

## Appendix A: Muslim Population Growth and Migration from Bangladesh into Rakhine State: What Do We Know?

### Background

The violence in Rakhine state has led to many remarks about the uncontrolled migration of Bangladeshi migrants into Rakhine. As many of those who were actually born in Rakhine often cannot prove it, some argue that any person who is Muslim and appears to be South Asian must be a migrant and should be expelled. In addition to migration, the rate of births of the Muslim families are said to be higher than the Buddhist and there is fear expressed that the proportion of Islamic people will increase and make the Buddhists a minority in their own country. Given the poor state of population registration, it is not easy to discuss these issues with reliable data. This research note uses historical and official data to investigate the proportion of the Rakhine and Muslim population since the 1953 Census.

### Demographic Data

The 1953/54 Census was partial due to security issues in various parts of Burma. Based on the complete urban enumeration and partial rural sampling, the nation's population in 1955 was projected to be 20.4 million. The proportion of urban population is not given, but was independently estimated at 19% in 1960 by a World Bank source. The 1953/54 Census found 8% of urban national population was Muslim and 3% of rural, for a weighted average of 4% for the whole country. The Arakan population had 52% of the national rural Muslim population and 10% of the urban Muslim population. Using the 1955 population, there would have been 805 thousand Muslims in all of Burma, 310 thousand in urban and 495 thousand in rural areas. In the Arakan (now Rakhine) state, there would have been 31 thousand urban Muslims and 257 thousand rural Muslims for a total of 288 thousand Muslims out of a total state population of 1.4 million or 20.6% Muslim to total population in the state.<sup>25</sup> After 1962, Buddhists but not Muslims in Rakhine were allowed to migrate to other parts of Burma, which may have raised the Muslim share of the total population since then.

The population of the state, which was renamed Rakhine, was listed at 1.71 million in the 1973 Census and 2.05 million in the 1983 Census. The 2011 Statistical Yearbook puts 2010 Rakhine state population at 3.3 million. The table below shows the state and total national population in millions over time:

Year	Population in Millions			
	Rakhine	Burma/Myanmar	Rakhine/National	Muslim/National
1955	1.40	20.4	6.86%	3.95%
1973	1.71	28.9	5.92%	
1983	2.05	34.1	6.01%	3.9%
2010	3.30	50.4	6.55%	

Sources: Statistical Year Books from 1967, 1997 and 2011. The national Muslim proportion was also 4% in 1931.

<sup>25</sup> The 1967 Statistical Year Book provides an estimate of 1.56 million for 1961 Arakan population. This is adjusted to 1955 by taking the ratio of national 1955 to national 1961 population, or .895 to get 1.4 million in 1955.

The official data show a slightly **lower** population growth rate in Rakhine compared to all of Myanmar for the 1955-2010 period. If the population of Rakhine had grown at the national rate from 1955, the 2010 population would be 3.46 million instead of 3.3 million. Unless there is a severe underestimation of the Rakhine population, it does not appear that the population changes are large enough to shift relative population shares much. This also shows up in the national Muslim population share which was no higher in 1983 than in 1953 – more recent and reliable data are not available.<sup>26</sup> Note that this data is completely inconsistent with widely circulated fears that the rapidly growing Muslim share of population is threatening Myanmar's Buddhists.

The migration issue is implicitly downgraded by the slower growing population of Rakhine compared to the national population growth. However, in addition, there are official data on movements between Burma and India/Pakistan in the official data. From 1950 to 1969, the net recorded movement was an **outflow** of 152.5 thousand people with the biggest exodus in 1964-66 when more than 117 thousand people left. There are no recorded movements from 1970 onwards. The number of Pakistani (which would include Bangladeshi) foreigners in all of Myanmar was listed as 28,334 in 1960 and the number fell steadily to under five thousand by 1993.<sup>27</sup> Thus the official data tell a story of net outflows and dwindling numbers of "Pakistani" foreigners. This supports the recorded slightly slower rate of growth of Rakhine's population than of Myanmar's.

### Comparative Economic Statistics

The IMF has estimated 2011 PPP GDP per capita at \$2039 for Bangladesh and \$1405 for Myanmar.<sup>28</sup> This would suggest an average Bangladeshi would take a 30% income reduction by moving to Myanmar and getting an average Myanmar income. However, the 2010 Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey found the poverty rate in Rakhine to be 38%, well above the national poverty rate of all of Myanmar which was estimated at 32%. The landless rate in Rakhine was 31.5%, among the highest in the nation. This suggests there is not "surplus" land on which to settle. It is hard to imagine why many Bangladeshi Muslims would want to move to a poor region of a poorer country where they would be an unwelcome minority with few rights. In addition, Rakhine Moslems have no right to move to other parts of Myanmar. Indeed the Rakhine in that same survey had a moderate child malnutrition rate of 60.5% and an additional 26.8% were severely malnourished, the highest state or division in all of Myanmar. This gives a total malnutrition rate of an incredible 87%. The latest recorded national malnutrition (moderate + severe) rate for Bangladesh was 41.3%, less than half of the combined Rakhine rates. It is hard to imagine migrants seeking worse conditions for themselves and their children. The national under-five mortality rate in 2011 was 46/1000 in Bangladesh and 62/1000 in Myanmar. Since malnourished

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<sup>26</sup> One estimate in Wikipedia put all Rohingya in Myanmar at 800,000 in 2012, but not all of these would be in Rakhine. If 90% of these were in Rakhine, the ratio of Rohingya to total population would be 21%, similar to the 1955 ratio.

<sup>27</sup> *Statistics on the Burmese Economy: The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Saito and Kiong, p. 15

<sup>28</sup> PPP stands for "Purchasing Power Parity" and it is a way to adjust non-traded (services) prices so that comparable international comparisons of income per capita can be made. The 1999 PPP GDP per capita for Bangladesh was \$1530 per capita, above the 2011 estimate for Myanmar and also in dollars then of greater value. No estimate is available for PPP GDP per capita of Myanmar in 1999, but it is likely to be lower because of dollar inflation after 1999 and any per capita growth.

children are more likely to die, the child mortality rate in Rakhine is almost certainly well above the national average.

For those who doubt these data (and the 2010 Integrated Household Survey has been criticized as being more favorable than conditions merit – suggesting the differences could be worse than described above!), the amount of electricity per capita is perhaps one of the most reliable sources available. In 2010, Bangladesh had 279 kilowatt-hours per capita, more than double Myanmar's 131. This suggests a large gap in living standards, more even than the GDP per capita data do. Rakhine had only 23% of (mostly urban) households with electricity, below the Myanmar average. Another item – the quality of flooring – showed Rakhine had 95% of homes with less desirable flooring (earth, wood planks or palm/bamboo), compared to 83% for all of Myanmar. Here again, Rakhine shows itself to be well below the national average. For safe drinking water, Rakhine had only 41% of homes with access compared to 62% for all Myanmar and 81% for all of Bangladesh.<sup>29</sup> In summary, there appears to be no compelling reason for most people living in Bangladesh to want to move into Myanmar. The fact that millions have left Myanmar to work elsewhere underlines this fact that people tend to leave poor countries, not seek to enter them. The claims that there are large inflows of migrants from Bangladesh appear to lack both motive and any indications of their logical impact.

### Accuracy of Official Data and the Next Census

It is well known that due to political and practical difficulties and various pressures, the data published in Myanmar are not always reliable. The question for those fearing migration from Bangladesh and high Muslim birth rates is if there are really only about 4% of Muslims in the population, unchanged from 1931, or if the real proportion is higher. The best way to be certain would be to conduct an accurate census – and indeed one is scheduled in the near future. If the proportion is similar to what it has been, there would appear to be no factual basis for fears of a Muslim “population explosion” in Myanmar, whether from migration, naturally larger families or conversions. In that case a rational reaction would be to reduce the anti-Muslim rhetoric and propaganda and revert to harmonious living with the small minorities who are not Buddhist.

However, even if the Muslim proportion of total population turned out to be somewhat larger than last measured, the most effective way to prevent further escalation in the share of Muslims from high birth rates is to ensure that they too receive equal education, access to health care and voluntary family planning and economic opportunity. Under such conditions, birth rates tend to drop – the fertility rate in mainly Muslim nations such as Bangladesh dropped from 4.5 in 1990 to 2.2 in 2010 and in Indonesia it dropped from 3.1 in 1990 to 2.1 in 2010. This is very close to Myanmar's 2.0 in 2010 – a rate that may be

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<sup>29</sup> Bangladesh data are from Table 3 of the World Bank's [2013 World Development Indicators](#). Rakhine data are from the 2010 Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey. Note that Rakhine's access to clean water is half of the national average for Bangladesh.

depressed due to the migration of millions of younger workers. (Myanmar's 1990 fertility rate was 3.4 children per woman – its rate declined less in absolute terms than that of Bangladesh.)<sup>30</sup>

The share of Muslims in Rakhine will also be measured in the new Census. Since Rakhine has not had a strong economy, Buddhists who have been able to leave often did so, while Muslims had to remain in the state unless they were forced out. This might have resulted in the Muslim population share in the state rising. If this is so, the “solution” is to improve economic conditions in the state so that Buddhist workers return and young Myanmar workers not originally from the state also come. If export processing zones, better infrastructure and raw materials processing were combined, the economic future of Rakhine would be much brighter. Likewise, treating Rakhine Muslims as others would allow them to migrate elsewhere in Myanmar if they wanted to. This would lead to a peaceful balancing of minority population throughout Myanmar. A “rising tide lifting all boats” should be the goal, not attempts to have one group benefit at the expense of the other. Past experience shows that cooperation among different groups is easier if there is brisk growth in which all can participate.

### Other Factors

The recent and ongoing explosion of national anti-Muslim violence is hard for some to understand, although the tensions in the Rakhine go further back. The leader of the anti-Muslim “969” movement had been jailed but now is seen leading many rallies. Often police or army officers seem reluctant to get involved in preventing or controlling violence, even when they are nearby in adequate numbers. Some have speculated that the anti-Muslim violence is being encouraged by those who would stand to benefit from a weakened government more reliant on the security forces. The probability that this violence is being organized and is not merely spontaneous is high.<sup>31</sup>

Yet the larger environment is also important. The lack of progress in many areas such as preventing blackouts and attracting labor-intensive investment creates a sour temperament so that appeals to narrow sectarianism are more effective. Without broad and rapid economic progress, it will be hard to get agreement on many ethnic and religious issues and this would sustain ethnic and religious conflict. The prospect of Myanmar being squeezed between Al Qaeda<sup>32</sup> and China is not one that is likely to foster progress. If a way to calm tempers, work together and share revenues from raw materials is not found, the outlook is for more violence between the largely Burman military and ethnic groups as well between extremist Buddhist groups and minorities such as Muslims. This will depress investment, political development and wider diplomatic acceptance. The current trajectory is one that will benefit very few and have high costs.

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<sup>30</sup> The recently proposed policy of limiting Muslim families to two children but not limiting others is directly opposite the Chinese one-child policy which allowed a more liberal policy for minorities. The Myanmar policy seems to feed off popular but unsubstantiated conceptions of a population explosion among Muslim families.

<sup>31</sup> See [The Buddhist war on Myanmar's Muslims](#), Jason Szep, April 8, 2013

<sup>32</sup> Muslim extremists tend to use maltreatment of co-religionists as a rallying cry and then step up recruiting and terrorist efforts in those places where persecution is seen. The trouble with this kind of terrorist threat is that it often strikes “soft” targets such as tourist spots or religious buildings rather than “hard” targets such as police or military bases. This makes it very hard to suppress.