F.L. in

Arakan probably has a hold on fifty percent of the people in Akyab District outside Akyab town and certainly on seventy percent of the populace in Kyaukpyu and Sandoway districts.

#### NEED FOR MORE FRATERNISATION

In the abundance of insularity and local patriotism, the Arakanese of Akyab area slightly regard the people of metropolitan Burma as "aukthas" (sons of nether regions). In point of fact, for over a century the Arakanese had slight and few contacts with members of the other branches of the Burmese race across the Arakan Yoma. During the British rule before the war, the few Burmans who came to Arakan for compulsory stay were, with few exceptions, officials mostly in their late career and sent there for punishment. These Burmese officials lived out their days of disgrace in isolation and contrived to get out of Arakan at the first opportunity.

Only the people of Kyaukpyu and Sandoway districts all along had friendly and fraternal relations with the people on the other side of Arakan Yoma as they came and went through the An and Taungup passes in search of trade. On the other hand the Arakanese in government service, except those in the I. C. S., invariably spent the whole span of their official career in Arakan. The need now is for sending out young Arakanese officials from Arakan to suitable stations in metropolitan Burma and sending in young and sympathetic Burman officials to Arakan.

Such had been and, to some extent, still is the state of Arakan. In sum, if Arakan is to march abreast with the rest of the Union, the basic need is for the Union Government to put down the petty but widespread rising promptly and effectively, for the A.F.P.F.L. to end internal dissension and build up a homogenous political organization on a strong base of cohesion and discipline; linking Arakan both by rail and road with the rest of Burma, besides improving transport services within Arakan; equitable and systematic distribution of land; reshuffle of service personnel and their re-orientation.