

CONFIDENTIAL

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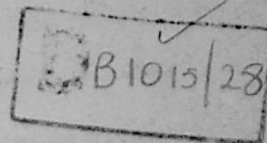
No. 130 ✓



British Embassy,

Rangoon. D.

May 10, 1957.



1015/15  
1015/27  
Sir,

Under cover of my Chancery's letters Nos. 10114/4/57 of the 25th of March and 10116/14/57 of the 9th of May this Embassy has recently sent the Department accounts by members of my staff of visits to Arakan. Little news from Arakan appears in the newspapers and the area is inaccessible and not generally suitable for touring. I hope that it may be useful, therefore, if I set down in this despatch a short general account of the situation in Arakan today.

2. Arakan is a backward and neglected part of the Union of Burma. There is agricultural wealth in the broad alluvial paddy lands of the northern part of the province, whence a surplus of rice is exported or smuggled over the frontier into Pakistan. The hill tracts and southern areas are, however, deficient in rice. Few vegetables are grown and although there is some talk of developing the cultivation of coconuts, which might be very profitable, nothing notable has yet been done. There is no industry of importance in the area apart from rice-mills at Akyab, and no timber. A project to utilise power from the falls of the Saingdin (Sindaung) River, east of Buthidaung, to manufacture paper from the forests which clothe

the hills is being considered. The forests are being cleared firmly

3. The Arakanese have been clamorous in asking the central government to remedy this situation and I need hardly say that fulsome promises of public works have been made at elections. But these have not been fulfilled. The principal public work undertaken is the road from Prome to Taungup to link southern Arakan with the Irrawaddy valley. But the road, which is not yet completed, merely leads to an infertile swamp and unless steps are taken to improve the area, to establish industry and to develop communications to the other parts of Arakan the road can serve no useful purpose. Such other few works as have been undertaken - a Naval Base, a hospital and a University College - have been mostly in Kyaukpyu rather than in the traditional capital of Akyab, and, as I have recorded above, the Saingdin project has been dropped. There is some element of political spite in this in that the inhabitants of Akyab are the most independent-minded of the Arakanese and the Burmese have therefore tended to favour Kyaukpyu which is not such a stronghold of independent sentiment.

4. Another grievance is that the Arakanese unlike most of the other constituent minorities of the Union have not been granted their own state or any degree of autonomy. They contend that if the Karens or the Kachins are entitled to their own state, so are they. The attitude of the Burmese on this is uncompromising. They say that there is no such thing as an Arakanese race and that for the Arakanese to pretend that they are not Burmese is simply silly. It is true that both races come of very much the same stock and that their language is almost identical with

/Burmese



Burmese when written, though the spoken language is sharply differentiated from Burmese. But the Arakanese have a strong sense of separate nationality and there was for many centuries a separate Arakanese kingdom, with its own customs and coinage and links with India, which was not annexed by the Burmese till late in the eighteenth century.

5. These grievances have led to much dissatisfaction in Arakan. In the south the results are perhaps not serious because the area is very poor and the people depend upon the Union Government for large grants of money and food to keep them going. They know that if there were an autonomous Arakanese state, the new capital of Akyab would not be able to provide the same support and moreover the traditional leaders of Arakan - a small group of wealthy families living in Akyab - have always treated the south very scurvily. But in Akyab itself and the northern half of the territory there is probably a strong movement in favour of autonomy or even independence, directed not only against the Burmese but also against the Muslim immigrants from Chittagong who now occupy most of the Mangdaw Township and the northern half of the Buthidaung Township. The Arakanese would like to throw them out by force; the Muslims have in the past resisted by force, but the "Mujahid" movement appears to be quiescent at present (though the recent release in Pakistan of a former Mujahid leader has just provoked some indignation in Burma) with the Burma Army holding the ring. The public and parliamentary movement in favour of

/autonomy



autonomy is waged by the Arakan National United Organisation (A.N.U.O.) and particularly by the redoubtable Member of Parliament, U Kyaw Min, a Barrister, former member of the Indian Civil Service and part proprietor of the "Nation" newspaper.

6. During the recent session of the Burma Parliament U Kyaw Min made a speech on the 13th of March stating in violent terms the grievances and aspirations of the A.N.U.O.

I enclose a copy. Although the speech was most intemperate there is considerable substance in the points which he made:-

(i) Whereas under British rule the administration of Arakan contained many Arakanese, it is now practically entirely staffed by Burmese. 90 per cent. of the gazetted (i.e. senior) posts and a good number of the non-gazetted posts were now filled by Burmese.

I have little doubt that these allegations are correct.

(ii) Bogyoke Aung San had originally intended that the Arakanese should have the opportunity of forming a constituent state if they wished it but that they were later deprived of this right by his successors.

It seems to be true that Aung San laid down certain criteria for statehood within the Union which the Arakanese consider should apply to them. It is a matter of opinion whether they are right in this contention because, as I have already stated in this despatch, the matter hinges around the question of whether the Arakanese have a separate language and origin.

(iii) Finally U Kyaw Min complained bitterly of the gross interference practised by the Government during elections

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in Arakan. I fear that his accusations are all too true. There has been much intimidation by the Army and by the local Government and A.F.P.F.L. party authorities. The courts have set aside a number of elections as a result, but the Government have managed to postpone second elections on various grounds where they fear that these might go against them.

7. The intemperance of U Kyaw Min's speech caused an uproar in the Burmese Parliament and the Speaker directed that it should not be published. This may in part have been due to the threat contained in the peroration that, if the Arakanese are not granted a state within the Union, they will create their own state and secede. The Arakanese have no constitutional right to take any such action and U Kyaw Min's speech was to that extent treasonable. It was perhaps unwise however not to let it be published as its suppression naturally aroused a great deal of curiosity and unfavourable comment. The "Nation" newspaper was able to make excellent capital of the occasion by pretending to publish the speech but leaving all the columns blank and printing only the Speaker's ruling that the speech should not be published in the press.

8. To conclude, the outlook for Burmese/Arakanese relations is not a particularly happy one. Instead of seeking to enlist the willing co-operation of the Arakanese, the Government is rather hoping to hold the area down by staff and by the entire with Burmese officials and

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the Union as a



9. I am sending a copy of this despatch to the United Kingdom High Commissioner in Karachi, with a spare copy which he may wish to send to his Deputy in Dacca.

I have the honour to be,

with the highest respect,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(for H. R. Ambar)

(R.H.S. Allen)

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