Records of the Reform Department: M/1/120, P&J(B)1057

30 Mar 1935

Extract from Confidential Memorandum by the Government of Burma on the Representations received from Political Representatives of Political Parties and Minorities regarding the proposals contained in the memorandum on the Representation of Minorities and on the Constituencies and Franchise for the Lower House and Proposals for an Upper House, 25th Sept 1933

Extract from 'Karen Views on the Memorandum of the Government on the Representation of the Minorities on the Constituencies and Franchise for the Lower House and Proposals for the Upper House' [submitted by S'Ra Shwe Ba, 21st Sept 1931

Minorities.

1. Numerous reports and many eminent persons have admitted that Burma is not India and that Burma stands quite distinct in the matter of communal question. The Government of Burma has adopted a wise measure on the weighty subject of communal question and communal award.

...many of the Karens, especially in the delta districts, do not differ much from their neighbours, the Burmans in dress, physical features and mode of living and unless enumerators take pains, time and care, I am afraid, they will be classified as

Population

2. Figures tell and convincingly do so in most cases, but the case of minonties stands on a different category. The figures for Indians, Chinese, Anglo-Indians and Europeans, whose languages, races and physical features are unni kably distinct and who are to be found mostly in urban areas, may be considered so exact and correct, but many of the Karens, especially in the delta districts, do not differ much from their neighbours, the Burmans in dress, physical features and mode of living and unless enumerators take pains, time and care, I am afraid, they will be classified as Burmans, hence the number of Karens, as the figures show, appears to us to be below the actual number.

Separate Electorates

3. It is with deep regret that no agreement has been arnved at between the communities regarding the question of the representation of minority communities and special interests in the Legislature. It is emphatically asserted that the Karens' only chance to have their voice heard through the mouths of their own people is separate electorates. The Karens are true sons of the soil and but for their number have stood up shoulder to shoulder with their countlymen, the Bunnans, in all matters embracing the administration, education and welfare of Burma.

Minorities - Karens

4. The Karens do not form a floating population nor are sojourners in Burma but they are an indigenous race, the second largest in Burma, and thus have every claim to be adequately represented in the Legislature. The only means to achieve this end is by reservation of special seats for them as it has been amply proved that they could not and will never get a seat in the Legislature by contest in the general election.

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Amount of Representation to be given to Karens

5. The proposal is that the Karens will be given 12 seats in the Legislature. At the present juncture, in the Legislature of 132 seats, the Karens will have to accept the 12 seats allotted them on the basis of population.

Representation for Women

6. The proposal that one seat be reserved for Karen women in unanimously approved and greatly appreciated, but the said seat should be termed 'Special Seat' like 'Labour' and should not be taken out of the Karen quota, as the said quota is so limited that it will not be possible to re-allocate the seats among the different

Karen Constituencies.

7. This summary clearly indicates the majority of the Burmans in the Council and there appears to be no fear when the percentage of the minority representation is only 26. The Burmans and Karens, being true sons of the soil, can easily hold the reins in their hands.

Karen Constituencies

10-14(a) The Karens have cause to complain that the distribution of the seats for them does J not appear to be a representative one, e.g.: Pegu Division, with a local Karen population of 149,300, is not given a single Karen seat although it occupies a central position and is the most outstanding and conveniently situated division. The only drawback is the wide and almost even distribution of the Karen population in the four districts - Insein, Pegu, Hanthawaddy and Tharrawaddy. Consideration on the basis of population should be waived and the only ground left to maintain in the favour of allotting a seat to this division is to educate the Karen population in political affairs.

(b) Assuming that one seat is allotted to Pegu Division the Karen quota of 12 seats may thus be distributed:

IrrawaddyDivision 7
Tenasserim Division 4
Pegu Division 1
Total 12

The said distribution might be thus further subdivided:

Irrawaddy -	Bassein	2
	Myaungmya	2
	Maubin	2
	Henzada	I
Tenasserim -	Thaton	2
	Amherst	1
	Toungoo	1
Pegu -		1

The density of population, the easy means of communication, the facilities for education and physical features of the districts as well as the distribution of the Karens in the districts call for the above unequal distribution.

Representative Karen Meeting

[forwarded by S'Ra Shwe Ba, 21st Sept 1933]

A representative Karen meeting was held on 9th September 1933 at l0.30a.m. at No.7, U Loo-Nee Street, Karen Quarter, Kenimendine, to express Karen opinion on the Government Memorandum on the Representation of Minorities on the Constituencies and Franchise for the Lower House, and Proposals for the Upper House.
U San Baw, OBE, Kill, President, Karen National Association, Burma, was voted to the chair, with U Ba Kin, BA, General Secretary, Karen National Association, as Recording Secretary of the meeting.
Delegates from six districts were present in person. Toungoo Distict represented its own opinion by wire as its delegates missed the train. Amherst District represented its opinion by letter.
As the Memorandum is marked 'Strictly Confidential,' the meeting was of opinion that the Memorandum was laid before them only for general expression of Karen opinion on the principle of the Representation of Minorities, and on the Constituencies and Franchise for the Lower House, and of the Proposals for the Upper House. This meeting was not therefore called upon either to pass or move resolutions for or against the Memorandum. It was just called to get the non-official Karen opinion on the proposals contained in the Memorandum, and the proceedings should not therefore be recorded and published. It was for the leader of the Karen Party to whom copies of the Memorandum were entrusted to take the sense of the meeting to the Reforms Secretary for his information and necessary action personally.
The sense of the meeting is that the Karens generally approve of the proposals to base the amount of Representation for the Lower House for the Minorities on population basis. Therefore the 12 seats proposed for the Karens on a population basis of

9 per cent of the total number of 132 seats are approved. The meeting cannot, however, agree to the proposals to restrict the area of Constituencies for the Karens into the two Divisions only, viz. Irrawaddy and Tenasserim, and none is proposed for the Pegu division which is a very important Division also. The Karens should have Constituencies in such [an] important Division. The sense of the meeting is that Karen Separate Consitutencies should also be expanded as to have 12 Karen Separate Constituencies for the 12 Karen seats as follows:

Thaton with Karen population of 281,300 - 1
Bassein with Karen population of 129,000 - 1
Myaungmya with Karen population of 118,500 - 1
Maubin with Karen population of 113,800 - 1
Amherst with Karen population of 107,000 - 1
Toungoo with Karen population of 88,000 - 1
Henzada with Karen population of 60,200 - 1
Insein with Karen population of 27,700 - 1
Pegu with Karen population of 37,300 - 1
Tavoy and Mergui with Karen population of 35,400 - 1
Rangoon and Hanthawaddy with Karen population of 33,000 - 1

The meeting is of opinion that in order to educate the Karens to fit them in future Reforms, it is really necessary to expand the area of Karen Constituencies as far as practicable.

Regarding reserved seats for women, the meeting is against the proposal to count the Karen women seat against the Karen quota which is based on Karens' population. This should be taken as Special Interests as in other cases, such as Labour and Commerce. The Karen women seat should not therefore be counted against the Karen quota 12 based on Karen population:
the meeting is of opinion that this reserved Karen women seat should be located in Pyapon District containing 21,700 Karen population, thereby making all the Karen Districts in Lower Burma Karen Separate Constituencies for the badly needed political education of the Karens for future Reforms.
Ba Kin, 9.9.33 (Recording Secretary)

Telegram for Secretary of State for India from Ba Kin, General Secretary Karen National Association, No.1853 (P&J(B)1057, dated Kemmendine 30.05.35
Karen National Association Burma at its Annual General Meeting on twenty eighth March
supported views of Karen Representative meeting on Local Government Memorandum on
Representation of Minorities for Lower House to expand area of Karen Constituencies to
Pegu Division as submitted through Reformed Secretary and their delegate Shwe Ba ninth
September 1933.

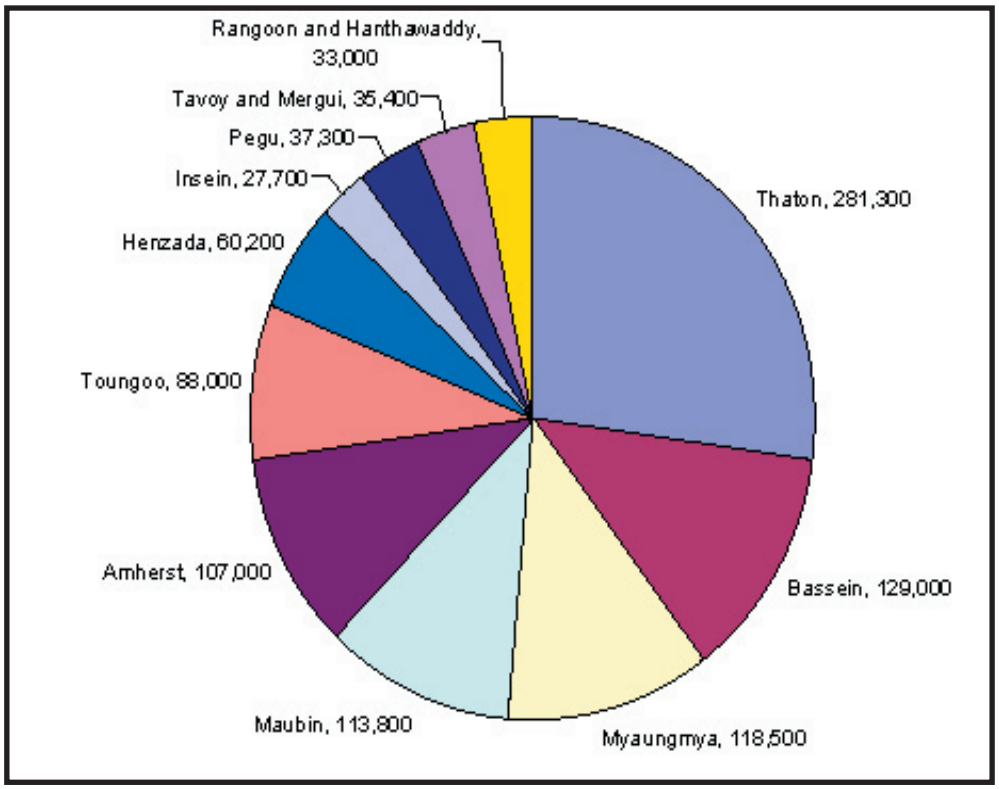


Chart showing Karen Constituancy poulations as reported by the Karen National Associations (KHCPS 2005)