



Dr Lionel Bopage



known as the People Power Uprising and the People's Democracy Movement, it led to a series of nationwide protests, marches and civil disturbances that peaked on 8 August 1988 (hence the name "8888 Uprising"). In the general election held in 1990, the

Myanmar Nationality Act 1982

The Myanmar Nationality Act enacted in 1982, stripped Rohingya of their citizenship retrospectively and made them stateless. The Act required proof that one's family lived in Myanmar prior to 1948 and fluency in a national language. Many Rohingya lacked paperwork, which was either unavailable or denied to them. To be a citizen, a person's ancestors should have belonged to a national race or group prior to the British rule in 1823. Rohingya were declared Bengali foreign-

Rohingya-led National Democratic Party for Human Rights won four seats. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won the election, but she was placed under house arrest preventing her from becoming Prime Minister. The Burmese military junta banned the National Democratic Party for Human Rights in 1992. Its leaders were arrested, jailed and tortured.

The first constitution of the Union of

uted to the 2012 riots between Rohingya Muslims and ethnic Rakhines. The Rakhine were said to have been abetted and armed from the capital of Rakhine state. Calling on the Rakhine to defend their "race and religion", the regime appears to have incited this pogrom, though the regime has denied this.

The regime imposed curfew, deployed troops and in June 2012 imposed a state of emergency in Rakhine. Yet, the regime has never prosecuted anyone for the attacks against the Rohingya. The Rohingya were considered a threat to the national identity. About 140,000 Rohingya remained confined in IDP camps and were subjected to arbitrary detention, assault, rape, torture, arson and mur-

trapped on boats at sea. Around 100 are said to have died in Indonesia, 200 in Malaysia, and 10 in Thailand. The UN adopted a resolution to set up an independent, international mission to investigate the alleged crimes. However, Myanmar was reluctant to allow the UN to investigate or to accept UN investigators. They denied visas to members of a UN probe investigating the violence and alleged abuses in Rakhine. The UN has called on Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar's security forces to end the violence and labelled security operations as a "text-book example of ethnic cleansing". The UN also warned of a looming "humanitarian catastrophe".

Under a plan originally introduced in 2015, Bangladesh wanted to move undocumented Myanmar nationals to a remote island that is prone to flooding during monsoon and identified as uninhabitable. The UN is also concerned with this controversial forced relocation. Bangladesh's Prime Minister called on the UN and the international community to pressure Myanmar to allow the return of Rohingya refugees. Even Bangladesh's foreign minister called the violence against the Rohingya "a genocide". Its National Commission for Human Rights was considering pressing for an international tribunal against the Myanmar army on charges of genocide. The Rakhine Commission

In September 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi entrusted an advisory commission (Rakhine Commission) led by Kofi Annan to find ways to heal the longstanding divisions, and said the government would abide by its findings. However, there was no mandate to investigate specific cases of human rights abuses. In October 2016, three Burmese border posts along Myanmar's border with Bangladesh were attacked. The insurgents looted several dozen firearms and boxes of ammunition. This also resulted in several security officers being killed. Troops poured into villages in Rakhine State leading to a security crackdown on villages where Rohingya lived.

In August 2017, the Commission released its recommendations. The report called for measures that would improve security in Myanmar for the Rohingya, but did not accommodate all measures various Rohingya factions were asking for. According to the Myanmar military, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) launched multiple coordinated attacks on police outposts and border guards soon afterwards. This led to the current humanitarian catastrophe. Following the attacks, the military and some extremist Buddhists started a major crackdown on the Rohingya Muslims in the western region of Rakhine State.

The regime in Rakhine State originally blamed an Islamist insurgent group. However, a

Myanmar

A Good Example for Politics of Polarisation

ers, despite their presence dating back to the 12th century.

So, their rights to study, work, travel, marry, practice their religion and access to health care were restricted, denying them future possibility of gaining nationality. They cannot buy property, or run for office. Rohingya politicians have been jailed to disbar them from contesting elections. As of 2017, Burma does not have a single Rohingya MP. The Rohingya have no voting rights and are subjected to various forms of extortion, arbitrary taxation; land confiscation; forced eviction, house destruction, marriage restrictions and blacklisting children. Even if they somehow become "naturalised", they are prevented from entering professions such as medicine and law. Their illiteracy rate is about 80 percent.

Pro-Democracy Movements

Rohingya community leaders supported the "8888 Uprising". This was organised and largely led by university students. Also

Burma was enacted in 1947. After the 1962 coup d'état, a second constitution was enacted in 1974. The 2008 Constitution is the third and current constitution, under which the Myanmar military still control much of the country's government, including the home, defence and border affairs ministries. One Vice-President and 25 percent of the seats in Parliament are from the military. Hence, the country's civilian leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi have little influence over the security establishment.

During the 60 years of military rule, things worsened for the Rohingya. They faced military crackdowns in 1978, 1991-92, 2012, 2015, 2016 and now in 2017. Since the 1990s, a new 'Rohingya' movement appears to have emerged. The new movement provides publicity to the term "Rohingya", reject being depicted as originating from Bengal; and with their diaspora, lobbies internationally.

der. The security forces have shut down their social and political organizations. The government's taking over of their private business debilitated them financially.

The most persecuted minority In 2013, the UN identified the Rohingya as the most persecuted minority in the world. The 2014 Myanmar census did not include the Rohingya in it as they were categorized as stateless Muslims from Bangladesh. Many Rohingya see this as a denial of their basic rights. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar also agreed. In 2015, many thousands of Rohingya fled by boat via the waters of the Strait of Malacca and the Andaman Sea. The UN estimates from January to March 2015 alone, about 25,000 people fled by boats. An estimated 3,000 refugees have been rescued or made it to shore, while several thousands were believed to remain

Widespread fears among the Buddhist Rakhines that they would soon become a minority contributor.

