

Copyright © Narinjara News 2004

ARAKANPOST

Monthly Journal

GAS DISCOVERY WILL BENIFIT JUNTA

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

AN Interview With General Secretary OF ANC

Issue - 3

March, 2004

THE ARAKANESE STUDENT AND YOUTH MOVEMENTS

Series-2: AFPFL

By SHWE LU MAUNG ALIAS SHAHNAWAZ KHAN, Ph.D. (WALES, UK)



entered into the world map as Arakan in the days of King Mun Saw Mwan in 1430. He was multilingual with good proficiency in Bengali, Hindi, and Persian, on the top of his mother tongue Rakhaing. Among his advisors were a good number of highly educated Muslims and his royal international language was Persian. Being influenced by the Muslim Mogol Empire, the Persian language was adopted by the Rakhaing as well as the Bama kings of those days. It was the fashion of the time. Because of this, Rakkhapura was known as Arakan.

Deeply lost in the world of colo-

The Arakanese Student and Youth Movements Series-2: AFPFL

Shwe Lu Maung *alias* Shahnawaz Khan, Ph.D. (Wales, UK)

A movement is a process that makes steady progressive advancement resulting in a new and better social, cultural, economical, or political order. In the light of this conventional understanding I am making this attempt to present the readers a concise analysis of the Arakanese student and youth movements. My analysis will be based upon my own experience as well as on what I have learned from my parents and their generation. I call this a political analysis, as I will mainly focus on the horizon of a new and better political order.

The Arakanese Dilemma: What is to be done? This question haunts every generation of the Arakanese since their national kingdom Rakkhapura lost her western territory to the Mongol Empire in 1660 and finally independence to the Myanmar colonialist in 1784. It came under the British rule in 1826 and lasted till 1948. Inside that vast British Empire which ruled half the world, Rakkhapura was just a piece of broken arrow, very insignificant and useless. She had already lost her original name and by then was known as Arakan, her Persian name. Most historians believe that Arakan is the

English name for the Rakhaingpray. As a matter of fact it is the Persian name. Rakkhapura entered into the world map as Arakan in the days of King Mun Saw Mwan in 1430. He was multilingual with good proficiency in Bengali, Hindi, and Persian, on the top of his mother tongue Rakhaing. Among his advisors were a good number of highly educated Muslims and his royal international language was Persian. Being influenced by the Muslim Mogol Empire, the Persian language was adopted by the Rakhaing as well as the Bama kings of those days. It was the fashion of the time. Because of this, Rakkhapura was known as Arakan.

Deeply lost in the world of colonialism, the Arakanese did not know if they should fight for sovereign independence or stay inside India or Burma. In fear of the Muslims and the Hindus they opted to join hands with the Buddhist Bama (Myanmar) on the basis common religion. *It was a religious decision.* The Bama (Myanmar) is seen as a lesser threat by the Arakanese. Only a small faction, for example U Seinda party, opted for sovereign independence to no avail. U Uttama Bhikhu was the only one who favoured remaining part of India. Subsequently a vast majority of the Arakanese youths and intellectuals joined Anti-Fascist and People Freedom League (AFPFL) at its birth in 1943.

The Arakanese and AFPFL. Such big figures as Sir Paw Tun, Sir Tun Aung Kyaw, ICS U May Aung, Daw Mra Sein (May Aung's daughter), U Aung Zan Wai, U Nyo Tun, and U Ba Saw (Kyauk Pyu) became active at the national level as the AFPFL members. Regionally, Pha-Hsa-Pa-La Shwe Phaw, Daw Kra Zan, U Pyinnya Thiha, and Bo Gri Kra Hla Aung were well known. U Nyo Tun joined the Burmese delegation that negotiated with the Allied Supreme Command for military alliance to oust the Japanese from Burma. He politically supervised the anti-Japanese guerrilla war. U Ba Saw parachuted down as the Allied Secret Agent into Arakan in 1944. The guerrilla commander-in-chief Bo Gri Kra Hla staged offensive guerrilla attacks all over Arakan hand in hand with the Allied Forces. By the end of December 1944 the Japanese were all uprooted from Arakan. The Bama Army led by Bogyoke Aung San entered the scene in March 1945. The 27th of March is now observed and celebrated as the Myanmar Armed Forces Day.

The strong Arakanese presence in AFPFL rendered credibility and strength to the Bama leadership. Their support made AFPFL and Bogyoke Aung San successful in two great endeavours; first, they helped to win recognition by the British government that produced the Provisional Government of Burma, and second, the confidence of the federating Frontier Nations. The 1947 Panglong Agreement between the federating Frontier Nations and Burma would not have been possible in the absence of the Arakanese in AFPFL and Aung San cabinet. Without the Panglong Agreement the British parliament would have delayed Burma's independence; the Union of Burma would not have come into existence either.

The Arakanese in the Government. U Aung Zan Wai was a cabinet minister in Aung San cabinet and survived the 19-July assassination attempt that killed Aung San and other cabinet ministers in 1947. He remained as the cabinet minister in U Nu provisional government, but retired upon independence in 1948. U Ba Saw and Arakanese Muslim leader Sultan Muhmud were in U Nu's cabinet of independent Union

of Burma. U Ba Saw was U Nu's major partner in abolition of millennium old slavery in Burma.

Myanmar slavery known as Phya Kyuan (Slave of Buddha or Pagoda Slave) was introduced by the Myanmar King Anawrahta in 1044. The slaves were also untouchable. In 1956 U Nu officially ended slavery by making it illegal. U Ba Saw, in his capacity of the Minister for the Religious Affairs, executed the abolition process ceremonially. In the ceremony he had a feast, eating with hands in traditional Burmese style at the same table sharing the same dishes with the untouchable slaves in Pagan. About 90% of the untouchable slaves were located in Pagan. These slaves were of Mon, Arakanese, and Thai origin, made captives and slaves by the successive Myanmar kings from 1044 to 1784 through the brutal occupation wars. U Ba Saw brought great pride to the Arakanese people for his radical performance in abolition of the untouchable slavery.

Upon the retirement of U Aung Zan Wai he was replaced with U Nyo Tun in U Nu cabinet. In the days of the Myanmar military government, General New Win made U Nyo Tun the Burmese Ambassador to Australia in 1970. Another Arakanese BIA soldier named U Tha Kyaw was also honoured by Ne Win as the Minister of the Communication and Transport. That ministry was known as the Rakhaing Ministry as U Tha Kyaw filled 60% of his ministry with the Rakhaingthars at Rangoon. In 1989, he became the chairman of National Unity Party, a pro-junta establishment. Interestingly, U Aung Zan Wai, U Nyo Tun and U Tha Kyaw are close relatives. In my generation, Khaing Saw Tun, a nephew of them, became active in politics. He was a member of the Rakhaing network for federation of Burma and democracy since 1962 along with me. As a lawyer and political theoretician he was very popular at the Democratic Alliance of Burma at Maemarlaw during 1988 to 1991. A number of foreign journalists gave good account of him. He was the key political mind behind the establishment of Arakan Army (AA) in 1992. The anti-intellectual AA commander Kra Pru Aung plotted to kill him in Bangladesh. In despair he surrendered to the military junta in 1994, became alcoholic, and died in the same year.

The Troubling Questions. The 50-year rough journey of the independent Union of Burma raises troubling questions again and again. Was it right for the Arakanese to have given full support to the Bama political movement? Was it right to have taken independence jointly with the Bama? Was it right to have followed the Bama leadership with faith and trust?

I shall discuss these questions in the coming communications.

(To be continued).

Copyright © Narinjara News 2004