

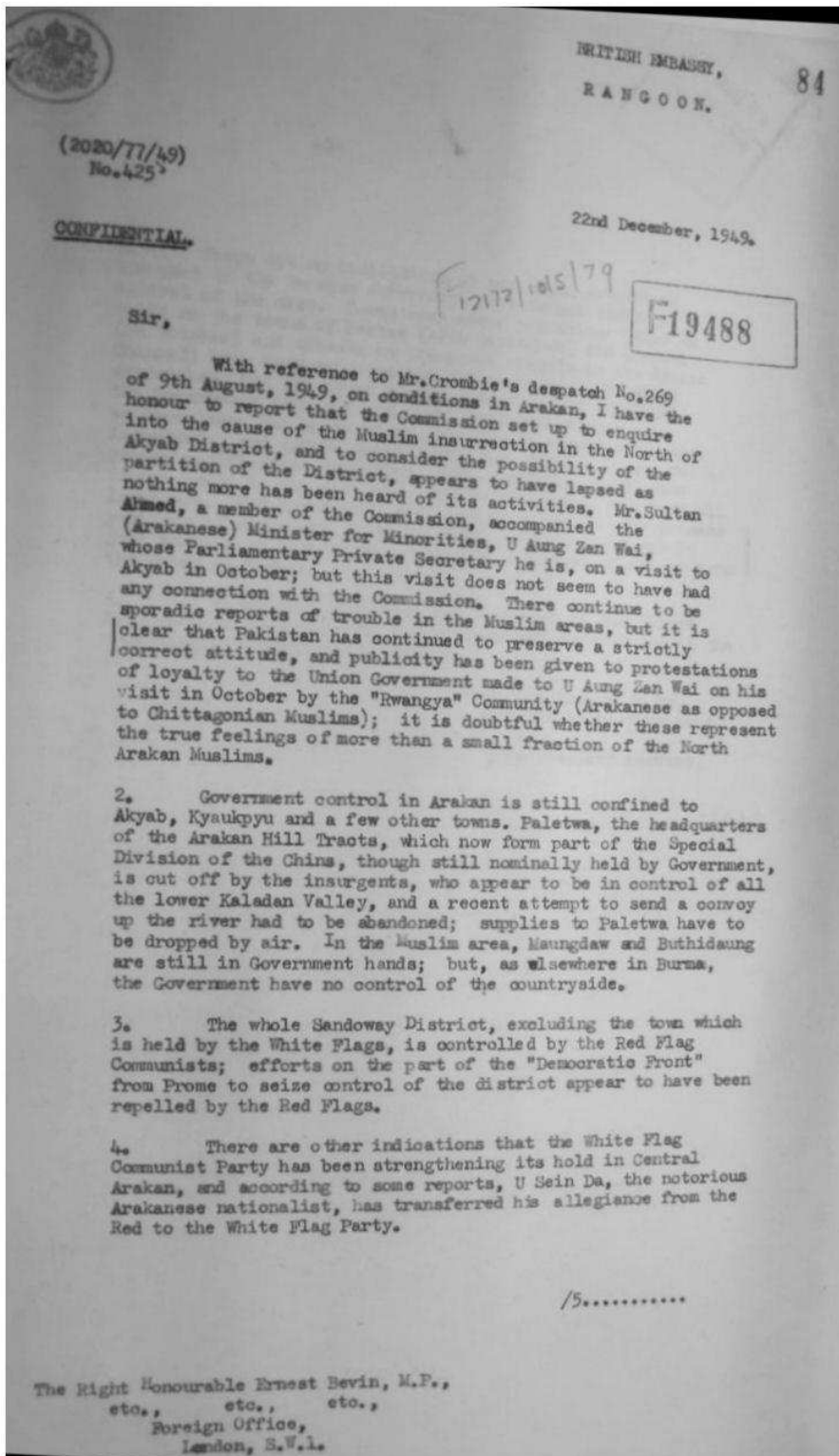
Transcript of Paragraph 1 of a diplomatic despatch from Ambassador James Bowker in Rangoon to the British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, dated 22 December 1949

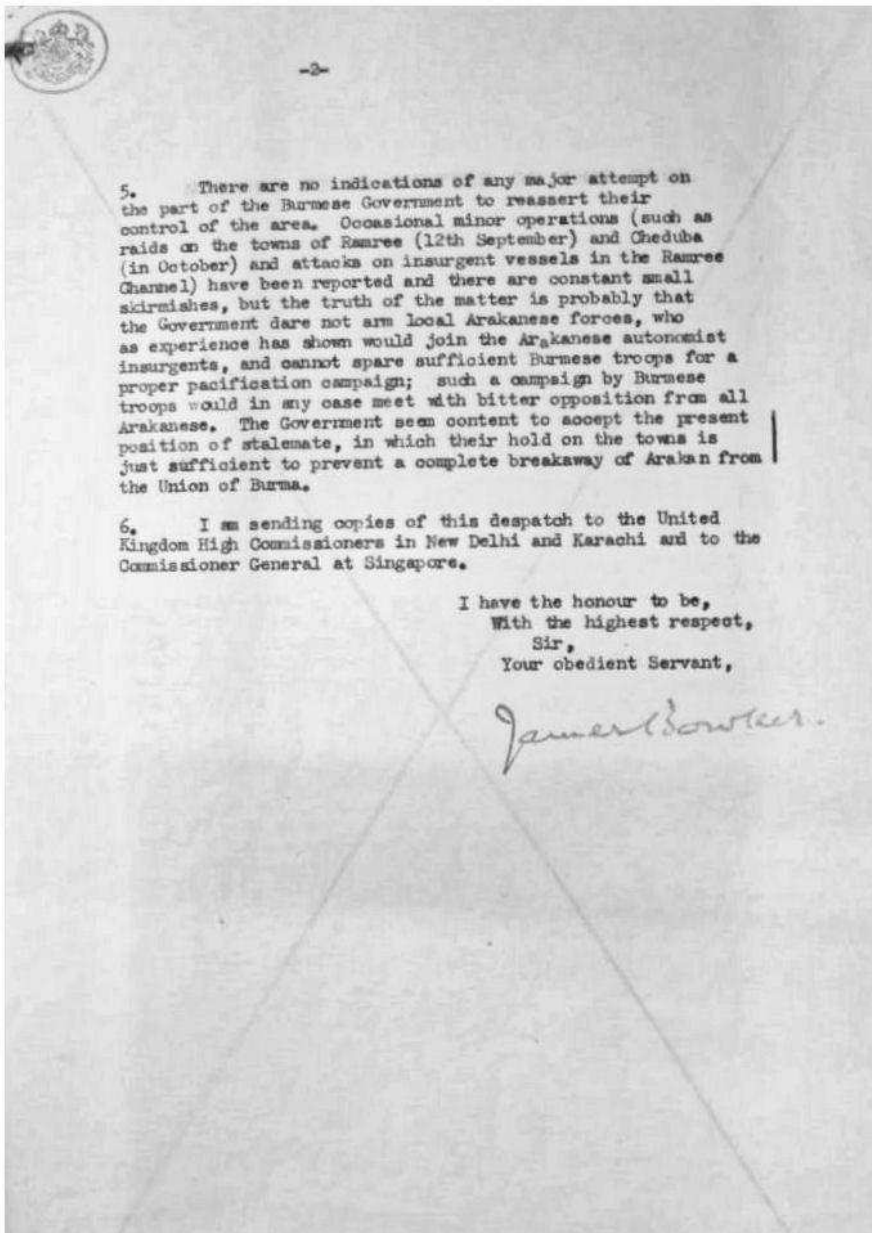
Sir,

With reference to Mr Crombie's despatch No. 269 of 9th August, 1949, on conditions in Arakan, I have the honour to report that the Commission set up to enquire into the cause of the Muslim insurrection in the North of Akyab District, and to consider the possibility of the partition of the District, appears to have lapsed as nothing more has been heard of its activities. Mr Sultan Ahmed, a member of the Commission, accompanied the (Arakanese) Minister for Minorities, U Aung Zan Wai, whose Parliamentary Private Secretary he is, on a visit to Akyab in October; but this visit does not seem to have had any connection with the Commission. There continue to be sporadic reports of trouble in the Muslim areas, but it is clear that Pakistan has continued to preserve a strictly correct attitude, and publicity has been given to protestations of loyalty to the Union Government made to U Aung Zan Wai on his visit in October by the "Rwangya" Community (Arakanese as opposed to Chittagonian Muslims); it is doubtful whether these represent the true feelings of more than a small fraction of the North Arakan Muslims.

2. Government control in Arakan is still confined to Akyab, Kyaukpyu and a few other towns.....

[Note the distinction drawn by the Ambassador between the minority of quasi-indigenous "Rwangya" Muslims and the majority of 19th-20th Century immigrant Chittagonian Muslims. The "Rwangya" Muslims were in my view most probably the descendants of the "Rooinga" Mohamedans recorded in 1799 by Dr Francis Buchanan. The Chittagonian Muslims would subsequently appear to have absorbed the remnants of the "Rwangya" Muslims to become today's "Rohingya" Muslims, a designation which began to emerge in the early 1960s at the time of the surrender of the East Pakistan-based Mujahid movement – Derek Tonkin.]





Transcript of an undated letter, probably written in 1951, from Professor Pearn of the Foreign Office to Professor Gordon Luce of SOAS University of London

FOREIGN OFFICE
Research Department
Cornwall House S.E.1

[1951 ?]

My dear Luce ¹,

You may remember that a little while ago I wrote to you on the subject of the derivation of the word RWANGYA, by which Arakanese Muslims describe themselves.

I have had a word from Merrells ², in Rangoon, on the same subject. He says that he asked E Maung ³, who gave the following explanation : -

“Between the two words [-] and [-] I would prefer the latter as it would seem to have a relevant meaning. RWAM [-] is a Tibeto-Burmese word and means ‘midway between’ - i.e. a person who is a stranger to one is called in Burmese [-] and a person who is neither a stranger nor an intimate (in other words, a person who is on the midway between the stage of a stranger and that of an intimate) is called in Burmese [-]. So also in the case of a half-ripened fruit, the midway between the stage of green and that of ripeness. The other word [-] means ‘in between’. Consequently the two words [-] and [-] put together as a coined word would mean ‘half-caste’ or ‘a person of mixed blood’.”

This sort of thing is beyond my ken, but the above does not, to my untutored mind, seem convincing. So far as I have seen, the term RWANGYA is used by few except the Arakan Muslims themselves, and I should have expected them to adopt some simpler expression, perhaps with an Indian connexion. But I am very likely wrong. However, if some time when leisure permits, you should feel disposed to let me know your views, I should be most grateful.

with all good wishes,
Yours ever,
[signed]
(B.R.Pearn)⁴

G.H. Luce, Esq., OBE.,
School of Oriental and African Studies,
University of London
W.C.1

[See original letter on next page. No response known.]

¹ [Professor Gordon Hannington Luce](#)

² George Merrells, Oriental Secretary at the British Embassy, resident some years in Arakan

³ Professor E Maung, formerly University of Rangoon, Foreign Minister, Minister of Justice

⁴ Professor Bertie Reginald Pearn, formerly University of Rangoon, Head of Asian Section FO Research

PALESTINE OFFICE,
Research Department,
Cromwell House, S.E. 1.

1951

My dear Lucie,

You may remember that a little while ago I wrote to you on the subject of the derivation of the word **RAKSYA**, by which Mohammedan Muslims describe themselves.

I have had a line from Herralls, in Rangoon, on the same subject. He says that he asked A HANG, who gave the following explanation :-

"Between the two words **ꨀꩃ** and **ꨀꩄ** I would prefer the latter as it seems to have a relevant meaning. **ꨀꩃ** is a Tibeto-Burman word and means 'midway between' - i.e. a person who is a stranger to one is called in Burmese **ꨀꩃ** and a person who is neither a stranger nor an intimate (in other words, a person who is on the midway between the stage of a stranger and that of an intimate) is called in Burmese **ꨀꩄ**. So also in the case of a half-ripened fruit, the word **ꨀꩄ** is used. That is to say, the fruit is on the midway between the stage of green and that of ripeness. The other word **ꨀꩃ** seems 'in between'. Consequently the two words **ꨀꩃ** and **ꨀꩄ** put together as a coined word would mean 'half-ripe' or 'a person of mixed blood'."

This sort of thing is beyond my ken, but the above does not, to my untrained mind, seem convincing. So far as I have seen, the term **RAKSYA** is used by few except the Arakanese Muslims themselves, and I should have expected them to adopt some similar expression, perhaps with an Indian connexion. But I am very likely wrong. However, if, sometime when leisure permits, you should feel disposed to let me know your views, I should be most grateful.

With all good wishes,
Yours ever,

B. R. F.
(S. H. Brown)

S. H. Brown, Esq.,
School of Oriental and African Studies,
University of London,
W.C.2.