

## **Extract from an Article in the monthly Burmese magazine “The Guardian” of October 1954**

The author is 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” carried articles by U Thaung Myine on Shan, Kachin and Chin affairs. The extract below is from his third article on Arakan.

### **The State of Arakan**

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

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#### **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.

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