

# British bring in large numbers of Bengali from neighbouring country

NAY PYI TAW, 29 April—*The Rakhine State Conflicts Investigation Commission released its report. The executive summary of the report is as follows:-*

## Executive Summary

Rakhine State, situated in the western part of Myanmar, comprises 4 districts, 17 townships and 3 sub-townships. The Rakhine people and related indigenous ethnic groups (“*Taing-Yin-Tha*”)<sup>1</sup> such as the Rakhine, Thet, Daing-Net, Mro, Khamee, Kaman and Mramargyi peoples. Apart from these, Bengali

peoples<sup>2</sup> also live in Rakhine State. The total population is over 3.3 million and the State’s population density is 235 persons per square mile (90.78 per square kilometre).

The British colonial forces took over Rakhine State in the earlier part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, subsequently expanding the land under cultivation. The British

brought in large numbers of Bengali from the neighbouring country as seasonal workers. From then on, Myanmar saw increasing numbers of Bengali settlers. The Bengalis had high population growth rates, gradually making them become today’s second largest population group in Rakhine State. The high

population growth has contributed to the tensions between the different groups that were caused primarily by the struggle for control of socio-economic assets and other resources.

The conflict and tension between the Rakhine people and the Bengali people go a long way back. Major differences between the two

groups in religion, traditional practices, culture and social norms meant that each group did not easily accept the other. Relations between the two groups have seen attacks and killings, heightened feelings about racial identity, desire for political control, accusations and counter-accusations. The bitterness and tensions have passed

down from one generation to the next. Amongst the many episodes of violence, the sectarian violence that erupted in June and October of 2012 was particularly prominent.

The 2012 sectarian conflicts led to the 192 deaths, 265 injured, and the destruction of 8,614 houses,

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turning an estimated 100,000 into internally displaced people (IDPs). The violence has affected not only the livelihoods and food security of these communities, but has also affected businesses throughout Rakhine State. Attacks and counter-attacks, killings and counter killings erupted between the Rakhines and Bengalis, leading to heightened fears, lack of physical security and the inability of communities to meet their basic essential needs. In particular, the violence has affected vulnerable groups such as women and children both physically and psychologically. The result was a breakdown in communication between the two sides. The earlier hatred and bitterness between the two sides—which had been created because of certain historical events—provided fertile ground for renewed tensions, mistrust and violence. Therefore, to address the root causes and problems, the Commission recommends the following:

- Agencies responsible for security should heighten cooperation and collaboration with one another.
- The number of security forces in Rakhine should not be withdrawn or reduced in any significant numbers.
- Border security must be increased. A skilled force especially trained and prepared in preventing and resolving conflicts needs to be put in place as a preventive measure. Such a force must be trained and equipped with modern and appropriate means of conflict resolution. A bomb squad also

needs to be established to guard against actions by extremist groups.

- In the event that intervention by the *Tatmadaw* (Armed Forces) is needed to prevent or stop sectarian violence, those forces must be adequately equipped with weapons for conflict resolution.
- The security forces to prevent the violence must be fully prepared and able to access all areas rapidly. To this end, they should be equipped with modern telecommunications systems, all-weather vehicles, speedboats and other suitable transport.
- The role of the Navy needs to be expanded and strengthened. To this end, coastal radar stations and patrol aircraft should be established. Close circuit television cameras and man-made barriers are needed for 24-hour surveillance along the border.
- To work closely with the Navy, a marine or coastal patrol force should be established and equipped with assault boats, in order to ensure effective patrolling of the Rakhine Coast.
- A Special Team comprising a civil-military mix needs to be established and made responsible for gathering intelligence on extremist organizations and violent groups.
- As a matter of priority, the organization of Immigration service personnel (*La-Wa-Ka*) in Rakhine State must be strengthened.
- The Border Immigration Headquarters personnel (BIHQ or *Na-Sa-Ka*) in Rakhine State has issued certain administrative orders pertaining to control of the territory. Such control must be continued.
- The authorities should

ensure that Rakhine State has an excellent transportation network.

- Bangladesh has scheduled general elections in December 2013. Spillover effects—such as unrest and infiltration by extremist groups—may affect the border regions in Rakhine State. Accordingly, security and other necessary arrangements should be made well in advance.
- The authorities need to set up systems for conflict resolution, for analysis and implementation of Myanmar laws and regulations, and for prevention of illegal immigration.
- The communities on both sides need to be educated on the relevant laws, regulations and policies and on the nature of sanctions for those who break the law. Rakhine State's civil service needs to be strengthened, in particular, the Office of General Administration and the Department of Religious Affairs.
- The authorities need to ensure that those who break the law are tried and punished swiftly following due process, without discrimination between different groups, who should all be equal before the law.
- All who live in Myanmar, including civil servants, are subject to the country's laws, regulations and legal procedures and should follow these rigorously. Those who break the law or act outside the procedures and regulations should be prosecuted according to the law.

The Government and various organizations are now implementing emergency relief and recovery/rehabilitation programmes that provide food, shelter, health and education services, and livelihood opportunities. Although there have been

some modest achievements, the response still has many gaps. An estimated 15% of food needs are still unmet. Some 90% of needs are unmet in the construction and provision of shelter. The need for shelter is all the more urgent because of the imminent arrival of the rainy season. Basic and preventive health measures need to be improved and expanded. In the education sector, teachers are urgently needed, as are other measures to reopen schools and provide a safe learning environment for children. To address the above problems, the Commission recommends the following measures as urgent priorities:

- The authorities need to assess and address child malnutrition in Rakhine State.
- Livelihood opportunities for families need to be urgently created and expanded.
- Before the arrival of the monsoon seasons, the IDPs who are in inadequate temporary shelters must be moved into more secure buildings, and the overcrowding in IDP camps must be reduced.
- The authorities need to ensure safe water and adequate numbers of sanitation facilities in IDP camps and amongst the IDP population.
- The frustration, trauma and anxiety experienced by communities need to be addressed, including through psychosocial support and counselling.
- Concrete measures must be undertaken to reopen schools and to ensure that children are able to go to school.
- Civic education needs to be implemented to counter extremist teachings, especially in religious schools for the Muslim communities in Rakhine State. As well, Muslim communities must be able

to function in the Myanmar language; to this end literacy courses<sup>3</sup> need to be implemented amongst these communities.

- A local FM radio station broadcasting in local languages should be established, followed by a TV channel.

Rakhine State's economy and business environment need to be enhanced, so that livelihood and employment opportunities are created and expanded.

However, this will happen only if the two groups are able to live side-by-side without conflict and tension. Accordingly, to promote peaceful coexistence, the Commission recommends the following measures:

- All groups must be able to speak the Myanmar language, and understand Myanmar's traditional cultures. Measures to promote such learning need to be implemented.
- Communication and interaction should be promoted between the Rakhine people and Bengali people.
- Measures need to be taken to instil a sense of loyalty and allegiance to the Union of Myanmar.
- The human rights of all groups must be protected.
- In dealing with illegal immigrants, the government should ensure adherence to human rights principles, taking into account the international conventions and human rights laws ratified or acceded to by the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.
- The government needs to urgently initiate a process for examining the citizenship status of people in Rakhine State, implementing the provisions of the current 1982 Citizenship Law.
- The authorities need to ensure that justice and the rule of law prevail in resolving problems.

- News media influence public opinion and have a special responsibility not to incite further hatred and violence. Consequently, the Commission recommends the following:
- The responsible authorities need to ban language and actions that inflame tensions and create conflict.
- The government needs to issue accurate and fact-based news to ensure openness and transparency and to counter rumours and falsehoods.
- All villages and communities should be able to receive correct and factual news via radio programmes, news bulletins, and public address systems.

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### (Footnotes)

1 Translation note: *Taing-Yin-Tha and Myo Nwe Su are those who are part of the 135 indigenous ethnic groups of Myanmar, according to the country's laws and official documents.*

2 Translation note: *Those who are not of the 135 indigenous ethnic groups of Myanmar, according to the country's laws and official documents, have always been classified as "Bengali", "Indian", "Chinese," etc., according to their ethnic root. For example, the race and citizenship of Chinese citizens of Myanmar are written on their identification cards as "Chinese/ Myanmar."*

3 Called *Ah-thon-Lon* in the Burmese language.