



rule felt helpless. They reacted with a racism that brought together feelings of both superiority and fear. This gave rise to a grass-roots based Burmese nationalism. As Burmese nationalism increasingly asserted itself before the Second World War, the Indian presence and the Muslim religion that was 'imported' with them came under attack. In the early 1930s there were serious anti-Indian disturbances and in 1938, there were riots specifically directed against the Indian Muslim community. The Muslims of northern Arakan were caught up in this cross-

olence against the Muslims. The Japanese Army committed rape, murder and torture against Muslims in Arakan. Many were killed or died of starvation, and thousands appear to have fled.

In response, the Muslims conducted retaliatory raids from British-controlled areas causing Buddhists to flee to southern Arakan. The British formed Volunteer Forces called "V-Force" with Rohingyas. Some reports state that this "V-Force" instead of fighting the Japanese destroyed Buddhist places of worship and committed atrocities in northern Arakan. The Rohingya recruits engaged in a campaign against

fers in Burmese internal matters. After his refusal, some Rohingya elders founded the Mujahid party in northern Arakan with the aim of creating an autonomous Muslim state.

**Since Independence**

In 1947, two Arakanese Indians were elected to the Constituent Assembly of Burma. U Nu came to power just before independence, after Burma's great resistance hero, independence leader and the founder of the Communist Party of Burma, Aung San (late father

identification or even citizenship under generational provision. In 1950, some Rohingyas staged a rebellion against government policies demanding citizenship and asking for the state the British had promised.

The Parliament continued to have Rohingya legislators: five Rohingyas were elected in 1951 and six in 1956. Some of them served as ministers, parliamentary secretaries and high-ranking government officers in Prime Minister U Nu's cabinet. During the election campaign in 1960, Prime Minister U Nu pledged to include all Arakan into one province. Following the general election, U Nu set up a separate administrative zone for the Rohingya-majority northern areas of Arakan, which was called the Mayu Frontier District. The zone was administered directly by the national government of Burma.

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**"Socialist" coup d'état**

In March 1962, General U Ne Win, who began his military career fighting for the Japanese in World War II, captured power, which ended the Westminster-style political system of governance. The authoritarian rule of the army spanning 26 years created a police state with midnight arrests, imprisonment without trial, a controlled press and a brutal Military Intelligence Service. All citizens had to obtain national registration cards. The Rohingyas were only given foreign identity cards. Thus, they could pursue only limited job and educational opportunities. The military had confiscated the arable land of Rohingyas and had given this expropriated land to Buddhist settlers who came from outside the region. The military regime relied heavily on using Burmese nationalism and Theravada Buddhism to bolster its rule. To remain in power, the military regime not only discriminated against minorities, but also helped to provoke riots led by Buddhists. The Ne Win regime carried out military operations against the Rohingyas for over two decades. In 1978, a large-scale military operation named "King Dragon" was launched to expel what they called Rohingyas insurgents. This operation forced hundreds of thousands to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia and Thailand.

fire.

**"Divide and Rule" strategy**

The Burmese nationalists supported the Japanese during World War II. The Muslims fled from Japanese-controlled Buddhist-majority areas towards British-controlled Muslim-dominated northern Arakan. The Arakan massacres in 1942 involved communal violence between British-armed Rohingya recruits and pro-Japanese Rakhines. This situation polarised the whole region including other parts of Burma along ethnic lines. With the retreat of the British, the Japanese approached Arakan and the Buddhists instigated vi-

Arakanese communities. The British had promised Rohingyas a "Muslim Autonomous Area" if they fought alongside the British against the Japanese. However, in 1948, when the British left Myanmar, Rohingyas did not get an autonomous area.

Not being granted what the British had pledged, Rohingyas Muslims were apprehensive of a future Buddhist-dominated government. In 1946, Muslim leaders from Arakan asked Ali Jinnah's assistance to incorporate the Rakhine zone into Pakistan due to the religious affinity and geographic proximity. They also founded the North Arakan Muslim League. Jinnah did not wish to inter-

of the current de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi) and his ministers were assassinated in a coup attempt by a former Prime Minister U Saw. Under U Nu's leadership, Burma remained a democracy from 1948 to 1962. His regime recognised "Rohingya" as an indigenous ethnic nationality, but was not widely used until the 1990s.

The Myanmar Parliament enacted the Union Citizenship Act that defined which ethnicities could gain citizenship. The Rohingyas were left out. However, the act allowed those whose families had lived in Myanmar for at least two generations to apply for identity cards. Rohingyas were initially given such

In 1978, Bangladesh protested to the Burmese government for expelling thousands of Burmese Muslims. Despite the Burmese argument that those expelled were Bangladeshis illegally residing in Burma, they provided no evidence to substantiate these claims, the Burmese regime agreed to take back 200,000 refugees, who were settled in Arakan. A joint statement by Myanmar and Bangladesh at the time and then repeated in 1992 acknowledged that the Rohingyas were lawful Burmese residents. Despite the use of the term in the past, the military regime continues to reject using the term Rohingyas to identify them now.

**To be continued**