

Arakan Geopolitics Rendered Rohingya Stateless Ethnicity

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Rakhine State's historical name was Arakan until it was changed in 1989. Following the 1960 general elections in Burma, Sultan Mahmud, Myanmar's Minister of Health, called for a state for the Arakan Indian community in northern Arakan. He suggested the Kaladan River as a border between the Muslim majority and Arakan who are majority Buddhists. He also stated that the Arakanese Indians would accept a joint state with the Arakanese Buddhists if there was adequate protection and representation of the Indian minority. Mahmud's proposal was presented to the State Consultative Committee where he suggested that a separate area in northern Rakhine be administered directly from the nation's capital, Rangoon. On 1 May 1961, Prime Minister U Nu implemented Mahmud's ideas, albeit the new zone did not extend up to the Kaladan River.

Between 1961 and 1962, the Mayu Frontier Districts were governed by the elected government in Rangoon. The 1962 military coup ended parliamentary democracy in Burma. Following the coup, the Mayu Frontier Districts were directly administered by the Tatmadaw and Ne Win's Union Revolutionary Council. Tatmadaw changed the administrative status of Frontier Districts in February 1964 and was placed under the Ministry of Home Affairs. In 1974, when Ne Win proclaimed the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, the Mayu Frontier area was incorporated into Arakan State. In 1989, State Law and Order Restoration Council, Headed by General Swa Maung changed the name of Arakan into Rakhine State and its capital from Akyab into Sittwe. He also renamed the country from Burma to Myanmar.

Historically, Arakan was an independent Kingdom. A total of 234 Arakanese Kings ruled the land before the Burmese King annexed it in 1784. The Burmese King ceded Arakan to British Rule in 1826 as war reparation after the first Anglo-Burmese War (5 March 1824–24 February 1826). The second Anglo-Burmese War (5 April 1852–20 January 1853) annexed lower Burma to British India, and the third war (7 November–29 November 1885) was a colonial conquest. Burma was ruled as a province of British India till 1936. The

"ignoring Japan's strong concern" (Irrawaddy, 2022). On the other hand, Japan officially invited Myanmar to attend ex-Prime Minister Abe's funeral held on 27 September 2022. Critics viewed the invitation as Japan's recognition of the coup leader who has killed 2,000 democratic activists since the military coup on 1 February 2021 (Nobira, 2022). The UK did not invite Myanmar to attend Queen Elizabeth II's funeral.

Japanese Army pursued British forces up



beginning of British rule of Burma as an independent colony met with the Second World War.

Japan occupied Burma (1942-1945) during the Second World War. Burmese welcomed the Japanese as liberators against the British. Japan had assisted in the formation of the Burma Independence Army and trained the Thirty Comrades, who were the founders of the Tatmadaw (Armed Forces). General Aug San, the founding father of Burma and the father of Aung San Suu Kyi, was one of the Thirty Comrades. This is the historical context in that Japan has been sympathetic to military regimes despite their atrocities against ethnic minorities. Japan only decided to stop training Myanmar military personnel following the junta's execution of four pro-democracy activists in July 2022,

to Arakan Mountain Range. The presence of Japanese and British forces exposed the historical divide between the two major communities-Rakhine Buddhist and the Rohingya. Buddhists' historical grievance against the British was due to its colonization of Burma by the Buddhist King. Muslims had grievances against Buddhists for the colonization of Independent Arakan by the Buddhist King.

Buddhists supported the advancing Japanese Army and took up arms against the British forces. The Rohingya population in Arakan supported British forces to resist the Japanese advance. Weapons in the hands of two major communities resulted in the riot, which began in a fishing village known as Ale Than Kyaw on the Arakan Coast and Maruk U township. The riot inflicted much

damage to properties and loss of life in both communities.

Before the Second World War, the political movement against the British was gaining momentum in the sub-continent. At the time of the partition of the subcontinent and Burma's independence, the Rohingya Muslims of western Burma had the ambition of merging their region with East Pakistan. Before the independence of Burma in January 1948, Muslim leaders from Arakan addressed themselves to Jinnah, and asked his assistance in annexing of the Mayu region [Mayu Frontier District] to Pakistan which was about to be formed. Two months later, Akyab became the home of the North Arakan Muslim League. It too proposed annexation to Pakistan. However, it was never materialised after it was reportedly turned down by Jinnah. The British annexed Arakan to Burma, sowing the seed of permanent trouble in western Burma.

Rohingyas' desire to annex Arakan into East Pakistan entrenched distrust among the majority of Bamar and Rakhine Buddhist communities. They hold a wild perception that if Rohingyas get an opportunity, they will separate Rakhine from Myanmar. After the independence of

Burma, the historical divide turned into animosity and was exacerbated by persistent anti-Rohingya narratives in domestic politics. Successive military regimes heavily garnered Buddhist sentiments against Rohingya, persistently spreading hate speech and narratives against them, and embarked on planned persecution and eviction of Rohingya.

Rohingyas were Burmese nationals throughout the centuries. Their Burmese nationality was endorsed by The Union Citizenship (Election) Act 1948. After Burma's independence, they exercised voting rights. They filled candidature in national and state elections. They represented people in the state and national parliament. They were employed in government jobs. They ran businesses. Military drafted Citizenship Act 1982 changed all The military did not include Rohingya ethnicity in the new law rendering them the world's worst persecuted stateless population, much to the persistent insouciance of the global consciousness.

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