

# **PAKISTAN AND ITS NEIGHBOUR – BURMA**

**By**

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## PAKISTAN AND ITS NEIGHBOUR—BURMA

Pakistan's Eastern wing lying near the Himalayas, situated in the eastern most region of the sub-continent, is almost in Southeast Asia. Its neighbours to the East are Burma, an important Southeast Asian power with which Pakistan has a border of hundreds of miles, and Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Closely situated is also Malaya, beyond which lies Indonesia. As West Pakistan faces the Middle East, East Pakistan adjoins Southeast Asia. It is not only just the geographic neighbourliness, there is significant cultural influence of Southeast Asia on East Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> What Iran is to West Pakistan, Burma is to East Pakistan. Hence, the importance which Pakistan must attach to its relations with Burma, which unfortunately have not been so intimate as should be desired. In fact, there have been cases of irritation between the two. One of the reasons behind this lack of warmth is Burma's sense of being different from the peoples to its West and the unhappy experiences of the immediate past when in the wake of the British came Indian money-lenders, shopkeepers, businessmen and even labourers in large number who exploited the Burmese. The antipathy towards the Kalas—as the Indians are called by Burmese—is deep and is manifested at all levels on most occasions. For example even U Nu, "the pattern of Buddhist tolerance, permits himself to dislike the Chettyars", as evidenced by his remarks at the 1952 Pyidawtha Conference concerning "the Chettyar with the bloated abdomen named Allagappa".<sup>2</sup> As these exploiting Indians included some Muslims, Pakistanis have inherited the legacy and share the contempt the Burmese have for the Indians.

An additional factor in Burma's lukewarm attitude towards Pakistan in the early days of its independence was its own problem of unity. There seems to exist no evidence to suggest that the demand for Pakistan even indirectly inspired separatist tendencies in Burma, for they were present long before the demand for Pakistan was raised by the Muslim League. However, the Burmese feared that setting of an example in the immediate neighbourhood would encourage their own minorities to make similar demands. As such most Burmese did not favour the demand for the partition of India or the ideology of Pakistan.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ahmed Chagla, "Pakistan—a Crucible of Cultures," *Pakistan Miscellany*, Pakistan Publications, Karachi, 1952, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence*, Oxford University Press, London, 1961, p. 96.

The Karens are linguistically and socially distinct from the Burmese, many of them are Christians and all are conscious of a long history of friction with the Burmese. When they demanded a completely sovereign state of their own and for this purpose staged a revolt against the Burmese Government, the parallel with Pakistan was established in the minds of some Burmese.

Then there was the *Mujahid* movement in Arakan. Even before independence, people of certain regions in the Akyab District expressed their desire to adhere to Pakistan. When the Constituent Assembly of Burma refused to accede to their demand the *Mujahid* campaign was launched. It was alleged that the movement was being supported with arms and money by East Pakistan landlords. Though both the Governments denied the allegation and did not allow the situation there to harm their relations, it nevertheless made its impact. Linked with the developments in Arakan was the tension caused by the presence of Buddhist community in East Pakistan and the reaction of the Muslims towards them in consequence of happenings across the border. On another plane was the Burma-Pakistan boundary, the Naff River. It is a winding creek with half submerged islands and shifting channels, thus ideal for presenting the two countries with endless border problems. The adherence to different foreign policies by the two countries prevented international cooperation between Burma and Pakistan, so essential for the development of an intimate relationship. This factor more than any other is responsible for the retarded development of Pakistan's relations with Burma, for otherwise both the Governments dealt with the situations created by the above mentioned irritants in a dispassionate and friendly way.

Over and above all there was lack of understanding by Pakistan of Southeast Asia as a whole and its importance. As compared to the Middle East, the importance of which, due to the unbroken historical contacts, was realised, by Pakistan and ideas formed about its problems from the very outset, Southeast Asia was generally neglected. Here was an area, surplus in Pakistan's much needed food, lying near Pakistan, an area rich in resources, potentially friendly and historically the scene of Sino-Indian rivalry. In this area, Islam was introduced and spread by the Muslim merchants and seamen from the sub-continent. The Indonesians and Malays are almost solidly Muslims and Burma, Thailand, the Philippines have sizable Muslim minorities. Not only no attention was paid to the freedom struggle going on in Indo-China, very little interest was shown in the aspirations of the Muslim people of Malaya and Indonesia. The situation in Malaya remained

unnoticed, though some interest was shown in Indonesia. The emphasis was put on the fact that both Indonesians and Pakistanis adhered to Islam and not on things which were presently meaningful there, like the common struggle against colonialism. President Soekarno on his first visit to Pakistan in 1950 paid tribute to the comradeship which grew between the Indonesian freedom fighters and the Muslim soldiers of the British Indian army in Indonesia, whose Muslim soldiers refused to fire upon the Indonesians. He thanked Pakistan for the contribution of Muslim volunteers who fought in the Indonesian ranks. Such sentiments were not harnessed properly to create a binding relationship between the two countries. Due to the lack of correct assessment of the forces working in Indonesia and the aspirations of its people, Pakistan thus missed a great opportunity and let India almost totally eclipse it in this most important country in Southeast area. Similarly no attempt was made to stimulate the interest of Muslim minorities in the region. Even the Muslims of sub-continental origin living in countries like Malaya were not attracted to identify themselves with Pakistan.

Many reasons could be adduced for Pakistan's failure in this respect, such as a lack of contact with and knowledge of the area, the fact that it was not homogeneous like the Middle East, and did not consequently have a uniform pattern of problems about which a general attitude could be formulated<sup>1</sup>. Further, all of Southeast Asian countries did not fit in what Keith Callard calls Pakistan's search for blood brothers. Of equal importance, if not more, was the fact that though some of the countries in the region were Muslim they were not the centre of historic Muslim grandeur and power like the Middle Eastern countries, solidarity with which could add to the psychological security of Pakistanis. Also, Pakistan looked at the outside world from Karachi in the west and not from Dacca in East Pakistan<sup>2</sup>. Hence a lesser degree of importance was attached to Southeast Asia than to the Middle East. As the eastern wing gains in stature, more importance would be attached to Pakistan's relations with Southeast Asia in general, and to Burma, an immediate neighbour, in particular. As a matter of fact this trend was discernible after Pakistan's joining SEATO. Since then the happenings in the region have made their impact felt more vigorously on Pakistan. After the coming into power of the Ayub Khan regime, sustained efforts have been made to improve relations with Pakistan's neighbours and to

<sup>1</sup> See K. Sarwar Hasan, *The Strategic Interests of Pakistan*, Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, Karachi, 1954, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> There are signs of giving more importance to East Pakistan in this respect also. Recently the King of Malaya visited East Pakistan before going to the Western wing.

widen the area of friendship in Southeast Asia. For both of these objectives, Pakistan's relations with Burma have achieved a new importance.

Burma situated between two geographical giants, China and India, has an area of 260,000 square miles, and occupies the westernmost and perhaps the most fertile part of the Indo-Chinese peninsula. Like the Himalayan states, it has been influenced throughout its history, by the life and culture of its great neighbours. But immense and difficult mountain barriers have enabled it to evolve distinctive characteristics and develop a strong national consciousness. These mountain barriers were, however, not formidable enough to check population pressure and invasion from the north. Wave after wave of people from China infiltrated into Burma and established themselves all over the country and several times in its history Burma was invaded from that direction. With the result that Burma today is racially so close to China that the word for Chinese in Burmese is "Comrade in Birth".<sup>1</sup> Similarly Chinese cultural impact on Burma is very intimate. The Burmese acknowledge that "we have much that we admire in the Chinese and even our culture to a great extent is Chinese...".<sup>2</sup> Of no lesser importance is India's influence on Burma.

Indian culture was dominant in the ancient period of Hindu expansion overseas and has left its permanent mark on Burmese tradition. However, the persecution of Buddhism in India did much damage to the relations between the two peoples. As a matter of fact the Burmese King Anawrahta, A.D. 1044-77, helped his co-religionists in Ceylon when they "suffered under Hindu persecution".<sup>3</sup>

In the more recent times when Burma was gradually annexed by the British and was administered by them from India, the influence of Indians over Burma increased considerably. Indians not only occupied important positions in the civil service as well as the army, they also gradually became under British protection, masters of Burmese economy. By 1936, the Indian moneylender community, the Chettyars, owned outright or through mortgages, one quarter of Burma's best rice land.<sup>4</sup> Their capital investment in agricultural alone, in 1930, was estimated at Rs. 500 million and roughly Rs. 250 million in urban property and business.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the war, Indians owned about 3 million acres of

<sup>1</sup> & <sup>2</sup> U Myint Thein in his speech in the General Assembly on April 22, 1953, *Kuomintang Aggression Against Burma*, Ministry of Information, Rangoon, cited Russell H. Fifield, *The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia: 1945-1958*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1958, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Ma Mya Sein, *Burma*, Oxford University Press, London, 1944, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> & <sup>5</sup> J. Russel Andrus, *Burmese Economic Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1947, pp. 76, 305 and 306.

paddy land out of around 10 million acres in Lower Burma. Their economic hold on the country could be judged from the fact that at the end of the war 70 per cent of the buildings and 50 per cent of the cinemas in Rangoon were Indian owned.<sup>1</sup> Indians came to control "more than half of Burma's rice export, and were important in the export of some other commodities, as well as being the leading importers of most items. They owned many saw mills, rice mills and miscellaneous but important factories like those manufacturing matches, soap and knit goods."<sup>2</sup> Fortynine per cent of those who paid income tax in Burma were Indians. This economic hold was strengthened by the rapid increase in their numbers. By 1931 there were 1,018,000 Indians in Burma or about 7 per cent of the country's population.<sup>3</sup>

According to the same census, 14 per cent of Burma's male wage earners were Indians. They were assigned one seat in Burma's House of Representatives. Indian stevedores and transport workers organised their own unions. The British colonial regime provided instructions in different Indian languages in Burma's Anglo-vernacular schools. Several Indian cultural missions operated in Burma, partially subsidized by the Indian Government. In general, the British government in India encouraged the spreading of Indian culture and Indian influence in Burma. Growing Burmese nationalist sentiments however kept a check on it.

The Burmese never reconciled themselves to the political union with India which the British brought about for administrative expediency. From the very beginning there was opposition to it and in the late twenties Burmese sentiment became very hostile to India. The decade before the separation of Burma from India which took place in 1937 was marked by violent anti-Indian outbursts. There were several riots against Indians and much damage caused to their property, and violence resulting in hundreds of deaths.

Burmese nationalism which wanted separation from India, like the Muslim nationalism, which later demanded Pakistan, was hardly distinguishable from religion.<sup>4</sup> There was also a similarity of economic motives. Not only the big business, trade and commerce was in the hands of the Indians, almost all

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Thompson & Richard Adloff, *Minority Problems in Southeast Asia*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1955, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Ma Mya Sein, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> John Leroy Christian writes: "Burmese nationalism has found expression in many curious ways. For reasons of religion or nationalism—it is frequently difficult to differentiate between the two—many Burmese objected to pictures of pagodas on new Burma stamps". *Modern Burma*, Institute of Pacific Relations, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1942, p. 235.



Hindus, they also filled the white collar jobs in the administration and in commercial firms. According to a Burmese writer "as education expanded, and Burmans became ready to take their place in the various departments of administration and in commercial firms, they were faced with keen Indian competition. Among the uneducated, there was the same rivalry."<sup>1</sup> The Committee that was set up by the Burma Legislative Council to confer jointly with the Simon Commission in 1929, declared that Burma's political subservience to India had seriously jeopardized its financial and economic interests and even threatened to denationalize it.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of strong pressure from India and use of Indian money to influence the people against separation,<sup>3</sup> Burma was separated. Though the Burmese had on separation declared that "we part as friends", because of the continued Indian economic hold, anti-Indian sentiment did not subside. "An unfortunate personal misunderstanding" between Pandit Nehru and Dr. Ba Maw, during former's visit to Rangoon immediately after separation, further strained the relations.<sup>4</sup>

As the Chinese had no British backing, such as the Indians had, their influence in Burma in modern times was not so significant as that of the Indians. In comparison to other Southeast Asian States, Chinese immigration pressure on Burma always remained light. This was due to the colonial control measures and the relative inaccessibility of Burma from China. In 1951 the Chinese constituted only about 1 per cent of the total population. They were regarded as kinsmen and not as a political or an economic menace. But the possibility of larger immigration was not welcome to the Burmese nationalists.

Burma today is about three-fourths Burman. Excluding the Indians, Chinese and Pakistanis, who are a little over a million, out of the total population of twenty million, the rest of the Burmese are indigenous minorities. These non-Burman Burmese inhabit an elongated horseshoe of hill country, encircling the Irrawaddy and Sittang river valleys. The Shans number about a million and a half. They belong to the Thai-Chinese branch of the Mongolian race and formed the Kingdom of Manchao (modern Yunan) from the eighth to the mid-thirteenth century when they were driven away southwards by Kublai Khan. Escaping from the great Khan they spread in the areas which later became Burma, Siam

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<sup>1</sup> Ma Mya Sein, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> See J. L. Christian, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

and Indo-China. They overthrew Angkor, founded the Kingdom of Siam and conquered most of Burma. Their tide was turned in the sixteenth century in Burma and they were thrown back into the hill country where they remained under the suzerainty of the King of Burma, and later of the British. The Shans in Burma developed a strong social system, based on small principalities, ruled over by hereditary Sawbwas or chiefs. The British established a form of indirect rule over them.

Next to the Shans are the Karens, over a million strong. They are scattered all over Southern Burma. Only about a third of them live in the Karen State which they fought to obtain after independence came to Burma. During British rule, many Karens were converted to Christianity and were favoured by the Government. They showed great loyalty to the British and provided the core of the Burmese fighting forces. They supported the British in the suppression of 1931 rebellion and earned the hostility of the Burmese majority.

There are some 300,000 Kachins, who have lived in northern Burma since the fifteenth century. They are animists and have a social structure based on clans, chieftainships and small villages. There are some 200,000 Chinese living in the hills in the Western Burma. Also there are Mons in the South and Arakanese on the Western coastal strip.

These hill peoples, as the British called the Shans, the Kachins, the Chins, the Karens and other non-Burmese groups living in the highlands surrounding the plains, occupy 47 per cent of the total area of Burma. The highlands came under British control towards the end of the nineteenth century. Before that, only a few of the Shan States had come under the suzerainty of the King of Burma. The British considered them a "special responsibility" and they were placed under the direct care and protection of the Governor. This British approach facilitated their rule over and strengthened their hold on the country. But it deepened the historic animosity between the hill people and the Burmese majority and erupted into a civil war<sup>1</sup> after the withdrawal of the British power.

Pakistan's attitude towards Burma's internal conflict was very sympathetic to the Central Government. Even before independence, when in May 1946, the Arakan Muslims appealed to Mr. Jinnah for help in their desire for separation from the Buddhist Arakanese and Burmans, he discouraged them.<sup>2</sup> After

<sup>1</sup> This description of the challenge to the Central Government's authority has been used by the Commander-in-Chief, Bo Ne Win.

<sup>2</sup> See Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-5.



independence, the Pakistan Government's policy towards this minority problem of Burma remained consistent and the lead given by Mr. Jinnah was followed throughout. However, the complex nature of the problem did not fail to involve Pakistan in difficulties over its relations with Burma.

Though the problem of the Arakanese minority was not different in character from similar problems in other regions of Burma, the isolation of Arakan region from the rest of the country and, since 1947, its common land frontier with the newly created Muslim Pakistan, complicated it. A state of confusion already existed before World War II in Arakan. Japanese occupation and military operations from 1942 to 1945 in the areas further intensified it. The British wartime promise of semi-autonomy to the Muslim district of Arakan, added a new dimension to the problem. Being Muslim by religion and racially closer to East Pakistanis than to Burmese and with past political relations with the Muslim Kingdoms of Bengal whose dominions sometime included Arakan, the Arakanese Muslims had developed a separatist movement in the northern part of the region during the time of British rule in Burma. Due to the fact that movement across the frontier, between Chittagong and Akyab, was easy and cheap, people from Chittagong, mostly Muslims, kept pouring into Akyab. Many came to reap the paddy crop and went back to Chittagong when the harvesting season was over. These seasonal contacts further cemented fraternal relations between the two people. During the war, when Arakanese economy suffered both by the elimination of its trade across the border and due to the vagaries of war, the people realised the importance of the contacts with Chittagong. During the war both the British and the Japanese gave the Arakanese military training and after the surrender of Japan, they came into possession of stocks of arms and ammunition. The number of immigrants from Chittagong is said to have swelled after the war. In 1946 the Northern Arakan Muslim League was formed in Akyab district and a resolution was passed for union with Muslims across the border. This move was not supported by the Indian Muslim League leaders. Later after the birth of Pakistan no support seems to have been given by the Pakistan Government to the so-called *Mujahids* who after their failure to achieve their aspirations through lawful means resorted to unconstitutional methods. The Burmese Ambassador to Pakistan U Pe Khin ridiculed the *Mujahids* for their attempt to give "their nefarious actions high sounding names."<sup>1</sup> But unfortunately the Burmese troops which were sent by the Government to establish law and order themselves indulged in "looting and kidnapping prosperous Arakanese."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> & <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

The situation was further confused by another separatist movement in Arakan—that of the Arakanese Buddhists, and the activities of the Communists in the region. Trouble arose over communal differences between the *Mujahids* and the Arakanese Buddhists. News of the persecution of the Arakanese Muslims filtered into Pakistan and appeared in the Pakistani press. Burmese papers carried similar stories of persecution of Buddhists in the Chittagong district. It was felt in Pakistan that the Arakanese Muslims had lost their sense of confidence and security. Many fled from their homes to East Pakistan. By the middle of January 1950 approximately 30,000 Muslims, mostly Arakanese, had migrated to Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> As the civil war spread to other areas Pakistanis in Burma felt unsafe. Two hundred and twentyfive Pakistanis were repatriated. The Pakistan Embassy in Burma “broadcast appeals to the insurrectionists to treat Pakistanis fairly and to arrange for their escort to places from where they could be repatriated to Pakistan.” The Embassy also brought the matter “to the notice of the Burmese Government and requested them to take steps for the evacuation of Pakistanis from danger zones and for the early restoration of peace in those areas.”<sup>2</sup>

The Indian press fully utilized the opportunity to malign Pakistan and to create tension between Pakistan and Burma. Fictitious reports, like those of sending of Pakistan gunboats to Arakan and adjacent islands, were published. As an example such a moderate paper as *The Statesman* in its issue of December 22, 1948 wrote: “Uniformed Muslim guerillas, carrying the flag of Pakistan have crossed the Naaf River dividing Burma from East Pakistan to plunder Burmese villages and to loot rice”. It also said that “Pakistan’s naval boats are approaching the Arakan waters and are standing off St. Martin Island.” A Muslim League leader who toured the border areas told *Dawn* that like other parts of Burma trouble was also reported from North Arakan but that had nothing to do with East Pakistan. He claimed that no one from the Pakistan side had violated the Burmese territory and accused Indian newspapers of trying to embitter relations between Pakistan and Burma. Similarly the East Pakistan Premier called the Indian reports “unfounded and mischievous”. He also saw in such reports an attempt to embitter relations between the two countries.<sup>3</sup> The Press in Pakistan took serious note of these attempts on the part of the Indian papers. *Dawn* commenting on the above noted reports wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> & <sup>2</sup> Dr. Mahmud Husain, Dy. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, *Debates*, 16th January 1950, Vol. 11, No. 14, p. 535.

<sup>3</sup> *Dawn*, Karachi, December 23, 1948.

"It would seem necessary, in view of this attempt by those who are unfavourably disposed towards the fraternal bonds that exist between Burma and Pakistan, that both countries should devise some manner whereby any future attempts in this direction are promptly countered."<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately both the Governments remained vigilant and did not let the relations between them deteriorate. With the arrest in East Pakistan of the *Mujahid* leader, Kassim, in June 1954, and the diminishing of the movement to insignificance, under the pressure of Burmese Government's military actions, this irritant was removed.<sup>2</sup> Pakistan appealed to the Burmese Government to take back the refugees from Arakan. Chaudhry Hamidul Haq informed the National Assembly in 1956 that a large number of these refugees have now gone back to Arakan and said that "the question of those who are still with us is under discussion." He added: "We have every confidence that the Burma Government would do their utmost to create a sense of confidence and security in the mind of the Arakanese Muslims now living in Arakan".<sup>3</sup>

President Mohammad Ayub Khan while addressing newsmen in Rangoon, during his December 1960 visit to Burma, drew attention to the fact that there was a large number of Muslims in Arakan. During the trouble in this area thousands of them poured into Pakistan. The President said that they had to be admitted on humanitarian grounds.<sup>4</sup> He thus made it clear that Pakistan had no political motive in the matter. It is however, true that a satisfactory solution of the grievances of the Arakanese Muslims<sup>5</sup> would be much appreciated in Pakistan.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, December 27, 1948. Indian press is very quick and apt in trying to malign Pakistan in other countries. A recent example of this is a report published in the *Times of India* giving world reaction and other news on Indonesia's decision to liberate West Irian. *Dawn* had earlier written an editorial supporting Indonesia's stand over the issue. The Indian paper referring to it categorically said that *Dawn* upheld the Dutch position.

<sup>2</sup> There are still some remnants of the movement left. As late as November 1961 Burmese papers reported surrender of *Mujahids* with arms and ammunition. See *The Nation*, Rangoon, November 16, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> *Debates*, 26 March 1956, pp. 93-94.

<sup>4</sup> *Pakistan News Digest*, Karachi, December 15, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> The difficulties the Muslims are facing in Arakan do not seem to have been removed yet. Recently the Arakanese Muslims Organisation strongly objected to the Arakan State Bill submitted to the Government by the Arakan State Preparatory Committee. It claimed that the said Bill had no provision for the fundamental rights of all Arakanese nationals and its implementation would result in establishing domination of the minorities by the majority. According to AMO, the bill also fails to provide for the rights of the Muslims who form the second largest community in Arakan. *The Nation*, Rangoon, November 30, 1961. Similarly some Muslims are demanding proportional representation as a distinct race in the State Council, State Cabinet, State Public Service Commission etc. *Ibid.*, November 29, 1961.

Another aspect of the problem of the Arakanese Muslims that directly involves Pakistan-Burmese relations is the deportation of Muslims to Pakistan which will be dealt with later. As far as the Burmese civil war is concerned, Pakistan adopted correct attitude notably towards the *Mujahid* separatist movement, but also towards uprisings elsewhere in Burma. This attitude was conducive to the return of peace to the country and the re-establishment of the central government's authority. When Burma was in the thick of the civil war in 1949 which in the words of Premier Nu "completely lowered" it "in world estimation", affected its international relations, reduced it to poverty and created conditions which made securing loans very difficult,<sup>1</sup> Pakistan offered its helping hand. At the initiative of Liaquat Ali Khan, Premier Nu visited Pakistan in April 1949. Liaquat Ali Khan told his guest that Pakistan was deeply interested in the early restoration of peace in Burma and that "Burma can count on the goodwill, sympathy and support of Pakistan."<sup>2</sup> The Pakistan press fully endorsed its Government's approach. *Dawn* commented: "Pakistan has nothing but goodwill for Burma and in Burma's present difficulties . . . Pakistan has every sympathy for her and will not hesitate to help her to the utmost extent possible. Pakistan, being a close neighbour to Burma, is interested in the stability and well being of the Burmese Republic."<sup>3</sup> U Nu was very happy over the welcome extended to him and with the understanding he reached with the Pakistani leaders. He said: "I brought from Burma an immense fund of goodwill of my people for the people of Pakistan, and I am happy to say that I shall carry back with me unmistakable tokens of the desire of Pakistan to strengthen and to preserve the bonds of friendship and cooperation which already unite our two countries." He added: "I can assure you that when Pakistan needs, Burma will not be found wanting." Appreciating Pakistan's friendship for his country at a very critical time, he said: "Burma is passing through a difficult period, and it is so comforting to know that in Pakistan it has an understanding and a sympathetic friend."<sup>4</sup>

It may be noted that the Burmese leader visited Pakistan just before the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. He disclosed that he had made certain suggestions to Liaquat Ali Khan to be informally conveyed to the members of the British Cabinet. He stated that though Burma was no more a member of the Commonwealth but she would continue to work in close cooperation

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<sup>1</sup> *Dawn*, Karachi, 28 February, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 April, 1949.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 April, 1949.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 April, 1949.

with it and other democratic countries in economic and defence matters.<sup>1</sup> On his way to Karachi, he had already met Pandit Nehru in India. As such his statement at Karachi shows that in the period before Pakistan joined western defence arrangements, Burma had no exclusive association with India, as it later came to have, and leaned equally on Pakistan.

Pakistan, jealous of its own sovereignty, gave sterling support to the Burmese Government in its efforts for the integration of the country, which was for it a matter of prime importance. An outstanding example of this support was Pakistan's refusal to attend the Conference convened by India's Nehru in February 1948, to discuss the situation in Burma. Britain, Ceylon and Australia participated with India in the talks. India's Foreign Office expected to send a Commonwealth conciliation mission to mediate between the Burmese Government and the Karens. The Pakistan Government held that an attempt to settle the internal affairs of Burma without the consent and cooperation of the Government of that country was not only inconsistent with friendly relations, but also with the international propriety. It was thought in Pakistan that the answer to the Burmese situation was "first to strengthen the regime in Burma to enable it to overcome its immediate danger, and then to persuade it to offer reasonable terms to some of those who have been giving them trouble."<sup>2</sup> Pakistan's view about the Delhi talks on Burma was thus characterized by respect for Burmese national feelings. U Nu himself disclosed that the Indian move was not liked in Burma, and he appreciated the realism shown by the Pakistan Government in this respect.<sup>3</sup>

Pakistan's stand was a bold one in view of the fact that the repercussions of the Burmese situation could have been grave for East Pakistan. While the prevalent trend in Britain and some Commonwealth countries could not but have encouraged the insurgents to think that they rather than the Central Government had the greater support outside the country, Pakistan kept on giving full support to the U Nu Government.

In pursuance of this policy, Pakistan impressed upon Britain to change its attitude of indifference towards Burma. Burma was in need of foreign assistance to finance its rice exports. A Commonwealth loan of £ 6,000,000 was agreed to, Pakistan's share being £ 500,000. When U Nu visited Pakistan, he had asked

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 April, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 March, 1949.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 April, 1949.



for "some help" in respect of arms and ammunition.<sup>1</sup> It is safe to assume that his request was granted. In respect of rice purchases also, the export of which is so essential for the Burmese economy, Pakistan did not put up a stiff front as was done by some other countries, and tried to accommodate Burma as much as it could. Pakistan imported a major portion of its eastern wing's deficit of 60,000 tons from Burma. In short, Pakistan demonstrated the utmost goodwill towards Burma and its government and pursued policies worthy of a trusted and sympathetic neighbour, when Burma was involved in a struggle for survival. In return Pakistan earned Burma's deep gratitude. U Tin Tut, the late Foreign Minister of Burma, who visited Pakistan in March 1948, had said in a farewell message: "In Burma Pakistan has a near neighbour and a close friend, watching her progress with brotherly sympathy, ready to render such assistance as may be needed to her and secure in the knowledge that she herself will receive such aid as is needed from Pakistan".<sup>2</sup> The policy which Pakistan pursued in the following years towards Burma proved that Burmese expectations were well grounded. A Treaty of Friendship between Pakistan and Burma was signed. The very first article of the treaty of 25th June, 1952 obligated the two states to recognise and respect the independence of each other. Its second article says that the two states shall maintain "perpetual peace and foster friendly relations between the two countries and their peoples." The two Governments significantly agree that their representatives shall occasionally meet as the need be "to exchange views on matters of interest to the two countries" and for considering ways of cooperation. Problems arising out of their close proximity, such as immigration, repatriation, dual nationality, extradition of criminals, cultural relations, trade, communications, civil aviation, customs, consular service etc., are to be negotiated for the conclusion of agreements.<sup>3</sup> The treaty as such is a fine example of good neighbourly relations. In May 1953, the Government of Pakistan sent at the request of the Burmese Government a team of financial experts to study and advise on financial matters.

Pakistan-Burma solidarity manifested itself in the United Nations when Burma complained of aggression against it by the Government of Chiang Kai-shek. The Pakistan delegate, A.S. Bokhari, demanded a "condemnation" of the Chinese action and an official pronouncement of the General Assembly against what was being done by Chinese soldiers in the Burmese territory. He called

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 April, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 March, 1948.

<sup>3</sup> *Treaty Series*, 1952, Government of Pakistan Press, Karachi, 1956, pp. 48-49.



the national Chinese action "a flagrant infringement of international law" and "dangerous to peace".<sup>1</sup> In pursuance of Pakistan's policy to help in the emergence of a united and stable Burma, he drew the attention of the members to the fact that the Chinese soldiers had often joined hands with the Burmese rebels against the government, a factor "the danger of which could not be underestimated."<sup>2</sup>

However, as has been stated, the relations between the two countries lacked much to be desired, due to reasons that have been mentioned. They were to cool down further after Pakistan's joining the military pacts. But in comparison with India-Burma relations, Pakistan's relations with Burma were on a sounder footing. The irritants between Pakistan and Burma were not so disquieting as those in Indo-Burmese relations, however, deceptive their appearance might be. Several under-currents of ill-feeling existed between India and Burma. There was the problem of Indians in Burma, difficulties in rice trade, Indian suspicion that Burma was in favour of a Nagaland under its auspices and the revival in some Burmese quarters of the fear of Indian expansion.<sup>3</sup> The Delhi Conference on the situation in Burma was taken by the Burmese as an interference in the internal affairs of their country. U Nu himself accused the Indian Communists of starting the Communist revolt in Burma, and Nehru's refusal to commit his country to give Burma some military assurance in the face of the threat from the KMT forces in 1953, caused much disappointment in Burma.

A change between the relations of Pakistan and Burma took place on Pakistan's joining the military pacts. In 1954 relations between Burma and Communist China were improving considerably and those with the Soviet Union were being placed on a new footing. Chou En-lai visited Rangoon in June 1954, and U Nu made an official visit to China in December that year. During Chou's visit Burma and China agreed to follow the five principles of co-existence. Exchanges of Burmese and Russian delegations also became frequent from 1954. The Burmese delegation that visited Russia in December that year laid the foundation of the three-year trade agreement that was concluded on July 1, 1955, for the exchange chiefly of Burmese rice and agricultural products for Russian industrial goods. As against this Burma terminated the American aid programme on March 17, 1953. Pakistan gradually got more

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<sup>1</sup> & <sup>2</sup> GAOR, 609th Meeting, April 21, 1953, p. 672.

<sup>3</sup> See Werner Levi, *Free India in Asia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1952, pp. 38-40 and the remarks of a Burmese delegate at the Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in 1947 quoted therein: "It was terrible to be ruled by a Western power, but it was even more so to be ruled by an Asian power".

and more involved with the West, and Burma gradually became firmly entrenched in neutralism. As the region was sharply divided between neutralists and western allies, Pakistan and Burma found themselves in different camps. Past relations of near cordiality could not keep up their warmth and they cooled off. Had it not been for the realities of the situation in the region, the graph would have gone much lower than it actually did. Though Burma remained neutral it did not show towards SEATO naked hostility of the Delhi and Djakarta type. It was expected in certain quarters that Rangoon would join the pact. Its architect the late Mr. Dulles, visited U Nu after attending the first meeting of the Council established by the South East Asia Collective Defence Treaty held in Bangkok in 1955. Though Burma did not join the SEATO Pact, U Nu in an address on Pakistan Day in 1955 observed that the two neighbours must continue their efforts to serve the cause of peace. "In serving thus it might happen that our methods differ although our goal is the same and we fully recognize the right of all countries to adopt their own methods which they consider best."<sup>1</sup> This stand was in sharp contrast to that of Mr. Nehru, who held that Pakistan, by joining SEATO, had threatened the peace of the region. It was a reminder to the rulers in New Delhi that though Burma might be pursuing a policy similar to that of India it was by no means a camp follower of India and that it stood for the freedom of its own action and that of smaller countries in the region. It is in view of geo-political realities that Pakistanis look upon Burma and Ceylon, though following policies different from their's, "as allies, being potentially in the same position as Pakistan is in relation to the great neighbour India, which is suspected of nursing a growing imperialism against her neighbours."<sup>2</sup> However, in spite of the growing realisation in Pakistan of the need for forging some kind of comradeship with South Asian countries, other than India, and of the significance of the relationship with neighbours like Burma a new policy with regard to them failed to materialize. This was due to Pakistan's having lost the initiative in Afro-Asian affairs because it had linked itself up with the Western group of powers. Pakistan's efforts after joining the military pacts were confined to minimizing the impact of irritants between it and Burma. Official visits were exchanged at different levels. One such visit was Prime Minister Huseyn Suhrawardy's, in October 1956. That year an agreement called the Rangoon Agreement was signed by the two Governments for periodic

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\* 1 *Burma Weekly Bulletin New Services*, Vol. 4, August 18, 1955, p. 147.

2 I. H. Qureshi, *The Pakistani Way of Life*, William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1957, p. 72.

meetings between their officials to inquire into and settle border incidents. A trade agreement between the two countries was signed in February 1957.

On coming to power in October 1958 President Ayub Khan committed his Government to improving relations with its neighbours. He sent his Foreign Minister to Rangoon in April 1959 where talks were held with the Burmese leaders in a very cordial atmosphere. On the invitation of his Government, the Burmese Prime Minister General Ne Win paid a two-day visit to Pakistan from 6 to 8 October 1959. President Ayub Khan and General Ne Win held informal discussions on matters of interest to the two countries in a very friendly atmosphere. The communique issued at the end of the visit said that the two leaders had agreed to set up a high powered commission to inquire into the border situation between the two countries and to work out ways and means of solving problems of interest to the two countries in a spirit of friendly, co-operative and good neighbourly relations.

The only irritant between Pakistan and Burma is the situation created by the border between the two countries. One aspect of it is related to the boundary itself and the other is the result of the cross migration of people in Chittagong and Arakan. The boundary between the two countries is the Naaf river which has numerous half-submerged islands and shifting channels. An attempt to survey the course of the river and to determine an agreed frontier line was made in 1953. But the frequent changes in the course of the river occasions numerous potential disputes. A minor border dispute was under negotiation in 1960.

The historical background of the movement of population between Chittagong and Arakan goes back to some eight hundred years. There were frequent changes in the loyalty of these areas. For centuries there was a tripartite struggle among the rulers of Bengal, Tripura and Arakan for the possession of Chittagong. To ward off this threat, several times the Kings of Bengal captured Arakan and on many occasions the rulers of Arakan made incursions into Chittagong. This resulted in the creation of a Muslim population in Burma and a small population of Burmese stock in Chittagong. With the conquest of Arakan by the Burmese King at the end of 18th century, Arakanese fled in large number to Bengal. When in 1826 the British conquered Arakan from the Burmese King many returned to their homes. Their stay in Bengal brought many social changes in their religion. A good number embraced Islam. Thus the number of the Muslims swelled in Arakan. An offshoot of this was the *Mujahid* problem, which has already been discussed. Of direct concern to Pakistan was the large scale deportation of Arakanese to East Pakistan which started in early 1959.

Under the influence of extreme anti-Muslim organisations in the area, the local authorities started the operation which was supposed to be primarily directed against persons who had illegally entered Burma but unfortunately took in its purview more the innocent ones than the guilty. In March 1959 there was concluded an agreement between Burma and Pakistan to the effect that only those persons should be deported whose status as Pakistanis had been confirmed by Pakistani authorities. It did not work well.

In pursuance of the decision between President Ayub Khan and General Ne Win in October 1959, a joint High Powered Commission met in Rangoon from 5th to 9th May 1960. Agreement was reached on a number of important points for maintaining harmony on the border and on measures for preventing occurrence of further incidents. President Ayub Khan's purpose was not just to try to remove the irritants between his country and Burma. He wanted to give a new orientation to Pakistan's relations with other countries, an orientation based on Pakistan's geographic situation and its national interest. During his visit to Burma in 1960, the President said: "Pakistan wanted to develop friendship with Burma and other Southeast Asian countries in the same way as it did with Middle Eastern nations."<sup>1</sup> He invited U Nu to Pakistan. This visit was scheduled for a week from November 7 to 14, 1961. Due to Buddhist-Muslim communal disturbances, over the construction of some mosques in Burma, U Nu's visit was postponed. Instead Burma's Foreign Minister came in December and held talks on subjects of mutual interest, including the demarcation of the Pakistan-Burma boundary on the Naaf River. This frequent exchange of visits of the leaders of the two countries indicates the growth in the relations between the two countries.

Trade relations have also developed in the recent past. In 1957-58 Pakistan's total exports to Burma amounted to Rs. 22,725,000, in 1958-59 to Rs. 18,030,000, in 1959-60 to Rs. 91,465,000, and in 1960-61 to Rs. 68,014,000. Total imports from Burma were worth Rs. 41 million in 1958-59, Rs. 31 million in 1959-60 and Rs. 109 million in 1960-61.<sup>2</sup> Rice was the biggest item of import. Pakistan was one of the four leading buyers of Burmese rice in 1960-61. Trade delegations have frequently been exchanged between the two countries recently. A trade delegation under the leadership of Burma's Parliamentary Secretary of Trade and Supply, U Hla Gyaw, visited Pakistan in September 1960. A ministerial level delegation led by Mr. Hafizur Rehman, Pakistan Minister of Commerce

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<sup>1</sup> *Pakistan News Digest*, December, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> Press Release, Government of Pakistan, December 19, 1961.

went to Burma in May 1961 to explore possibilities of further expansion of trade between the two countries. A Burmese trade delegation again visited Pakistan in December 1961 and agreed to meet the major portion of East Pakistan's rice demand. It may be pointed out here that the export of rice has an important place in Burmese diplomacy. During 1960-61 Pakistan imported more rice from Burma than did India.

Another indication of closer relationship between Pakistan and Burma is the provision of facilities to Burmese students for higher studies under the Cultural Scholarship Scheme and to Burmese Army personnel for training in military institutions in Pakistan.

Though an internal matter but one having a bearing on Pakistan's relationship with Burma, is the growing interest shown in the Buddhists in East Pakistan. Apart from the deliberate efforts of the two countries to have better relations with each other as neighbours, other forces are working to bring them closer together. It seems that both Pakistan and Burma are becoming region conscious. Both are carefully watching the developments taking place around them. The emergence of two big powers in their immediate neighbourhood, India and China, and their mutual relationship, are being viewed with concern. There is a tendency amongst the smaller powers in the region to come closer to each other. An attempt seems to be in process to ward off any threat of erosion of the independence of the smaller countries by the said big powers. An example of this is the attempt of both Burma and Pakistan to develop their relations with Nepal. Burma has the closest of ties with Nepal of any state in Southeast Asia. U Nu's recent remarks, while on a visit to the Himalayan kingdom, against interference by one country in the affairs of other countries were obviously directed against India. The timing of his visit was also a reminder to India to keep its hands off and an indication that not only China but other neighbouring states would also oppose Indian moves against Nepal. U Nu visited Nepal when Indian pressure on that country was mounting.

The appearance of a sort of warm relationship between Burma and India could only be maintained because of personal understanding between U Nu and Nehru. The future leaders of the two countries may not have the same understanding because of the fact that they would not have the feeling of comradeship as a result of their fight against British colonialism which U Nu and Nehru have. Then the problems which exist between India and Burma, and they are quite serious in nature, would present themselves with a new character. Already with the new posture of China vis-a-vis India and vice versa,



the old relationship between the Indian and Burmese leaders is changing. Burma's attitude towards its border with China is qualitatively different from that of India. In this respect Burma, Nepal and Pakistan seem to have a common approach.

Pakistan's dispute with India over Kashmir has found sympathetic understanding in Burma. U Nu himself tried to help Pakistan and India solve it but met with no success. India's recent military action against the Portuguese enclave of Goa, Daman, and Diu was not met with the kind of universal applause it might have, for whatever its character, it was action taken against an imperial and colonial power. Hidden in the hesitation to applaud it wholeheartedly was the aggressive Indian posture which could not but be looked upon with fear. Had there been only India as a big power in the region, some of the smaller ones around it would perhaps have succumbed before its growing strength. Ironical though it may sound to the West, China's emergence on the Himalayas, has given a new lease to the independent existence of the smaller states in the region. The logical outcome of this seems to be the evolution of an *entente cordiale* amongst them. The developments in the recent past of relations between Pakistan and other states in the region, suggest that such could be the case.

Hafeez-ur-Rahman Khan

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