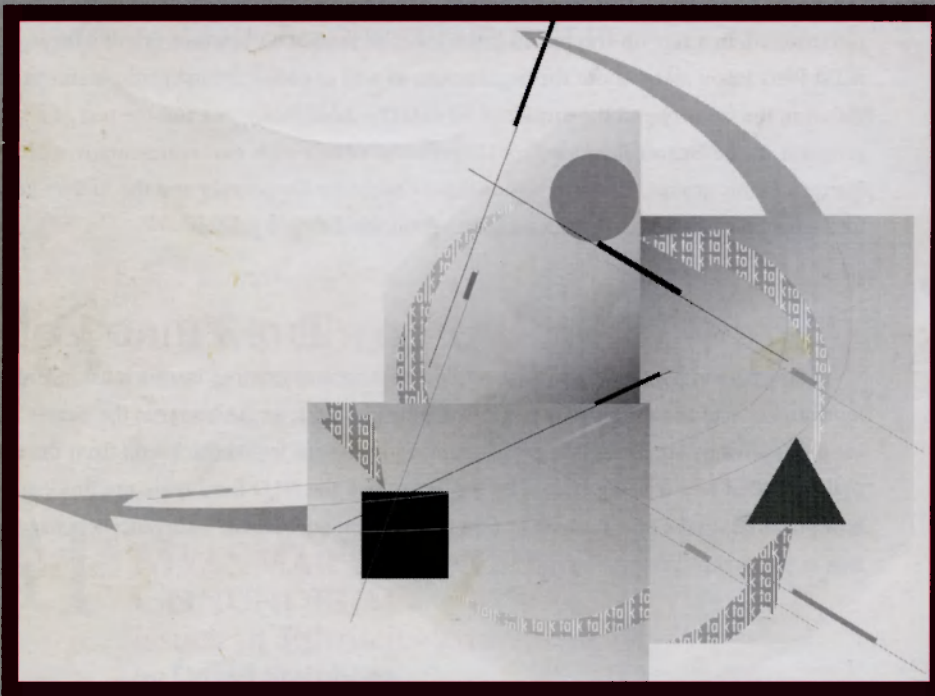


BURMA

D E B A T E

VOL. VIII, NOS. 2 & 3 SUMMER/FALL 2001



**A WORD ON
THE 'TALKS'**

**IN THEIR
OWN WORDS:**

Interviews with
SPDC, SNLD
and ALD

**THE THIRD
VOICE**

THE ISSUES...



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Burma Debate, a publication of the Burma Project of the Open Society Institute, is dedicated to providing an ongoing forum for commentary and analysis of issues concerning Burma. The director of the Burma Project is Maureen Aung-Thwin.

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Burma was officially renamed Myanmar in 1989 by the ruling military government. This publication will keep to the term used prior to that date, except when individual authors choose otherwise.

Burma Debate is published four times a year. For comments or permission to reprint contents write to: P.O. Box 19126, Washington, D.C. 20036. Fax: (301) 838-0587. E-mail: burmad@clark.net. Website: <http://www.burmaproject.org>

ON THE COVER:
Tripartite Dialogue, original graphic
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A WORD ON THE 'TALKS'

A year has passed since the 'Secret Talks' began between Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi of the National League for Democracy. As only those present during these meetings are privy to their contents, little is actually known about the progress of the 'Talks.' Some believe they are moving in a positive direction, while others see a stalemate. Asian leaders have publicly lauded the 'Talks,' but behind the scenes urged the regime to move toward a genuine political dialogue. Exactly what has been happening over the past year? Do the 'Talks' represent the first steps on the path to a transition to democracy? And what, if any, impact have they had on the lives of the Burmese people?

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Since the advent of the 'Talks,' little has been publicly acknowledged by either of the parties involved. In a rare on-the-record interview with the SPDC, however, South African journalist Piers Pigou asked about the negotiations as well as press censorship, the status of education in the country and the impact of HIV/AIDS. Additionally, we run the text of a recent program of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) with two representatives of non-Burman ethnic groups, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy and the Arakan League for Democracy, who discuss their perspectives on the dialogue process.

THE THIRD VOICE

Many have argued that any discussion on political transition in Burma must include the representation of the country's non-Burman ethnic groups. So far, however, the 'Secret Talks' are only two-way. Are the ethnic groups growing impatient at their exclusion from the negotiations? What role is being crafted by the SPDC and the NLD for a tripartite process? And how prepared are the non-Burman groups to move from decades of insurgency to a new position as political players?

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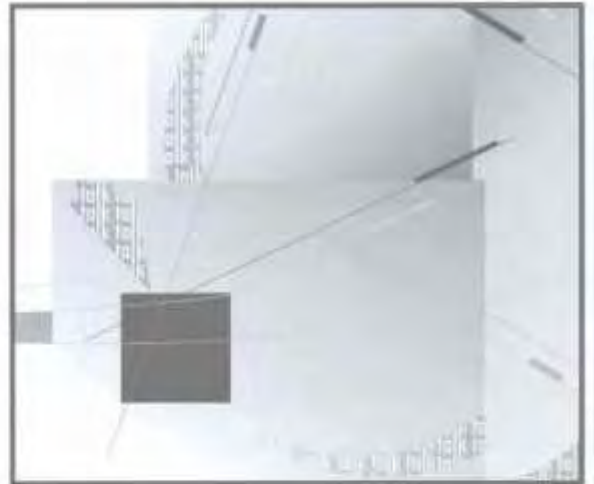
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A Transition in Burma



BY HARN YAWNGHWE

According to Thailand's defense minister, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, the answer is a definite 'Yes', and 'Soon'. Because General Chavalit is said to be close to the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in Burma, his assertion caused a stir.

Chavalit has made similar unsubstantiated remarks in the past to demonstrate his special relationship with the SPDC leadership. But this state-

ment came at the end of a visit to Thailand by Secretary-1 of the SPDC, Lieutenant-General Khin Nyunt, where he had the unprecedented honor of an audience with the Thai king. People, therefore, took notice. Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt, who is the Intelligence Chief, also heads the Office of Strategic Studies (OSS), the main SPDC group conducting the 'Secret Talks' with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Could Chavalit be right? Malaysian Prime

Yes or No



overgovernment

Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamed also has made highly publicized statements about Burma's future — the first one at the beginning of the year when he said that there will be new elections in Burma in three years. More recently, he said that the military leaders in Burma need a guarantee that they will not later be prosecuted for alleged crimes against humanity.

Asiaweek magazine has been rather optimistic too

in its reporting on the 'Secret Talks'. It has even described scenarios for a transition government. The latest report was headlined: "Yes, there is going to be a settlement in Myanmar." The article referred to the increased visits to Burma this year by senior foreign diplomats and the rumor of a possible visit to Rangoon by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell in November, and speculated on a prospects for a settlement before year's end. How valid are these claims?



WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

U Lwin, spokesperson for the National League for Democracy (NLD) — which won a landslide victory in the 1990 general elections — and the only NLD executive with regular access to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, told the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that reports of a power-sharing agreement with the military are not true, "There [is] in fact no dialogue process going on at present." He said, "We are waiting for the military to make an offer".

If the SPDC is to maintain its credibility amongst the military's rank and file, it cannot abruptly switch from calling Daw Aung San Suu Kyi a 'traitor' in 2000, to sharing power and forming a government with her in 2001 without first laying the groundwork.

While neither the UN Special Envoy, Malaysian Ambassador Tan Sri Razali Ismail nor NLD executives are present at the 'Secret Talks' between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Major-General Kyaw Win of the OSS, it is unlikely that in 11 months the 'Talks' have gone beyond the initial 'confidence-building' stage designed to develop trust between the two sides.

A power-sharing agreement would mean that substantial political concessions have been agreed upon by the military leadership and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. This is not possible for several reasons:

For one, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has in the past categorically stated that she will not make unilater-

al decisions about the future of Burma without wider consultation.

Furthermore, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is meeting only with Major-General Kyaw Win on a regular basis. General Chavalit's assertion that Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt has been meeting Daw Aung San Suu Kyi 'every two weeks' is incorrect. U Lwin said that Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt has not seen her for several months. Thai military sources also confirm that General Chavalit was 'misquoted'.

The fact that it is Maj.-Gen. Kyaw Win who sees Daw Aung San Suu Kyi regularly, not Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt or Chairman Senior General Than Shwe is an indication of the level the 'Talks' have reached. Maj.-Gen. Kyaw Win does not have the authority to make far-reaching decisions for the SPDC on his own.

Another argument against the imminent formation of a 'transition government' is the fact that while the 'Secret Talks' have been confirmed to the international community and have been reported extensively by foreign media, no official statement has ever been made by the SPDC about the 'Talks' in the official Burmese language media. People know about the 'Talks' from foreign radio broadcasts, the release of political prisoners and rumors, but there has been no official confirmation of the 'Talks' or even an explanation about why they are necessary.

If the SPDC is to maintain its credibility amongst the military's rank and file, it cannot abruptly switch from calling Daw Aung San Suu Kyi a 'traitor' in 2000, to sharing power and forming a government with her in 2001 without first laying the groundwork. To date, there seems to have been no preparation within the military to explain Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's 'rehabilitation' or to justify the SPDC's decision to share power with her and the NLD.

In spite of the various highly publicized claims about the 'Talks' moving forward, including SPDC Foreign Minister U Win Aung's statements to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in April and in July 2001, it is clear that the progress of the 'Talks' thus far has been less than satisfactory. This is based on the following:

After the UN Special Envoy announced the 'Secret Talks' in January 2001, he was not allowed to make a return visit to Burma until June 2001.

Sources close to the 'Talks' indicate that in April 2001, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was annoyed by SPDC Foreign Minister U Win Aung's statements to ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting in Rangoon that the 'Talks' were not deadlocked. She considered it to be a breach of her bargain with the SPDC not to discuss the details of the 'Talks' with anyone, and requested the immediate visit of the UN Special Envoy.

Before May, both the NLD and the exile National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) refrained from making public statements critical of the SPDC for fear of jeopardizing the 'Talks.' On Labor Day, May 1, the NLD issued a statement supporting the stand that the International Labour Organization (ILO) has taken against forced labor in Burma, thus indirectly criticizing the SPDC. The NCGUB also now says that as long as human rights are abused and forced labor is used, these issues should be pursued vigorously and independently from the 'Talks' by the various international organizations concerned.

After the June visit of the UN Special Envoy, it became known that the release of political prisoners is a key issue (*Far Eastern Economic Review* "Intelligence" Aug 16, 2001). Since then, some 180 have been released in dribs and drabs but apparently not fast enough for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who wants all 1,800 political prisoners released before she would consider giving 'rewards' to the SPDC.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi did not attend the official ceremony on Martyr's Day July 19, 2001. This ceremony honoring her father is one of the public functions she has normally performed since her release from house arrest in 1995. Her decision to not attend this year can be seen as an indication that she is dissatisfied with the pace of the 'Talks'.

Another benchmark used by many to measure progress is the ability of the NLD to function normally as a political party. In support of a more optimistic outlook, a recent article in *Asiaweek* stated that the NLD's headquarters and 18 other branch offices have been allowed to reopen and operate as normal. While this sounds encouraging, of the 18 branch offices, only nine were actually reopened. The other nine were never closed. The 18 mentioned are also located exclusively in Rangoon Division. Local authorities in the six other administrative divi-

" N O S E C R E T D E A L "

In response to concerns expressed by non-Burman ethnic leaders about the secret meetings held between the leader of the National League for Democracy, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council, and Secretary-1, Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt in September 1994 and again with Khin Nyunt in October of that year, Dr. Michael Aris released the following statement in Bangkok on January 23, 1995:

"It has always been the firm conviction of those working for democracy in Burma that it is only through meaningful dialogue between diverse political forces that we can achieve national reconciliation, which is the first and most vital requisite for a united and prosperous country.

That the international community shares this view is evident from clause 5 of the [United Nations] General Assembly resolution of December 1994, which encourages the Government of Burma to engage 'in a substantive political dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and other political leaders, including representatives from ethnic groups, as the best means of promoting national reconciliation and the full and early restoration of democracy.'

It was in full acceptance of this view and with genuine good will that I approached the meeting with members of the State Law and Order Restoration Council on September 20 and October 28, 1994.

There have not been and there will not be any secret deals with regard either to my release or to any other issue. I adhere to the principle of accountability and consider myself at all times bound by the democratic duty to act in consultation with colleagues and to be guided by the aspirations of those engaged in the movement to establish a truly democratic political system in Burma. I remain dedicated to an active participation in this movement."

Aung San Suu Kyi
January 22, 1995
Rangoon, Burma

sions and seven states have not permitted the NLD offices to operate their branch offices. The local authorities claim that it is illegal to do so and have even prevented NLD signboards from being erected. In total, the NLD has over 400 branch offices throughout the country.

From these indicators, it is clear that the 'Talks' are not going as smoothly as the SPDC would like the international community to believe.

BEHIND THE 'SECRET TALKS'

Why then is everybody so optimistic? Can the defense minister of Thailand, the prime minister of Malaysia, and *Asiaweek* all be wrong?

First, everybody *wants* the 'Secret Talks' to succeed. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD, the democracy movement, and all the non-Burman ethnic leaders believe that political problems must be resolved through political means and that the 'Secret Talks' are a unique opportunity to solve Burma's problems non-violently.

The international community, including ASEAN and the United Nations, also wants the 'Talks' to develop into a political dialogue that will bring about a peaceful change in Burma. Business interests stand to gain if there is a change too and are actively lobbying governments for policy changes. There is, therefore, a certain amount of goodwill and wishful thinking involved.

Second, after trying unsuccessfully to 'annihilate' Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD in 2000, the SPDC decided to change from confrontation to 'dialogue.' The SPDC's new strategy seems to be to buy time, gain legitimacy and secure desperately needed international funding without compromising its hold on power.

This strategy seems to have been quite successful. Many governments are now more willing to engage the SPDC in discussion because of the 'Talks' and there is intense interest on the part of UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations to consider humanitarian projects, especially concerning HIV/AIDS in Burma. Since the need is obvious, any slight progress in the political situation will tend to favor the resumption of aid.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

First, while the SPDC may think that its tactic is succeeding, the generals need to know that nobody is fooled. They, in the past, have given too many empty promises and tried to hold onto power without bringing about real changes. The international community may humor the SPDC in the short-term with small aid projects, but no real financial assistance

will be made available to Burma unless and until concrete steps are taken. In fact, if no further progress is made in the 'Talks' by the end of this year, both the United States and the European Union could seriously examine the possibility of new sanctions.

Second, if the process currently underway in Burma is merely a power struggle between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and General Than Shwe, or even a struggle between democracy and authoritarianism, the option for one or both parties to simply pull out of the 'Talks' due to frustration could become viable.

Burma, however, does not have the luxury of that option. Whether or not it is acknowledged by the leaders of the military or the democracy movement, the very existence of Burma as a nation is at stake. The problems that Burma faces are enormous. The crisis they create is real and needs to be resolved immediately, not in ten years time. In this modern high-tech, electronic world, a nation's most valuable commodity is no longer its natural resources, but its human resources. Today, with education in Burma at its lowest level ever, how can Burma hope to catch up, let alone compete, with the rest of the world?

In the past, it may have been possible for Burma to isolate itself and survive at subsistence levels. The increasing competitiveness of globalization, however, will not tolerate a vacuum in today's world. Burma will be drawn into one of the emerging spheres of influence either by choice or involuntarily. If Burma has her house in order, she can decide which of these spheres is most advantageous.

COMMON GROUND?

The Burmese military is serious about its much-vaunted "Three Main National Causes" — the non-disintegration of the Union, the non-disintegration of national solidarity and the perpetuation of Burma's sovereignty. On September 18, 2001, SPDC Vice-Chairman, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services, and Army Commander-in-Chief General Maung Aye addressed graduating Under-Officers of the *Tatmadaw* (Army) Officers Training School at Bahtoo Tatmyo. He reiterated that the aim of upholding the "Three Main National Causes" is to build a peaceful, modern and developed nation. Surely if the nation is now threatened

with extinction, will the military not re-evaluate and further explore whether there are ways to achieve its aims without following the same path that has brought neither peace, development nor prosperity?

Millions of Burmese who gave a vote of confidence to the NLD in the 1990 general elections, believe that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party have the welfare of the people of Burma and good of the nation at heart. They may disagree in methodology but they can surely agree to the military's "Three Main National Causes."

What about the non-Burmans? Do they want to break up the country? That is a common perception that needs to be re-examined. If it is true, there is no solution to the problem in Burma. What then are the facts?

THE NON-BURMANS

The SPDC claims that Burma is inhabited by '135 races' of people that will break up the country if there is not a strong military to hold it together.

Burmese are in fact primarily from the same 'Mongoloid' group that can be subdivided into Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Thai and Mon-Khmer. The '135 races' used by the SPDC refers to the number of dialects spoken by these three major sub-groups.

Out of a population of about 50 million, Burmans — the majority of whom live in 'Burma Proper' — make up about 60% of the population. The remaining peoples make up 40%. No Burmese state is ethnically 'pure.'

There are currently eight constituent states of the Union of Burma — Arakan (Rakhaing), 'Burma Proper', Chin, Kachin, Shan, Kayah (Karenni), Karen, and Mon. 'Burma Proper' is administratively divided into seven Divisions. Under the 1974 Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) Constitution, which was rescinded in 1988, the seven Divisions had equal status with the seven other States. 'Burma Proper' occupies about 43% of the landmass of Burma — 667,000 sq. kms.

Historically, the Arakan (Rakhaing) had a kingdom — *Dinnya-wadi* — as early as 146 AD. The Shans were known to have ruled in present day southern China and northern Burma from the 8th century. The Mons established the kingdom of Hanthawaddy in 825 AD. The first Burman kingdom

was only established in 1044 AD.

When the British annexed the Burman kingdom to British India in 1886, the territory included the present day Arakan, Karen and Mon areas. Karenni was recognized as a sovereign state protected by the British Crown, and the various Shan States also became British Protectorates in the same fashion as the Malay States. The Kachin and Chin Hills were administered separately as Frontier Areas.

Whether or not it is acknowledged by the

leaders of the military or the democracy

movement, the very existence of Burma as a

nation is at stake.

After the Second World War, the people of Burma, which became a separate British Colony from India in 1937, sought independence. When leaders of the Chin, Kachin and Shan met in 1947 in Panglong to examine their options for a future together, they were joined by General Aung San, who led the independence struggle.

These discussions gave birth to the Panglong Agreement, providing a legal framework within which the different ethnic peoples would cooperate as equals. It became the basis for the 1947 Union Constitution and enabled the Republic of the Union of Burma to gain independence in 1948.

When General Aung San was assassinated, the 1947 Union Constitution was rushed through without reflecting the Panglong principle of a voluntary union of equal partners. In spite of this setback, the non-Burman leaders continued to support the government of U Nu who had succeeded Aung San. This support began to wane, however, as frustrations on the part

RECENT NON-BURMAN ETHNIC NATION-BUILD

January 1997 — Mae Tharawtha Agreement — Non-Burman ethnic nationality groups agree to work together and with Burmans to rebuild the nation. The signatories also included non-Burman groups that had previously signed ceasefires with the SPDC as well as the Arakan, Karenni and Shan, who have traditionally been known to seek independence. Instead of welcoming this development, the SPDC saw it as a threat.

May 1998 — Establishment of the Chin Forum to enable the various Chin groups to raise and discuss issues of common concern, and to find solutions through non-violent means.

May 1999 - Establishment of the National Reconciliation Programme to encourage and enable the various non-Burman ethnic nationalities to discuss amongst their own people, with their neighbors, and with Burmans, how to resolve past and current problems and how to rebuild a nation where ethnic and cultural differences are respected and the different ethnic nationalities can co-exist in peace and prosperity.

National Reconciliation Programme

June 1999 — Meeting of Shan, Palaung, Wa and Lahu ethnic nationalities in Shan State to set up a mechanism to prevent future inter-ethnic conflicts

July 1999 — Consultation with ceasefire groups to establish working relation with non-ceasefire groups.

October 1999 — Meeting of various Shan groups to establish working relationships and cooperate with each other — groups included the Shan Democratic Union (SDU), Shan Human Rights Foundation, Shan Herald Agency for News, Shan State Organization, Tai Union, and community based organizations.

November 1999 — Kachin consultation to discuss a broad range of issues including a future tripartite dialogue.

November 1999 — Preliminary discussions with Mon, Karen, Kachin, Shan, Chin and Wa representatives about drafting state constitutions & state/federal Relationships.

December 1999 — Preparatory meeting to promote reconciliation between the National United Party of Arakan (NUPA), Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), the Democratic

Party of Arakan (DPA), and the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD)

December 1999 — Meeting to promote National Reconciliation attended by representatives from ABSDF, ABYMU, DPNS, NCUB (West), CNLD and the NLD-LA.

December 1999 — Preparatory meeting of women representatives to discuss the formation of a national organization to empower women from various ethnic nationalities to cooperate, work together, and participate effectively at every level in state affairs and national development.

January 2000 — 104 participants and 35 observers attended the Karen consultation to discuss and plan how to consolidate the unity of the Karen people, to consolidate the unity of the alliance with other ethnic nationalities and to uphold the political objectives of the Karen people within a democratic federal union in a tripartite dialogue, as well as how to systematically eradicate drugs in Burma.

February 2000 — Mon consultation to discuss cooperation with other ethnic nationalities in rebuilding a future Burma.

February 2000 — Training in Public Administration for youth and women of all ethnic nationalities to enable them to appreciate and implement good governance practices within their own organizations.

March 2000 — 'Learning from the South African Experience' conflict resolution seminars for top leaders of the non-Burman ethnic nationalities on both the eastern and western borders of Burma.

September 2000 — Further consultation with ceasefire groups on political objectives and the achievement of common goals.

December 2000 — Karen youth conference to empower the younger generation.

December 2000 — Workshop for women on drafting a constitution.

January 2001 — Establishment of the Women's League of Burma to empower women from various ethnic nationalities to cooperate, work together, and participate effectively at every level in state affairs and national development.

ING ACTIVITIES

January 2001 — Re-establishment of the United Nationalities League for Democracy in the Liberated Area to enable non-Burman ethnic nationality representatives elected in the 1990 general elections to participate in deliberations on the future of Burma.

February 2001 — Formation of Karen State Constitution Drafting Committee.

February 2001 — Preparatory Arakanese meeting on the eastern border of Burma.

March 2001 — Strategy Consultation between and non-Burman ethnic nationalities, the NCGUB and the NCUB regarding the talks in Rangoon between SPDC and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

March 2001 — Preparatory Arakanese meeting on the western border of Burma.

March 2001 — Arakanese, Karenni, and Shan youth conferences to empower the younger generation.

March 2001 — Youth Conflict Resolution Workshop

April 2001 — Meeting of Arakanese groups to discuss common objectives and find ways to work together for the future.

May 2001 — Karen Women's Conference to empower Karen women.

May 2001 — Youth Exchange Programme to promote better understanding among young people from various ethnic backgrounds.

May 2001 — Karenni consultation to discuss a broad range of issues including a future tripartite dialogue.

June 2001 — Establishment of Shan State Constitution Drafting Committee.

June 2001 — Nationalities Youth Seminar to bring together youth from various ethnic backgrounds.

August 2001 — Ethnic Nationalities 'Law Khii Lah' consultation on working together and taking a proactive approach towards a dialogue with the SPDC and the NLD.

August 2001 — Workshop on Drafting State Constitutions for the eight constituent states of Burma to highlight how the various states fit within the framework of a federal union.

of some non-Burman groups mounted. The Kayah (or Karenni) took up arms against the government of Burma and negotiations with the Karen also broke down. The Mon and Arakan people later joined the rebellion and Burma was thrown into a civil war that continues to this day.

Instead of moving to conform more to the principles of Panglong as the Union Government stabilized, the opposite occurred. When Premier U Nu took extra-constitutional steps in 1958 and called on the military to form a 'Caretaker Government' to discourage Shan State from exercising its constitutional right to secede, the non-Burman leaders remained loyal to the Union and launched the 'Federal Movement' in order to try to preserve it.

Burma's constitutional crisis finally came to a head in 1962. Convinced by non-Burman leaders that the 1947 Constitution needed to be amended, Prime Minister U Nu convened a National Convention. While all of Burma's political leadership assembled in Rangoon, General Ne Win launched a coup d'état claiming that he acted to prevent the nation from breaking up.

Ironically, while General Ne Win was able to prevent the amendment of the 1947 Constitution, he actually pushed the nation closer to disintegration. The non-Burmans saw the Panglong Agreement and the 1947 Constitution as the legal basis binding them to the Burmans so when Ne Win discarded these in order to rule through the Revolutionary Council, the non-Burmans no longer felt bound to the Union.

In fact, the Shans argued that since they were no longer legally bound, they were independent and that the Burma Army in the Shan State was an illegal army of occupation. As a result, the Shan State Independence Army, which was founded in 1958, transformed into the Shan State Army to defend the homeland from the invaders. Following the example of the Shans, other non-Burman nationalists armies also formed and plunged Burma deeper into civil war.

Against this background of distrust, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and now the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) have tried in their own way to correct the wrongs of the past by arranging separate ceasefire agreements with various non-Burman ethnic

armies. But while the fighting has stopped in some areas, it has intensified in others causing more suffering for the people. This is because the root of the problem has not been dealt with by the cease-fires. No political negotiations have taken place since the ceasefires started in 1989 and no political settlements have been reached between the ethnic

Instead of merely focusing on ways to prevent instability, unrest and insurgency, the military should perhaps concentrate on the root causes of the problem and work with the NLD and the non-Burmans to rebuild the country.

armies and the Burmese military. Over the past decade, however, non-Burman ethnic groups have been engaged with each other in numerous nation-building activities. They may, in fact, be better prepared than ever to be partners in resolving Burma's crisis. There is a need for a comprehensive political solution for the whole nation, not just temporary military ceasefires that can be revoked at any time.

General Maung Aye has said that "stability of the State, community peace and tranquillity, prevalence of law and order" are the most basic parts of the 12 objectives of the SPDC. Therefore, he said, efforts are being made by the SPDC to ensure that instability, unrest and insurgency will never arise again in the nation. Instead of merely focusing on ways to prevent instability, unrest and insurgency, the military should perhaps concentrate on the root causes of the problem and work with the NLD and the non-Burmans to rebuild the country.

CONCLUSION

Burma is facing a serious crisis. Its viability as a nation, its territorial integrity and its sovereignty are at stake. These issues should be a cause of concern for all citizens of Burma, be they in the military, the democracy movement or members of a non-Burman ethnic nationality.

The SLORC/SPDC has tried to solve the many problems piecemeal, as witnessed by the various economic 'reforms' since 1962 and the numerous temporary ceasefires since 1989. The latest effort is the long drawn out 'Secret Talks' with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. These efforts, while possibly reasonable, are not enough; they do not address the root causes of the problem. A new approach focusing on nation-building is required.

Such an approach by the SPDC or the NLD would be welcomed by the people of Burma from all walks of life. After more than five decades of civil war, economic ruin and devastation, most people want a normal life without having to live in fear. If General Ne Win is, as reported recently, near death this could be an opportunity for General Than Shwe to start anew.

The SPDC could begin building bridges to the democracy movement and the non-Burmans by making widely known in Burma, Senior General Than Shwe's thoughts as articulated in 1998 to *Leaders Magazine*, "My genuine desire is to see our country develop and prosper, and to see the emergence of a democratic system... I am a soldier, but at the same time, I am also a Buddhist.... So, even though I am a soldier, and even though I have to do certain things for the maintenance of peace and stability and for the welfare and security of the country, I don't have hostile or antagonistic feelings toward others.... What I am doing now is because I love my country."

On democracy, he said, "We are working for the development and peace of our nation. At the same time, we are trying to place our country on the path of democracy, and to build a democratic system.... So we're definitely trying to do both.... It is towards this end (the emergence of a democratic system) that we are putting our best efforts"

On the role of the military, he said, "Of course we believe it's not natural for the armed forces to assume responsibility for the State for a very long

STATEMENT OF CEASEFIRE GROUPS REGARDING THE CURRENT SITUATION

It has been more than ten years since the ceasefire groups agreed to end hostilities in the nation and to peacefully find a solution through political dialogue in order to achieve national reconciliation and the establishment of a genuine union of states.

During this period, after the end of hostilities, there has been significant peace within the Union of Myanmar. But up until this day, there has been no political dialogue between the ceasefire groups and the State Peace and Development Council. Therefore, in the area of national reconciliation progress has been slow.

We welcome the current talks between the State Peace and Development Council and important personalities of the National League for Democracy because it can lead to national reconciliation. We hope it will continue to progress and develop further.

The ceasefire groups are willing to support and participate in more substantial dialogue to achieve national reconciliation, the establishment of a gen-

uine union of states and the establishment of democracy within the Union of Myanmar.

Signatories:

1. Shan State Peace Council
 - a. Shan State Army
 - b. Shan State National Army
2. New Mon State Party
3. Karenni Nationalities Peoples Liberation Front
4. Shan State Nationalities Peoples Liberation Organization
5. Kayan New Land Party
6. Palaung State Liberation Organization

Date: March 1, 2001

The above statement was issued by six of the 20 ethnic groups that have signed ceasefire agreements with SPDC.

Translation: The Euro-Burma Office

time—I believe that if...the world community would help us, we could reach this goal (the emergence of a democratic system) within three years.... Let me say that we have no intention of prolonging the process unnecessarily. If we receive international assistance and support, the process of establishing a democratic system in our country will be sped up.... However, for our part, we have no intention whatsoever to unnecessarily prolong this process...."

Such sentiments followed by concrete action on the part of the SPDC to speed up the current 'Secret Talks' would go a long way in building trust and bringing about the democratic system everyone desires.

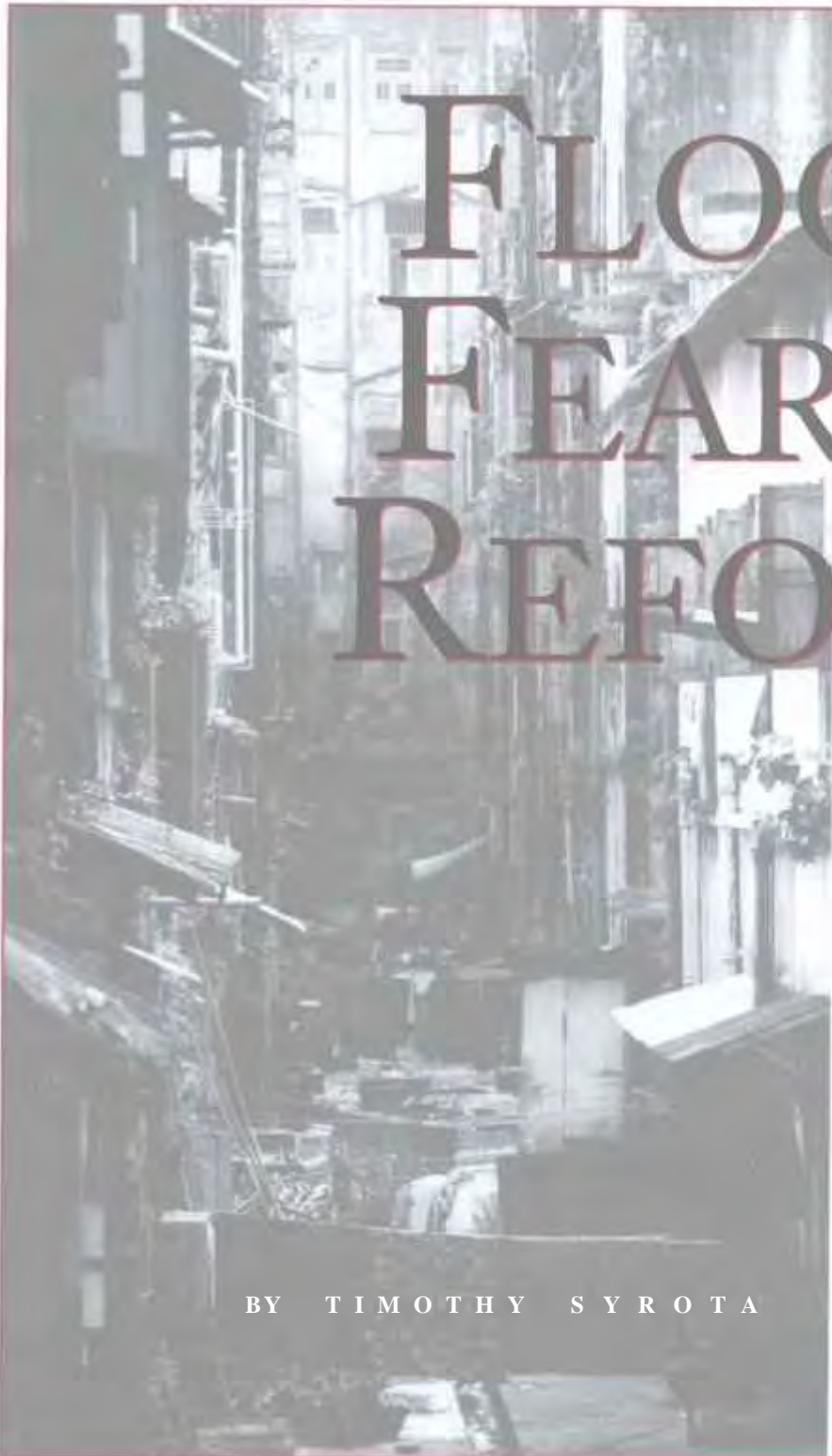
Ham Yawngghwe, is the director of the Brussels-based European Office for the Development of Democracy in Burma and the youngest son of Sao Shwe Thaik, the

first president of the Republic of the Union of Burma (1948-1952). He has been serving as an advisor to Prime Minister Dr. Sein Win of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma since 1991 and holds degrees in Mineral Economics and International Business & Finance from McGill University.

Editor's note: The views expressed here are those of the author.

PHOTO CREDITS

Page 4: Thai Defense Minister General Chavalit: Reuters/Sukree Sukplang; Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed: Reuters/Zainal Abd Halim. Page 5: Burmese Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt: Reuters/Jason Reed.



FLOODS, FEARS & REFORMS

Street Talk Inside Burma

BY TIMOTHY SYROTA

In downtown Rangoon there is more evidence of wealth than there was three years ago. But in the back streets, nothing has changed.

TIMOTHY SYROTA

It is July 2001 and the newspapers in Bangkok hail 'Junta, National League for Democracy to form government. Thai Defense Minister Chavalit optimistic about peaceful settlement between military leaders and opposition,' (*The Nation*, Bangkok, July 7, 2001). On July 6, 2001 seven political prisoners are released bringing to 129 the number of political prisoners set free since January 2001. There is talk of releasing Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest. In August, United Nations Special Envoy, Razali Ismail, is allowed once again to visit Burma and holds talks with military leaders and Aung San Suu Kyi. Meanwhile, 'Secret Talks' that began in October 2000 between Aung San Suu Kyi and Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, head of Burmese Military Intelligence and Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) continue. This is the first direct dialogue between the military and the democratic opposition since 1994.

Maybe these developments in Burma are signs of progress in a country that has labored under military rule since 1962. But maybe not. I first visited Burma in 1997 and most recently returned in May 2001 to film a documentary on the lives of Burmese people. While engaged in this work what I saw and heard painted an all-too-familiar picture.

In the cities of Rangoon and Mandalay a popular topic of conversation is the state of the economy. Taxi drivers, hotel receptionists, a corner-side betel nut man, a Muslim eyeglass seller, a goldsmith, would-be tour guides and importers/exporters, all voice their concerns and the message is unanimous: Burma's economy has floundered for decades but now it is going through particularly bad times. The national currency is subject to violent and unpredictable fluctuations, electricity is rationed, inflation is rampant, wages are low, foreign investors look elsewhere and the number of tourists visiting the country is diminishing.

In March 2001 the national currency, the *kyat*, was traded on the black market at 350 to the U.S. dollar. By May it was trading as low as 920 *kyat* per dollar. In the first week of June it rose to 600 as two consecutive police raids on black marketeers were executed. Then, two weeks later, the military imposed

an informal three-day ban on the trading of any foreign currency. But the black market traders will be back, and as confidence returns, so too will the value of the *kyat* once again plummet. The desire for hard currency dollars in Burma cannot be suppressed, even by the threat of lengthy jail sentences.

Another sign of the economic downturn is electricity rationing. In Pyay, a large provincial town between Mandalay and Rangoon, electricity is provided on an eight-hour rotation scheme with different districts on different schedules. Today electricity runs from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., tomorrow from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. and the day after, from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. The situation is the same in Mandalay, Burma's second largest city. One businessman asks, 'How can we do business when we do not have electricity? How can we do business when from day to day the prices of goods change? How can we do business when we do not know how much our money is worth? It is not possible.'

When I first arrive in Rangoon a taxi driver tells me that the price of petrol has tripled from 300 *kyat* per gallon to 900 *kyat* per gallon in five months. At its inflationary peak the price rises by 50 *kyat* per day. The taxi driver must increase his prices, but people cannot afford to pay more money. Sometimes he can no longer afford to drive the streets looking for work. Speaking with a tour guide, I hear that in 1997 some 250,000 tourists visited Burma, but now the figure is around 150,000. There is very little work and the man is lucky to earn US\$5 per week. Similarly affected by the dwindling number of tourists is the hotel in which I stay in Rangoon. Built in 1996 in anticipation of an increase in tourists coming to Burma, it used to boast a reception staff of three during the day but now there is one and she earns US\$15/month.

I meet a wealthy Burmese gentleman who works in import and export. As a sideline business he organizes documents, passports, visas and passage for wealthy people out of the country — including members of the military and their families. I ask him why even they want to leave and he explains, 'There is no security in business, there is no secure future. Anyone who can leave, does. For the poor, they work

only to exist. This is not life. The democracy uprisings in 1988, people wanted democracy but really everyone was sick of the economy being so bad. It is the same this year and in my country we are scared of what might happen. There will be change. We cannot continue like this.'

In Rangoon and Mandalay, the word is that economics will force change in Burma. Rural villagers speak with equal certainty about change, but their reasoning is very different.

In Rangoon and Mandalay, the word is that economics will force change in Burma. Rural villagers speak with equal certainty about change, but their reasoning is very different.

In May 2001, in Meik-ti-la, a town south of Mandalay, a dam wall overflows and approximately five hundred villagers are drowned. In Nam San, near the Chinese border, there is a mudslide that kills two hundred people. In Northern Burma, on the line to the town of Myitkyina a bridge collapses while a train crosses and most of the passengers drown. These events are not reported in the state-controlled media but word spreads quickly and to the rural people from the forests and the hills and the fields such disasters are seen as a powerful omens for change.

A well-spoken, well-educated friend who has regular contact with village elders tells me, 'Politics is talking. It takes place in rooms with lights and it doesn't matter whether outside it is night or day, sun or rain. Floods have nothing to do with politics. But the villagers do not think like this. In 1996 there were floods and soon after there was unrest. Ne Win stepped aside and there was escalating tension leading to the demonstrations of 1988. The villagers said that the floods had been omens for this. And today

the villagers believe further floods are omens for upheaval. They are sure of this. Perhaps they will be right again.'

Within Burma the military response to this belief in imminent change has been characteristic of its actions for decades. Primarily its objective is to create division and fear amongst its own people, thereby trying to secure its grip on power.

In Mandalay on May 4, 2001 a bomb explodes in Zeigyo market. The national newspapers proclaim that Shan insurgents trying to disrupt the stability of the state are responsible. Mandalay people, however, tell a different story. Reports one man, 'People knew that the bomb was there for half an hour before it exploded. The police station is five minutes walk from the market and the fire station is even closer. Why did they not come sooner? We know that it was the military who planted the bomb. It is a government trick.'

Equally sinister are events that occur on the 22nd and 23rd of May 2001 in Taungoo, a town in Central Burma. I hear this story piece by piece as it filters through to me. The first is about riots between Buddhist monks and Muslims. A military curfew is imposed. Buses bound for Mandalay are not permitted to go through the town. The central mosque has been burnt down. A senior Muslim leader has been killed. Others are also killed. Buddhist monks have perpetrated these deeds. Then I hear that they are not real Buddhist monks, they are military dressed up as monks.

The military uses the riots in Taungoo to increase its presence. In Mandalay, Eindawya Pagoda was the place where the poorest people of the city would stay and receive donations from the monks. Now the pagoda has been overrun by the military. Each entrance is protected by armed guards. Inside the temple grounds three squads of soldiers reside and military intelligence officers are rife. What were once meditation halls are now littered with the swags of soldiers — sleeping mats, boots, belts, helmets, and mosquito nets.

Beyond the pagoda is a monastery. I visit early one morning and a monk invites me to come up to the monks' quarters. As I join him a soldier walks across and does not leave me for the duration of time that I am with the monk. Then, when I have finished talking, he escorts me off the premises.

In another monastery, this time in Pyay, more soldiers with rifles stand on guard. Few monks leave their residences and there is a noticeable absence of monks in the town. At night, military patrols walk the unlit back streets, helmets on, truncheons and guns in hand. It's a sinister sight.

Why such a military presence? Is it to safeguard against the possibility of further religious conflict? Or is it because the military does not want monks expressing their views on the events in Taungoo. Monks are capable of attracting widespread popu-

lar support in Burma and they have a history of opposing the military regime. Already it is a widely-held view that the military themselves foster the rift between Buddhist and Muslim populations in order to divert attention from political and economic realities. 'We do not believe these are real monks making the problems,' says my hotel owner, 'real monks do not do this. If we see such people in Mandalay we chase them out of the streets because we know that they are trouble-makers who dress up as monks and do the work of the military.'



'When there are floods there will be unrest and there will be change. This is the way it was before, and now we have floods again,' says an elderly man in Shan state.



In Burma, people know that real monks are not the cause of the Buddhist-Muslim conflict.

The military presence in and around temples and monasteries has a second function. It positions soldiers so that they are plainly visible to the general Burmese population, creating fear and acting as a pervasive deterrent against popular unrest.

The state of the economy, the floods, the feeling that there will be change, the bomb, the religious unrest — this is something of what goes on inside Burma today. But it is only something. What of the propaganda that for months decries the threat of a neo-colonialist, 'puppet-of-America-and-the-CIA' Thailand invading the borders? What of the dismal state of education and the burgeoning drug problem? What of the workers of Burma in the streets and the rice paddies who earn US\$3 per month? What of the World Health Organization that rates the Burmese military as providing the second worst health care out of 191 countries assessed? What of the rice shortage that the country faces? And what of the truck loads of heavily-armed soldiers?

The Burmese military wants one type of news

coming out of Burma: news of reform. Burma is economically moribund. It needs foreign aid so the military must be seen to be making concessions. But the reforms it makes are to please the international community, they are not reforms that directly impact upon the lives of people inside Burma. Indeed, the lives of Burmese people are noticeably worse than they were four years ago and for them, current reforms seem only to equate increased pressure from a military regime still reluctant to transfer any of its power.

Timothy Syrota is a freelance writer, photographer and video producer whose work focuses primarily on humanitarian, political and social issues in Southeast Asia. He is the author of Welcome to Burma and Enjoy the Totalitarian Experience (Orchid Press, November 2001) and the producer of an upcoming documentary film about daily life for people in Burma. He currently holds the position of vice president of the International Society for Human Rights (Australia).

Interviews with

SPDC
& SNLD
AALD

Although little has been said publicly by Burma's military leaders regarding the 'Secret Talks' between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), in this rare interview, South African journalist Piers Pigou documents the regime's position on the progress of these talks, the prospects for political transition in Burma, the release of political prisoners and the state of education, health and the media in the country.

Excerpts from the August 29, 2001 program "Burmese Perspectives" by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) highlight the views of two prominent ethnic representatives — U Khun Tun Oo, Chairperson of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy and Dr. U Saw Mya Aung, Chairperson of the Arakan League for Democracy — on the current 'Talks' and the possibility for a tripartite dialogue.

Interview with

INTERVIEW WITH THE STATE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL BY SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALIST PIERS PIGOU

OCTOBER 2, 2001

PIERS PIGOU • *What is the current political situation, in terms of negotiations with opposition groupings, both inside and outside of the country? Does this include the ethnic minority groups?*

SPDC • The Government of Myanmar is transitional in nature and is committed to the establishment of a democratic political system. Myanmar has had two constitutions since independence from Great Britain. The first, the 1947 Constitution, was abolished for a one-party socialist constitution in 1974. The second, in 1974, was also abolished in 1988 for a multi-party democratic system. For Myanmar to become a peaceful, prosperous, modern and developed nation, exercising multi-party democracy, a strong and enduring state constitution is a necessity.

After patient negotiations, 17 armed insurgent groups (all ethnic minorities) have returned to the legal fold and are working hand-in-hand with the Government. Not only are they engaged in developing their own regions, but they are actively participating, along with other political parties and representatives in the National Convention, a forum for political dialogue with the aim of laying down fundamental principles for the New State Constitution.

Once the New State Constitution has been adopted, a parliament will be convened and State power will be transferred to the democratically elected government. Some criticize that the National Convention is taking such a long time and they wish to see progress quickly. To that I must respond that a constitutional process is quite delicate and sensitive, one that must not be rushed and put under unnecessary pressure for it would only hinder the pace of democratization. Today's world is so full of examples where a hasty transition from one political system to another has resulted in chaos and disruptions including armed violence. We cannot let that happen to our country.

PIERS PIGOU • *What are the major difficulties and obstacles in these negotiation processes?*

SPDC • In my own personal opinion the major difficulties and obstacles in the negotiation process could well be the need for more mutual understanding, patience and to drop unrealistic demands in some cases. Taking negative views and confrontational attitude will surely hinder the advance to democracy in our country and pressure from outside can be counter-productive.

PIERS PIGOU • *Recent reports have indicated the release of a number of political prisoners over the last few months. There are reports that at least a further 1500 remain in custody. What is the prognosis for the release of all political prisoners? Is this a precondition for meaningful negotiations with the opposition groups?*

SPDC • The UN Special Envoy Mr. Razali Ismail must be credited with acting as the catalyst for dialogue between the Myanmar Government and the National League for Democracy.

The release of political prisoners can definitely be seen as a positive evolution in the relations between the Government and the NLD and is truly a sign of progress in the national reconciliation talks between the Government and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Reports stating that at least a further 1500 political prisoners remain in custody are not true and even make me wonder where they come up with those unreliable figures.

PIERS PIGOU • *What is the government's preferred course of action regarding the demands of ethnic minorities in Myanmar? Is a type of autonomy or federalism being considered as a possible option?*

SPDC • The areas where most the ethnic minorities reside are backward and economically poor because of insurgency before the advent of the present military government. Development of these areas and a better living standard are therefore the main demands of ethnic minorities. The present government has been able to

SPDC · SNLD · ALD

meet these demands mainly because (17) insurgent groups made up of ethnic minorities have returned to the legal fold and are co-operating with the government to develop their respective areas. Infrastructures such as roads, bridges, constructions are underway. A new Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races has been set up soon after the present government assume the powers of state, and billions of kyats as well as foreign currencies are being spent on the development of areas where ethnic minorities reside.

There are eight major national ethnic races in Myanmar under which there are altogether 135 different ethnic minorities. It has always been the belief of all that they are one and cannot be separated. Apart from a couple of ethnic minority insurgent groups, who are still against the government, representatives are all joining hands to draft a new constitution. Although a new constitution has yet to be completed there is a kind of consensus granting administrative autonomy to some minority groups.

PIERS PIGOU • *How important is the establishment of a democratic form of governance in Myanmar? How would you explain why it has been necessary for the military to play such a prominent political [role] in Myanmar in recent years?*

SPDC • Since assuming state responsibilities in September 1988 the military government had suspended the one-party socialist system and socialist economy to pursue a multi-party democratic system with a market-oriented economy. The essence of democratic governance is to govern according to a constitution. Priority in the political sector was therefore given to emergence of a new constitution which will be compatible with the multi-party democratic system and which will also ensure peace and stability among the national races in the country. With this in mind elections were held in 1990 with the sole objective of electing the representatives to draft a new constitution. Although the drafting of a new constitution was initiated soon after elections, it was hampered and disrupted by the withdrawal of represen-

tatives from a main political party, which suddenly changed its position and began demanding the immediate transfer of power.

Myanmar has had two constitutions promulgated in the past based on a system of con-

The military believes that although the ethnic races may be small in number, they shall have a louder voice in the parliament, whereas the old system never gave the ethnic races any chance to have their voices heard and their desires appreciated.

SPDC

firmation by a majority plebiscite. But in Myanmar, where 70% of the population is Bamar, the old balloting system was regarded by the military as not fair and democratic and has changed the system to that of a consensus. By this consensus method the military believes that although the ethnic races may be small in number, they shall have a louder voice in the parliament, whereas the old system never gave the ethnic races any chance to have their voices heard and their desires appreciated.

Looking back into history it is evident that it is the old system that had created frustration and anger among the ethnic races that eventually led to armed insurgency. Armed insurrections throughout the country before the advent of the present military government are also found to have been created by previous politi-

Interview with

cal parties that concentrated their efforts only on party politics without giving any consideration to the stability of the entire nation.

The military, being an institution that is a neutral body in the country, is not interested in politics but when it comes to national affairs has to fulfill her commitments. The military, though it did not create any of the insurgencies, has taken the responsibility and initiative of bringing them into the legal fold and making them give up their armed insurrections.

Time and again in history, it has been proven that it is the military and not the political parties that have been able to keep the Union intact...

SPDC

The country has gone through bad times because of the way political parties acted in the past and also because of the inherent weakness of the former constitutions. Today to keep the country perpetually stable and to have a functioning democracy Myanmar has to have a strong and everlasting constitution, which will keep the country on the proper track.

Time and again in history, it has been proven that it is the military and not the political parties that have been able to keep the Union intact up to the present date. To preserve the present stability which has been achieved by the ability of the military to bring to legal fold the armed ethnic insurgencies the military has to continue playing a prominent role until a constitution that is compatible with a multi-party democratic system and that ensures peace

and stability among the national races has been drawn up and adopted for implementation.

PIERS PIGOU • *Does South Africa's own transition provide any lessons for the process in Myanmar?*

SPDC • Myanmar has always supported the South African people's struggle against apartheid. Myanmar did not have any relations with any of the Apartheid regimes and diplomatic relations with South Africa were established only after Nelson Mandela became the president of South Africa. A Myanmar delegation headed by Admiral Maung Maung Khin, Vice Premier of the Union of Myanmar, attended the inaugural ceremony of President Mandela. When Mr. Thabo Mbeki succeeded Mandela as president, Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) also visited South Africa to attend the inauguration.

Both Myanmar and South Africa are members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Myanmar is aware that South Africa, as the current Chairman of NAM, will continue to play an important role in enhancing the interests of all NAM members. Myanmar is witnessing that South Africa has also been playing an active role in promoting the causes of all developing nations. There is a need for both sides to concentrate on bilateral relations between the two countries.

PIERS PIGOU • *What is the current situation regarding the provision of university education in Myanmar? The government is deliberately keeping a number of institutions closed or transferring them out of the capital. What is happening in this area?*

SPDC • I would like to reject the accusation that the government is deliberately keeping a number of institutions closed or transferring them out of the capital as totally untrue.

On the contrary separate universities and colleges were being extended in the respective fields such as industrial, agricultural, technological and cultural sectors. In addition to Yangon, where all the institutions of higher learning in all fields have been located in the

SPDC · SNILD · AI

past, duties were being assigned to the respective ministries to give close supervision to the higher learning sector, regional requirements were being provided and universities and colleges were being extended and upgraded in all the states and divisions to enable students to pursue higher education in their own regions. At present there are 125 institutions of higher learning, i.e., 55 universities, 40 degree colleges and vocational colleges. In the health sector previously there were only four institutes. At present there are 13. Under the Ministry of Science and Technology there was only one technical institute and number of colleges in the past. Today there are three technological universities, two computer science universities and government computer colleges have been opened in all the states and divisions. Hence, there are 14 government technical colleges and 16 government colleges in the nation.

As there is an increase in the number of institutions, they are also being provided with modern electronic facilities in order to effectively uplift the advance, teaching and research programs with the introduction of labs, science labs and resource centers. Also doctorate courses have been extended in the universities of the nation. The Yangon University is conducting 16 doctorate courses of different studies, at Mandalay University, 11 courses of different subjects, and Yangon Institute of Economics, three courses on different fields. Five hundred and thirty PhD candidates are attending the courses. A total of 208 students are attending the 16 doctorate courses at the Yangon Technical University.

The above are the actual happenings in the field of higher education. Therefore, there is no truth at all in the accusations.

PIERS PIGOU • *What is the current situation regarding HIV/AIDS in Myanmar?*

SPDC • The first case of HIV/AIDS was detected in Myanmar in 1988. Due to its impact on social and economic developments and its threat to national security the prevention of HIV/AIDS is a national concern. The National

AIDS Committee was restructure in 1988. An HIV/AIDS Control Work Plan was developed in 1990 and a Technical Committee to observe and study its potential hazard was formed in 1995. Concerning the threat of AIDS epidemic there has been finger-pointing and HIV/AIDS is being used as a tool for politically motivated attacks. Only 40,000 people in Myanmar are HIV positive. However, monitoring the infected is difficult. Myanmar has no means of getting the exact data on how many cases there are. To test each person would cost around US\$2 and it cannot be afforded. Assistance has thus been sought from WHO [World Health Organization], but nothing sufficient has yet been received. Monitoring systems, however, must be started and they are being done with our own limited resources. The expenditure for AIDS prevention annually is 13 million *kyat*. The Government is cooperating with WHO, UNDP [United Nations Development Programme], UNICEF and UNAIDS in combating AIDS.

PIERS PIGOU • *Myanmar is frequently criticized regarding issues of press censorship and what are described as unnecessary controls over internet access and use of fax machines. Are these fair criticisms and what are the purposes of such restrictions?*

SPDC • Constructive criticisms are always welcome. However, most criticisms against Myanmar emanate from dissidents both inside the country and abroad who are facing difficulties in their efforts to discredit the government through the internet access and use of fax machines and other modern telecommunication facilities. Each and every government today is aware of the importance of Information Technology and essentiality of modern telecommunication facilities in the development of their economies. However, there are limitations, especially for a country like Myanmar, which is still engaged in rebuilding its infrastructures with limited resources to provide even a few with internet access. Therefore, priority of internet access are only

Interview with

given to potential entrepreneurs who are engaged in the development of the country's main economy. Even among the few who have internet access there are complaints against shortage of electricity supply, which are essential for their computers. Since the sole aim of the dissidents to gain access to internet is to discredit the government it is logical that access to internet and the use of fax machines by some need to be put under control.

PIERS PIGOU • *Why do you think Myanmar has gotten such bad coverage? What efforts are/will be made to address this?*

SPDC • It is regrettable that powerful Western media are allowing Myanmar dissidents to use their facilities to discredit the military government. Since the coverage or these media emanates from dissidents they can be nothing but bad coverage. The Myanmar media of course are countering this coverage with actual truths. However, radio and TV networks as well as the press disseminating actual truths concerning situations in Myanmar are so much handicapped that they are receptive only to a few countries. Nevertheless, efforts are being made to bring to light the true political situation in Myanmar and to prevent her image from being tarnished by powerful western media, who are allowing their facilities to be used by unscrupulous elements that are trying to destroy the nation.

BBC INTERVIEW WITH TWO ETHNIC REPRESENTATIVES, U KHUN TUN OO (SNLD) AND DR. U SAW MYA AUNG (ALD)

BBC • *Concerning the current talks between the junta and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, some ethnic organizations say the talks should be tripartite. They feel uncomfortable because the talks are only two-way. [As] leaders of parties that won seats in the [1990] elections, what are your opinions of the talks?*

U KHUN TUN OO • *To speak frankly, because of the current situation, the two-way discussion is good before there are tripartite talks. In our*

country, a crisis exists over every issue — economics, social issues, education, health care. We ethnic people can emphasize only our own issues. However, if we think about the country and the people, the two-way talks are suitable for now. This is not only my opinion, we discussed this when I met with Naing Tun Thein [Chairperson of Mon National Democratic Front, an ethnic party that won five seats in the 1990 elections], U Cin Shing Thang [Chairperson of Zomi National Congress, an ethnic party that won two seats in the 1990 election], U Aye Tha Aung [the secretary of the Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP)], and Daw Suu [Aung San Suu Kyi].

We want tripartite dialogue, but for now, two-way dialogue. Tripartite talks are also necessary because the ethnic issue should be presented and solved by ethnic people. I believe that two-way talks are the most suitable to [deal] with the current problem quickly.

BBC • *Do you believe Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who is representing the NLD in the current talks, is concerned with and is discussing the ethnic issue?*

KTO • *I assume that she is.*

BBC • *U Saw Mya Aung, have the ethnic people already discussed this issue with the NLD?*

U SAW MYA AUNG • *The ethnic people's opinion has already been mentioned. We have discussed this issue thoroughly, not only with the four ethnic parties, but also with the 25 parties from the UNLD and later with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi of the NLD. We've discussed how we are all going to live equally. We ethnic people need a federation. The parliament will decide to have a federation of eight states.*

BBC • *So, do you accept that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will represent the ethnic people while she is currently talking to the SPDC?*

SMA • *We assume that she will discuss general issues including the ethnic people. This is because we have talked about the federation of*

eight states many times before. Now, she is the one and only person who has contact (with the SPDC) to talk. She understands everything. Let her do her job. We believe that she will not do anything wrong (by us).

KTO • Currently, there is no tripartite discussion, only talks between two parties. It's good if Daw Aung San Suu Kyi talks about the ethnic issue. I hope she will. However, as I said before, only ethnic people know about the problems they have been suffering for years. Daw Suu alone or SPDC alone cannot solve the problem. To be acceptable, ethnic people have to present and discuss the issues with other ethnic people. The United Nations has already put forward guidelines for a tripartite dialogue. Two-way talks are important before this would begin. When there are conditions for reconciliation, we want talks to be tripartite. I hope it will happen.

BBC • *[UN Envoy] Mr. Razali Ismail is in Rangoon. You may have met him the previous time, will you be meeting him again? And if so what are you going to say to him?*

KTO • We have met before. And we are planning to meet with him again. The Chin, Karen, Shan, Mon and Arakanese plan to meet him. We are going to request that he suggest a two-way dialogue that will later become a tripartite dialogue. We are going to ask him to help in setting it up.

BBC • *U Saw Mya Aung, will you discuss with Mr. Razali Ismail freedom for the political leaders, including U Aye Tha Aung a prominent member of the in CRPP [Committee Representing the Peoples' Parliament].*

SMA • U Aye Tha Aung who was a key member of the ten-person CRPP committee was imprisoned for 21 years. He has been very close to death in the last few months and has been moved (from Insein Prison) to an intensive care unit in Rangoon General Hospital for treatment. We are very worried about him. As for my party, we are going to inform Mr. Razali of the

condition of U Tha Ban, one of our members, and U Aye Tha Aung, who is dying. The NLD sent a letter of request to Senior General Than Shwe (the chairperson of the SPDC), asking for the release of the political prisoners.

The United Nations has already put forward guidelines for a tripartite dialogue. Two-way talks are important before this would begin.

When there are conditions for reconciliation, we want talks to be tripartite.

U Khun Tun Oo

BBC • *Did U Aye Tha Aung's health condition deteriorate because he got sick or was there some other mistreatment to him?*

SMA • As a medical doctor, I met him before he was imprisoned. There were no signs that he would get ill. According to his family, he was made offers [by the SPDC] during the first two months of his arrest. When it did not work, he was forced to sleep on the concrete floor and his health condition began to deteriorate. He was put in the prison hospital. Finally, he was sent to Rangoon General Hospital when (the medical staff in prison) could not care for him as he was unable to breathe and in pain.... His family informed us of his health condition.

This interview was broadcast on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) program 'Burmese Perspectives' on August 29, 2001. It was translated from Burmese by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma).

A TWO-FOLD PATH

The Transition to Democracy and Federalism in Burma

BY LIAN H. SAKHONG



Ethnic representatives meeting with National League for Democracy leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon, in 1999. From left, Naing Thaung Shein (Mon National League for Democracy); Dr. Min Soe Lin (Mon National League for Democracy); U Kam Lian (Zomi National Congress); U Khun Tun Oo (Shan Nationalities League for Democracy); U Ngin Zin Paun (Zomi National Congress); Bo Nyo (People's Comrade League); U Onn Tin (Arakan League for Democracy); Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (National League for Democracy); U Fu Cin Shing Thang (Zomi National Congress); U Khun Htee (Co-signer of Panglong Agreement from Taunggyi, Shan State); U Aye Tha Aung (Arakan League for Democracy).

The political crisis in Burma today is not merely a confrontation between dictatorship and democracy. It involves an unmanaged and neglected conflict, including a civil war that has consumed thousands of lives and precious resources for nearly half a century.

The United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD), an umbrella political organization of non-Burman nationalities was formed in Burma in 1989¹ following the nationwide democracy movement against three decades of General Ne Win's dictatorship. From the very beginning, the UNLD adopted a policy aimed at the establishment of a genuine federal union based on democratic rights for all citizens, political equality for all nationalities and the rights of self-determination for all member states of the Union. It openly declared that democracy without federalism would not solve the political crisis in Burma.

Thus for the UNLD, the ultimate goal of Burma's democratic movement is not only to restore a democratic government, but to establish a genuine federal union. In other words, the UNLD views the root of the political crisis as a constitutional problem, rather than a purely ideological confrontation between democracy and dictatorship.

As Daw Aung San Suu Kyi correctly has pointed out, the struggle for democracy, equality and self-determination in present-day Burma is the struggle for a "second independence." For what Burma's leaders tried hard to achieve in the first independence movement was coercively negated by General Ne Win by the 1962 military coup. Moreover, the 1962 coup abruptly interrupted the Federal Movement, which was a struggle for the reformation of a genuine Federal Union in accordance with the Panglong Agreement of 1947.

The UNLD believes that in order to build a genuine Federal Union, the country's constitution must be based on a democratic administrative system. As noted by a Shan political analyst, "...democracy is an essential pre-condition for federalism. Federalism will not work in a polity where there is no democracy because federalism is about decentralization of power and the limits placed on power. In federalism that is achieved via a set of arrangements that limit

and divide or disperse power, so that parts of the whole are empowered and are further enabled to prevent the concentration of power."² Democracy and federalism are therefore inseparable in a pluralistic and multi-ethnic country like Burma.

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF A FEDERAL UNION

At the UNLD conference held in Rangoon, from June 29 through July 2, 1990, seven principles for the future constitution of the Federal Union of Burma were adopted. These principles were reconfirmed in 1998 and continue to serve as the guidelines for building a Federal union.

- (1) The constitution of the Federal Union of Burma shall be formed in accordance with the principles of federalism and democratic decentralization.
- (2) The Union Constitution shall guarantee the democratic rights of citizens of Burma including the principles contained in the United Nation's declaration of universal human rights.
- (3) The Union Constitution shall guarantee political equality among all ethnic national states of the Federal Union of Burma.
- (4) The Federal Union of Burma shall be composed of National States; and all National States of the Union shall be constituted in terms of ethnicity, rather than geographical areas. There must be at least eight National States, namely, Chin State, Kachin State, Karen State, Kaya State, Mon State, Myanmar or Burma State, Rakhine (Arakan State) and Shan State.
- (5) The Union Assembly shall consist of two legislative chambers: the Chamber of Nationalities (Upper House) and the Chamber of Deputies (Lower House).
 - (i) The Chamber of Nationalities (Upper House) shall be composed of equal numbers of elected representatives from the respective National States; and
 - (ii) The Chamber of Deputies (Lower House) shall be composed of elected representatives from the respective constituencies of the peoples.

The creation of a Chamber of Nationalities based on equal representation of the member states of the Union is intended to safeguard the rights of

UNLD Member Parties that won seats in the 1990 elections

Arakan League for Democracy	11 seats
Chin National League for Democracy	3 seats
Democratic Organization for Kayan National Unity	2 seats
Highlander Democratic Party (UNLD)	1 seat
Kachin State National Congress for Democracy	3 seats
Kaman National League for Democracy	1 seat
Karen State National Organization	1 seat
Kayah State All Nationalities League for Democracy	2 seats
Lahu National Development Party	1 seat
Mara Peoples Party	1 seat
Mon National Democratic Front	5 seats
Mro (Khami) National Solidarity Organization	1 seat
Naga Hills Regional Progressive Party	2 seats
Ta-ang (Palaung) National League for Democracy	2 seats
Union Danu League for Democracy	1 seat
Union Pa-O National Organization	3 seats
Zomi National Congress	2 seats

UNLD Members - Independents, that won seats in the 1990 elections

Hmuh Thang	Thantlang, Chin State	1 seat
Lian Uk	Haka, Chin State	1 seat

UNLD Affiliated Party that won seats in the 1990 elections:

Shan Nationalities League for Democracy	23 seats
Total	67 seats

National States and minorities in the Union government. It also intended as a symbol and instrument of the principle of equality among all nationalities of the Union.³

- (6) In addition to the Union Assembly, all member states of the Union shall form their own separate Legislative Assemblies for their respective National States. In federalism there must be a clear separation of the Union Assembly, or Federal Parliament, from the Legislative Assemblies of the member states of the Union. Moreover, the residual powers, that is, all powers except those given by member states to the federal center, or the Union, must be vested in the Legislative Assembly of the National State. In this way, the Union Constitution automatically allocates political authority of legislative, judiciary and administrative powers to the Legislative Assembly of the National States. Thus, all member states of the Union can freely exercise the right of self-determination through the right of self-government within their respective National States.

- (7) The Sovereignty of the Union shall be vested in the people of the Union of Burma, and shall be exercised by the Union Assembly. Moreover, the central government of the Federal Union shall have authority to decide on action for: (i) monetary system, (ii) defense, (iii) foreign relation, and (iv) other authorities temporarily vested in the central government of Federal Union by member states of the Union.⁴

UNLD POLICIES CONCERNING THE TRANSITION OF POWER

Following the elections of May 1990 — during which the UNLD and its affiliated parties won 67 seats or 16% of the parliament — the UNLD outlined steps to be applied during the transition from military rule to a democratically elected government. Among them were the holding of a tripartite dialogue and the convening of a national convention.

(a) UNLD on Tripartite Dialogue

From the very beginning, the UNLD has advocated for a non-violent political transition from military dictatorship to a democratic, open society. The UNLD believes that democracy is the only form of sustainable governance that can guarantee both individual citizens and national and cultural groups in Burma the right of full participation in the development of social, economic and cultural resources of the Union. Enduring democracy requires the active participation of all the citizens — as individual citizens and as members of an ethnic-cultural group — to build and renovate not only the democratic institutions, but also the structure of the Union itself, which shall balance the different interests of nationalities for the common good of all member states of the Union.

Dialogue is as an integral part of the political transition, not only in the process of power transformation from military rule to a democratically elected body, but in the entire process of democratization, which includes the restructuring of the Union into a federal system. Dialogue must be the main instrument for bringing individual citizens and collective members of the nationalities of the Union together at all levels. After the general election in 1990, the UNLD believed that at least two levels of dialogue might be necessary to achieve the goal of the creation of democratic open society and the

establishment of a genuine Federal Union. The first step of dialogue is for the purpose of power transformation. The second step, which is perhaps even more important, will be this process of democratization and the restructuring of the Union into a federal system.

The UNLD believes that because the NLD received the trust of the people in a landslide victory of the 1990 election, a dialogue for "transformation of power" should be a dialogue between the NLD — led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi — and the military. The nature of such dialogue at this first level must focus only on the transition of state powers to a democratically elected body. In other words, it will be a dialogue for administrative power, but not for legislative or constitutional power. The core of dialogue at this level is to create a "breakthrough" from the political stagnation that has created the political and social crises in Burma today.

In order to avoid further bloodshed and violence during the political transition, a second level of dialogue must start almost simultaneously with the first. The aim of dialogue at this second level is to address the broader political crisis in Burma and to end five long decades of civil war through the creation of a genuine Federal Union. Thus, the participation of all ethnic nationalities in the political transition is the most important element in the entire process of democratization and of restructuring the Union. Dialogue at this level must no longer be a two-way dialogue but a tripartite dialogue that shall include: the non-Burman nationalities, the democratic forces led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the military regime.

(b) The Need for a National Convention

At its conference in 1990, all the members of the UNLD unanimously adopted a policy on a national convention that states: In order to lay down the general guidelines of a federal constitution that will serve as the foundation on which to build a new democratic society for the future Federal Union, a National Consultative Convention shall be convened, similar to the Panglong Conference. It was envisaged that such a National Consultative Convention will ensure peace, unity and equality for all nationalities of the Union. Alternatively, it could be said that the National Consultative Convention would serve as a kind of forum for "peace talks" aimed at ending the

civil war that had consumed many lives and the country's resources for five decades.

The idea of the National Consultative Convention was discussed with the NLD, and on August 29, 1990, the UNLD and the NLD issued a joint declaration known as the *Bo Aung Kyaw Street Declaration*. This declaration included the following points:



UNLD delegates at Law Khii Lah's Ethnic Nationalities Seminar in August, 2001.

- (i) After the emergence of the *Pyithu Hluttaw* (Union Assembly or Federal Parliament), this *Hluttaw* shall form the elected government at the earliest time, then the *Pyithu Hluttaw* shall organize to convene a "National Consultative Convention" consisting of the representatives from all the nationalities and other persons that are deemed necessary to take part in this convention. This convention shall lay down general guidelines for the Constitution of the Union. The *Pyithu Hluttaw* shall draw up, approve and enact the constitution of the Union in compliance with above general guidelines.
- (ii) All nationalities shall have full rights of equality, racially as well as politically, and, in addition to having the full rights of self-determination, it is necessary to build a Union with a unity of all the nationalities that guarantees democracy and basic human rights.³

CONCLUSION

In the early 1960s, the Federal Movement was seen mainly as a separatist movement by the majority ethnic Burmese (Burman). Thus, the non-Burman

The Law Khii Lah Agreement August 30, 2001

Ethnic Nationalities leaders from major organizations met at the Law Khii Lah Camp, Kawthoolei, from August 26-30, 2001, and discussed the need for unity and closer cooperation in a fraternal spirit and atmosphere.

The leaders agreed on the need to strengthen the unity of the Ethnic Nationalities and a working committee, the Ethnic Nationalities Solidarity and Cooperation Committee (ENSCC), was thereby established. The committee has been entrusted with the task of fostering unity and cooperation between all Ethnic Nationalities forces and to promote a peaceful political settlement in Burma through tripartite dialogue.

The Ethnic Nationalities are cautiously optimistic about the talks held since October 2000 in Rangoon between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The Ethnic Nationalities leaders welcome and fully support the efforts of Ambassador H.E. Razali Ismail, the U.N. Special Envoy, to facilitate a peaceful settlement through a tripartite dialogue in Burma.

It was also resolved that the Ethnic Nationalities forces would:

- Undertake pro-active and constructive actions to bring about a peaceful resolution to the political conflict in Burma through a dialogue process

involving the SPDC, the NLD led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the Ethnic Nationalities as dialogue partners;

- Consult widely, cooperate, and work closely with all stakeholders in Burma and with the international community, international bodies and agencies, the U.N., and humanitarian organizations to resolve the grave humanitarian crises in Burma, which most seriously affect the Ethnic Nationalities population;
- Strive to facilitate an orderly and peaceful democratic transition in Burma, and to rebuild the country in accordance with the spirit of Panglong, the principle of Equality, Self-Determination, Democracy, and Justice.

Signatories:

1. Arakan Liberation Party (ALP),
2. Chin National Front (CNF),
3. Karen National Union (KNU),
4. Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP),
5. Lahu Democratic Front (LDF), and
6. Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF),
7. Pa-O People's Liberation Organization (PPLO),
8. Shan Democratic Union (SDU),
9. United Nationalities League for Democracy/Liberated Area (UNLD/LA)*
Other allied Ethnic Nationalities organizations

nationalities failed to receive support from their fellow citizens, the Burman majority. By contrast, the movement towards federalism is now seen as the movement for equality. The UNLD now enjoys strong support from all the democratic forces in Burma, especially the National League for Democracy (NLD), the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB), the National Democratic Fronts (NDF), the All Burma Students' Democratic Fronts (ABSDF), and other democratic forces. They all agree that the ultimate goal of the democracy movement in Burma is the establishment of a genuine federal union, where all indigenous nationalities can live peacefully together. This unity is the best hope not only for the UNLD but also for the future of Burma.

ENDNOTES

1 The UNLD was unilaterally dissolved by the State Law and Order Council (SLORC) in 1992. Thus the UNLD in exile was formed in the liberated area in order to carry out the mission of the organization. An official announcement on the forma-

tion of the UNLD/LA (in exile) was made on Union Day, 1998.

2 Chao Tzang Yawngnwe, "On Federalism," a posting on the internet, 1998.

3 As James Madison once explained regarding the role of the Senate in the USA, the role of the Chamber of Nationalities will be "first to protect the people against their rulers, and secondly to protect against the transient impressions into which they themselves might be led."

4 The protocols of the UNLD's Second Conference, held at the YMCA Hall, Rangoon from June 29-July 2, 1990.

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He has written extensively on history and politics in Burma, including the book, Peaceful Co-existence: Towards a Federal Union of Burma (1999) and the soon-to-be published, In Search of Chin Identity: A Study in Religion, Politics and Ethnic Identity in Burma (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies/Cuzon Press, London).

Myanmar's Minority Conundrum

ISSUES OF ETHNICITY AND AUTHORITY

DAVID I. STEINBERG

This article is excerpted from the author's presentation during the conference "At the Front Lines of Conflict Prevention in Asia" held in Tokyo July 6-7, 2001.

Many observers outside Myanmar have been encouraged by the private dialogue that began in October 2000 between members of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD). The United Nations Special Representative Ambassador Razali Ismail has been active in pursuing this welcome initiative, and his involvement

in Myanmar has so far been positive. Yet there are many who remain skeptical about the potential for success and even the use of such a term is certainly defined by the interests of each of the parties. Although cosmetic changes seem possible, it is highly unlikely that the military will give up essential power. The lack of inclusion of Myanmar's ethnic minorities in the dialogue also encourages such skepticism.



The issue of the status and authority of the one-third of Myanmar's population composed of diverse indigenous non-Burman peoples remains the most intractable of the problems facing the Burmese state since independence in 1948. The sharing of political power in a manner that insures social and economic equality for all people of Myanmar is per-

haps a more difficult and fundamental issue than what political form the government will take.

That ethnic representatives are not included in today's 'talks' has been a concern of many, including Ambassador Razali. At the time of this writing, however, there seems to be no movement toward this end. While the opposition feels the incorporation of ethnic representatives is premature, it may also be true that the government would rather isolate the NLD and its leadership from the minorities.

The role of the country's minorities in this process is critical because the NLD is essentially a Burman party. Although the NLD overwhelmingly won in the 1990 election, they were in alliance with a series of minority political parties as well. This alliance was forged despite a profound lack of trust between the Burman majority and individual minority groups and this mistrust has been exacerbated over time. In their efforts to maintain what they view as "national unity," the *Tatmadaw* has engaged in actions that have extended the distance between the Burman majority and the ethnic minorities, and thus made more tenuous the relationships between them. These actions may have been in response to varied stimuli such as perceived internal threats to the state (sometimes encouraged from foreign sources), attempts to ensure internal military hegemony over all centers of power within the state, and an essential disdain of minority cultures and peoples,

Still, in the early period following the establishment of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the NLD position (or more accurately that of Aung San Suu Kyi) seems to have been that the solution to minority issues could be easily resolved following the re-institution of democracy, and thus discussion of specific minority questions should be delayed until a later date. That may not be possible. The National Convention that the SLORC sporadically convened in the years that followed the 1990 elections was charged with drawing up a new constitution with a highly select group of delegates and in a heavily scripted and controlled manner. The process of drafting a constitution has floundered on the issues of minority representation and power, although the state organs of information have managed to leak certain "guidelines" on minority rule that are likely to be enshrined within such a document, whenever it may appear.

The first of these guidelines is that the former minority 'states' (Shan, Kachin, etc.) are inappropriate as pivotal administrative entities because such territorial distinctions are based upon inaccurate descriptions of 'race.' That is, these areas contain many minority groups besides the ethnic group for which the state was named (Chin State is an exception).

Second, in order for some of the most important ceasefires to continue, certain groups with concentrated ethnic populations within contiguous townships would have a degree of local autonomy called 'self-administered zones.' This is particularly critical for the Wa, who are the best armed and most difficult to contain. Others are said to be planned for the Naga, Danu, Kokang, Pa-O, and Palaung peoples.

This is an effective but short-term strategy. It provides such groups with local autonomy that post-independence governments have never permitted. At the same time, it diffuses power to such a local level that it can have no national impact. The model for such activity may be drawn from the Chinese 'autonomous regions,' where minority groups enjoy limited local authority but lack any real political power. The Chinese model may appeal to the Burmese more than, say, the Russian model, which they may view as having contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

If the British engaged in a 'divide and rule' policy, it can also be charged that the military is intent on a similar approach, but in a modern context. By following this course, however, the Burmese authorities would hope to exonerate themselves to the outside world, having granted more autonomy to minorities than any previous government, civilian or military. This will be at least accurate in part, although misleading as a whole. The *Tatmadaw* may believe, however, that such an approach should satisfy foreign critics who harp on human rights.

SUGGESTIONS FOR POTENTIAL RESOLUTION OF MINORITY PROBLEMS

The solution to the internal distribution of political power in Myanmar must result from actions taken by the Burmese people themselves. Yet foreigners do have a role in reinforcing the potential for accommodation and progress. The first step towards effecting such progress may be to recognize and respect the real concerns of the military for maintaining national unity.

These concerns are not simply state-generated propaganda, as is sometimes charged by foreign observers. The problem of internal unity has had external dimensions. The Burmese military has been preoccupied with national unity; senior staff has been suspicious of the role that foreign nations and peoples have played in fomenting national fragmentation and they accurately can point to history to support their contentions (as they do repeatedly in the controlled press).

For example, they correctly charge that the British employed the policy of administratively separating some of the peripheral minority areas from Burma Proper (where most of the Burmans lived). More important has been recent history, when many foreign powers — unofficially and often clandestinely — have supported political rebellions involving minority peoples. Among the many prominent examples of this are the 'unofficial' encouragement of Karen independence by the British, Chinese assistance to the Burma Communist Party, United States covert support of Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang) troops who retreated into Burma in 1949-50, external Islamic support of Muslim rebels in the Arakan, Indian involvement with Naga and Chin (Zo) rebels on Burma's Western border, and Thai assistance at various national and local levels to a wide variety of ethnic and political rebellions located along its long border with Burma.

However accurate the perceptions of foreign support to various diverse minorities may have been in the past, the situation has vastly changed since the early days of Burmese independence. Clearly, no foreign power today wants to see the break-up of the Burmese state. The balkanization of Myanmar would create conditions of potential chaos in the country, a pivotal state that has become the nexus of a tacit regional rivalry between India and China.

Perhaps one way to address this concern of maintaining national unity is for the ASEAN Regional Forum (ASEAN together with China, the U.S., and other powers) to reaffirm the territorial integrity of the state of Myanmar. This simple act of recognizing the status quo is seemingly redundant, yet it could be a step toward reassuring the military of the validity of its paramount concern — national unity.

Private foreign organizations and the international non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

have potentially important roles to play as well. The military does not have the budget, the knowledge, or the trust of the local populations to solve the economic issues that ethnic people face. Often deprived of their ancestral villages and agricultural land, moved into safe-areas where their actions can be monitored by the military and where they can be prevented from being sympathizers of, or bases for, potential insurgents, these peoples desperately need basic human needs assistance. At present, this must

As foreign perceptions have changed, most minority aspirations have also undergone major shifts. Where some minority leaders in the past had publicly advocated independence... most now do not.

come, if it is to be provided at all, from the international NGO community. Such assistance is in the interests of all parties, for it helps build local coalitions and organizations that can band together to resolve local problems. This, in turn, contributes to the social and economic stability of the region — a desirable development that would in fact strengthen the military's primary goal of national unity. The long-range goal is the re-creation of civil society at the local level in Myanmar — a step that would foster local pluralism (not independence), and would train foreign specialists on that society.

The second step would be for a compromise by the various players on the issue of local autonomy. As foreign perceptions have changed, most minority aspirations have also undergone major shifts. Where some minority leaders in the past had publicly advocated independence — or some types of UN trusteeship — most now do not. They have instead argued for a form of local autonomy or federal authority (although the word 'federal' seems anathema to the military, who equate it with virtual independence and the eventu-

al effective break up of the state). Most realize that independence of any of the regional groupings within Myanmar would not be economically sustainable, and could lead to the kind of 'ethnic cleansing' we have witnessed in other parts of the world.

The provision of local autonomy to specific minority groups, as presently envisaged by the government under its proposed 'self-administered areas,' could be maintained as a sign of progress. Such autonomy could be limited to customary and family law, inheritance, some forms of local taxation, etc. At the same time, some of the previous administrative functions of the seven states and divisions could be maintained and their representation built into a national legislature, though not necessarily specifically on the model of the 1947 constitution. These two administrative layers would not necessarily be inconsistent with each other. As the center devolves authority to the state and divisions, so the states could cede certain types of authority to the townships. Most of the groups governing under such systems of local 'self-administration' would enjoy the greatest degree of autonomy they have experienced, though groups such as the Shan and Kayah would see their former limited autonomy during the civilian period erode further.

These approaches themselves would be inadequate without the military receding into the background in minority areas. This would involve the military retaining responsibility for the maintenance of the borders and the garrison of troops necessary to ensure the preservation of the state and to deal with such issues as transnational crimes, including narcotics trafficking, illegal migration, etc. It would however, necessitate the involvement of military in the training of minority peoples in aspects of local public administration starting long before such a new system were to come into effect — perhaps over a two-year period. An administrative cadre needs to be created to take over the administration of township and state-level offices and functions, now run by the military. Those remaining from the previous civilian era are too few, old and outdated to staff the positions that would be required under such a system. Because continuation of direct military administration, even under a 'civilianized' administration, would exacerbate tensions, staged military withdrawal from local administration is integral to any

plan to address minority issues. The devolution of significant authority in local affairs should not alone be concentrated in minority regions. The Burman divisions also should be included, because the 1990 election indirectly indicated dissatisfaction with the lack of local participation in the administrative processes.

Budgetary issues have long been a problem, tied to minority policy debates; as far back as the civilian period minority groups protested the inadequate share of national resources allotted to them. A more effective and equitable system for distributing resources needs to be established in consultation with various minority groups. Budgetary arrangements under present conditions would require that the percentage of funding going to the military budget (that which is both officially and publicly recognized and that which is buried in other accounts) be reduced, for without sufficient economic incentives any solution to the minority issues will not take place.

The area of language policy is another point critical to an effective minority policy. Local state and/or township authority should extend to educational systems, in which local languages may be taught as long as the national language of Burmese is also included in the curriculum. This has not been possible under any previous Burmese administration, and the change would likely be greeted with enthusiasm by local people. Language is a critical indicator of identity and its preservation and use has become intimately associated with nationalism. Language policy thus has been a critical component of ethnic complaints on every continent, even inciting rebellion (witness Sri Lanka).

The granting of certain rights to minorities is necessary but not sufficient. Ironically, as the state loosens control over the peripheral minority areas, it must also tighten control over the military command system. The regional military commanders, who have been elevated to inclusion in the SPDC, need to come under central authority to control their arbitrary actions that only serve to undercut centrally mandated change. Some regional commanders have become the equivalent of warlords with wide discretionary authority. Furthermore, they have remained in their posts far longer than in previous administrations, thus strengthening their control. The state should redefine their nonmilitary

functions, reducing their authority over civilian administration and control.

Finally, the military should actively recruit (as they once did) minorities into the senior military leadership. There seems little question that the military will retain effective and ultimate power within any likely government over the next decade or two as they have done since independence. Some positions, however, should be opened to civilian leadership and retired military, and opposition parties should be allowed to function more fairly. This could occur through military representation in a national legislature and through other means. The military, which has dichotomized society into an ascendant military and a subservient civilian (of any ethnic background) sphere should share power with minorities who can rise within the military ranks as evidence of the fairness of the government and as a means to alleviate ethnic discrimination.

CONCLUSION

These suggestions are unlikely to be instituted out of hand, yet they could constitute the beginnings of a set of compromises with important implications for the defusing of the antagonisms that have caused the loss of so many lives over so many years and impoverished what should have been rich and vibrant regions of the country. If the immediate problems of the minorities can be assuaged then the lessons from that process could assist any central government through creating administrative and representational models. Final authority essentially would remain in Burman hands, but under a system regarded as much more fair. Because the military bears the mantle of power and authority, it must assume greater responsibility to initiate a process devoted to the attenuation and eventual resolution of Myanmar's ethnic tensions.

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BURMA'S EX-



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"Flying Golden Sheldrake"

The Mon Ceasefire & Political Transition

Following a half-century of civil war — the longest running of such conflicts in the world — the late 1980s and 1990s saw the majority of Burma's insurgent armies agree to ceasefires with the military government in Rangoon. Although the Karen National Union (KNU), once the most powerful of Burma's armed ethnic nationalist organizations, still fights on in the jungles of southeast Burma, the conflict seems to be entering a protracted end-stage.

The situation of a number of well-armed ex-communist militias in northern Burma has attracted considerable attention, as many of these 'ceasefire groups' have been active in narcotics and amphetamines production, the social effects of which are being felt in Thailand and the West. These groups have been accused of abandoning any vestiges of political ideology in order to concentrate on enriching their leaders through kickbacks and supporting the SLORC-SPDC regime by participating in the state-controlled constitution drafting process. Another subset of the fifteen-or-so officially recognized ceasefire groups, however, has largely eschewed the

INSURGENTS

BY ASHLEY SOUTH

drug trade (although these groups have enthusiastically participated in logging and other forms of natural resource extraction).

Unlike Burma's ex-communist insurgents, ceasefire groups such as the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), have remained politically active, though their influence on events from 'within the legal' fold has been severely restricted. (This has also been the case with all political parties.) Nevertheless, since the ceasefire, Mon nationalists — including those who never took up arms, or had long ago renounced armed conflict — have found some limited space within which to work for the development of 'civil society' in their community. Progress in the fields of human and political rights has been minimal, however, and critics have accused NMSP leaders of achieving little by means of the ceasefires, while helping to legitimize the military regime.

Having given up their largely symbolic armed opposition to Rangoon, the NMSP and other ceasefire groups are in danger of becoming marginalized within their own communities unless they can reinvent themselves as post-ceasefire political (and/or development) organizations. Already since 1995, six ex-Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) splin-

ter groups (three in NMSP Tavoy District, two in Mergui District, and a new faction that emerged this September) have gone back to war with the *Tatmadaw*, although none has represented a significant military challenge. At present, it seems unlikely (although not impossible) that the mainstream NMSP, led by the octogenarian Nai Shwe Kyin, will resume the armed conflict.

The party, therefore, is faced with three sets of options. First, it might ignore critics among the opposition and in the West and engage with Rangoon — if not politically, then at least on economic and 'development' projects (although the latter are often associated with human rights abuses). Alternatively, the party may avoid all but low-level cooperation with the military regime and support the democracy movement led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD. This latter option is, of course, unlikely to be compatible with successful business ventures, or the smooth implementation of development and education initiatives in government-controlled areas. To work with the NLD is to invite the wrath of the *Tatmadaw* and the military intelligence apparatus.

Since the mid-1990s, the NMSP has tended to oscillate between these two strategic poles. At key moments, the party has supported the NLD,

attempting to pressure the SLORC/SPDC into reform. It has sought to represent the ethnic nationalist agenda, both within the democracy movement and internationally. During times of crisis, however, the NMSP has been forced to back down and acquiesce to the government line. Unsurprisingly, such inconsistency has provoked criticism, both from the SLORC/SPDC and the opposition. It has also led to power struggles and defections within NMSP ranks.

Damned if they do, and damned if they don't — and with little room for maneuver in between — NMSP leaders have attempted to 'keep their powder

dry', waiting for a sea-change in Burmese politics around which to align their actions. However, this is in many ways the most dangerous policy. The party is currently in the throes of an economic, political and, above all, identity crisis, which threatens to undermine the bases of its support. Without substantive change, the NMSP faces further political marginalization.

It should be noted that the NMSP is not the only Mon player on the political stage. The Mon political scene is heterogeneous and features a number of impressive individuals and groups. In addition to a number of small, 'unreconstructed' armed

Ceasefire - Ethnic Armies

	Leader	Ceasefire	Strength
ARAKAN STATE:			
1. Rakhine State All National Races Solidarity Party	Saw Tun U	06 Apr. 97	100 men
KACHIN STATE:			
1. Kachin Independence Organization/Army	Tu Jai	01 Oct. 93	5,000 men
2. New Democratic Army	Sakhone Ting Yin	15 Dec. 89	400 men
KAREN (KAWTHOLLEI) STATE:			
1. Democratic Karen Buddhist Army	Tha Htoo Kyaw	Dec. 94	1,000 men
2. National Karen Peace Army (former KNU)	Tha Mu Hel	Feb. 97	50 men
3. Phado Aung San Group (former KNU)	Phado Aung San	17 Apr. 97	10 men
KAYAH (KARENNDI) STATE:			
1. Kayan National Guards	Gabriel Byan	27 Feb. 92	200 men
2. Karenni Nationalities Peoples Liberation Front (PDF)	Htun Kyaw	09 May 94	300 men
3. Kayan Newland Party	Shwe Aye	26 Jul. 94	150 men
MON STATE:			
1. New Mon State Party	Nai Shwe Kyin	29 Jun. 95	1,500 men
SHAN STATE:			
1. Kachin Defence Army	Mahtu Naw	11 Jan. 91	500 men
2. Myanmar National Democracy Alliance	Hpong Kyar Shin	31 Mar. 89	1,300 men
3. National Democracy Alliance Army	Sai Lin	30 Jun. 89	4,000 men
4. Pa-O National Organization	Aung Kham Hti	18 Feb. 91	300 men
5. Palaung State Liberation Party	Ai Mone	21 Apr. 91	800 men
6. Shan State Army	Sai Nong/Hso Hten	24 Sep. 89	1,500 men
7. Shan State (National) Army	Kang Yod		6,000 men
8. Shan State Nationalities Peoples Liberation Organization	Tha Kalei	09 Oct. 94	300 men
9. United Wa State Army	Pao Yuchang	May 89	15,000 men
10. MongTaiArmy	Khun Sa	02 Jan. 96	became SSNA, SSA*
	Total:	20 groups	38,410 men

*SSA and SSNA now come under Hso Hten in the Shan State Peace Committee

groups — active along the Thailand border, several local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and religious groups have emerged in Mon state over the past few years, and have often taken the lead in working for community development. And although three of the five Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) Members of Parliament elected in 1990 are currently in jail (one is in exile), the front remains an important example of Mon politicians' ability to mobilize support, based on a political and cultural heritage that has permeated lower Burma for centuries.

MON NATIONALISM AS A CASE STUDY

Pre-colonial Mon Civilization. The more than one million Mon people living today in Burma and neighboring Thailand constitute an ethnic minority. However, this has not always been the case.

From early in the first millennium and for a period of more than a thousand years, Mon and Khmer kings ruled over much of mainland Southeast Asia. Across northern and central Thailand until six or seven hundred years ago, and in central and lower Burma for another three hundred years, the bulk of the population were ethnic Mons — the people of the Golden Sheldrake. The classical period of Mon history came to an end in 1757, when the Burman warrior-king Alaungphaya defeated the last Mon ruler of Pegu. Thousands of his followers were driven into exile in Ayuthaiya (Thailand), where they settled in the border areas adjoining Burma.

Mon civilization was among the most distinctive and influential in precolonial Southeast Asia. Significant aspects of the language, art and architecture, political and legal arrangements and, above all, the religion of the great Thai and Burman civilizations were derived from the earlier Mon society, which acted as a vector in the transmission of Theravada Buddhism and Indianized culture to the region. This civilizing role helps to explain the enduring prestige attached to the Mon heritage across mainland Southeast Asia.

Mon nationalists have looked back to the classical era as a golden age, a source of inspiration and legitimacy. They have struggled to defend the historical Mon identity from assimilation into that of the Burman and Thai majorities. Although, by the nineteenth century, the era of Mon political ascen-

dancy was past, the language and culture survived and, in some cases, thrived.

The Colonial Era. The question of whether discrete ethno-national identities pre-existed or were a product of the eighteenth century Mon-Burman wars and one-and-a-quarter centuries of colonial rule has been tackled by a number of scholars. Although the British period saw considerable further absorption of the Mon language and culture into the Burman center, sectors of the old Mon elite remained secure in their identity, based as on the achievements of the pre-colonial civilization.

As traditional social, economic and political structures were overthrown and replaced by an administration geared to the needs of British India, members of the Burman majority found themselves marginalized within the colonial state, with little reason to identify with its ethos or structures and yet considerable reason to resent those (such as the Karen) who did. When, in the 1920s and '30s, colonial rule came under assault from a militant new generation of well-educated Burmese nationalists, the institutional weakness of a potentially independent state of Burma became apparent. With the traditional polity destroyed and the colonial state increasingly discredited, different parties put forward competing, more-or-less articulate ideas of a future Burma.

Until the eve of the Second World War, Mon political activity was largely conducted from within the mainstream Burmese nationalist movement. Mon students participated in the 1920 University Students' strike, and the Mon politician, U Chit Hlaing, served for several years as president of the General Council of Burmese Associations, the first overtly political movement in modern Burma.

In 1939, the All Ramanya Mon Association (ARMA) was established by U Chit Hlaing and colleagues in Rangoon. The majority of post-war Mon leaders were at one time or another members of the ARMA, and the association is regarded as the forerunner of the modern nationalist movement. Its official objective was the preservation of Mon language, culture and religion. The association was reluctant to play a more active political role, for fear of fragmenting the burgeoning Burmese nationalist movement.

However, following the war, in November 1945, Nai Po Cho, a Moulmein-born Christian and English lecturer at Rangoon University, formed the United Mon Association (UMA), the first overtly political Mon organisation of modern times. At first the UMA worked closely with Aung San's AFPFL. However, it soon became apparent that the Burman war veterans in the AFPFL and *Tatmadaw*, who were in the forefront of the drive for independence, regarded Burma a unitary state, and had little sympathy for the nascent Mon cause.

Although critics have accused the ceasefire groups of profiting financially from these agreements, this has only been true of the narco-traffickers in northern Burma.

Independence and Civil War. As they were not regarded as residents of the 'Frontier Areas', the Mon were not represented at the historic February 1947 Panglong Conference. Instead, the majority of Mon leaders preferred to throw in their lot with the ambitious Karen nationalist leadership.

Although twenty-four seats had been reserved for the Karen, they boycotted the 9th April 1947 elections to the Constituent Assembly, as did Nai Po Cho's UMA, which had by this time become disillusioned with the lack of recognition granted to Mon claims within the AFPFL. According to Nai Shwe Kyin, the 1947 poll was rigged, and despite vigorous campaigning and strong support from their own community, the seven independent Mon candidates all failed to win any seats.

The first armed Mon organization of modern times, the Mon National Defence Organisation (MNDO), was established in Moulmein in March 1948. It was modeled on the Karen National

Defence Organisation (KNDO), which had been set up by Mahn Ba Zan in July the previous year as the armed wing of the KNU. Although originally conceived of an organization for the *defense* of the Mon community from marauding Burman militias, the MNDO soon took the political offensive.

On July 20, 1948 a small group of Mon rebels seized weapons from Zarthabyin police station in southern Moulmein District, before raising the sheldrake flag and declaring their intention to fight for Mon autonomy, within the newly-independent Union of Burma. Six weeks later, the MNDO, together with the KNDO and Karen policemen, took control of the key port of Moulmein. They withdrew after a few days, before going back underground at Insein, in late January 1949 (the battle from which the start of the Mon and Karen insurgencies is usually dated).

Following the development of ideological fissures within the movement, and after a number of battle-field defeats, more than a thousand Mon troops agreed a ceasefire with the U Nu regime on 12th July 1958, two months before the first Ne Win coup (in total, about 5,500 insurgents 'returned to the legal fold' in 1958). Within a week, a small band of activists, led by Nai Shwe Kyin, had established the NMSP — the vanguard of the armed Mon nationalist movement for the next forty years.

In March 1962 Ne Win and the *Tatmadaw* again captured the state, in order to defend and project a unitary idea of the nation, the origins of which lay in the colonial era and Second World War. Throughout the Ne Win era, Burma's communist and ethnic insurgents fought on.

Like the KNU and KIO, the NMSP was a leading member of the National Democratic Front (NDF) and Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), fighting a series of (mostly losing) battles against the *Tatmadaw*, during which attitudes to the conflict in Burma hardened on all sides. As a result of the fighting, and the *Tatmadaw's* brutally effective counter-insurgency strategy, millions of civilians across Burma became displaced, including tens of thousand within Mon State (a largely artificial entity gazetted under the 1974 constitution).

In 1990 the first regular Mon refugee camps were established in Thailand, where nearly 50,000 Karen and Karenni refugees were already living

along the border, further to the north. By 1995, all but three thousand of the ten thousand Mon refugees had been more-or-less forcibly repatriated by the Thai military authorities (the last Mon refugees in Thailand, living at Pa Yaw, were repatriated in 1996). Through the relocation of civilian victims of the civil war, the Royal Thai Army and National Security Council pressured the NNSP into agreeing to a ceasefire with Rangoon, which in turn would open the way for the economic exploitation of newly 'pacified' parts of lower Burma.

Although they continued to receive limited assistance from Thailand-based NGOs, the repatriated Mon refugees enjoyed no real protection as was demonstrated on July 21, 1994, when the *Tatmadaw* attacked Halochanee camp, to which some 4,000 Mon refugees had recently been moved. In the face of attacks on its civilian support base, and continued economic and political pressure from the Thai authorities, on 29th June 1995 an NMSP delegation in Moulmein finalized a ceasefire with the SLORC. The terms were similar to those agreed with the KIO in 1994, under which the ex-insurgents would continue to control some 'liberated zones' in the countryside, but be largely excluded from mainstream national politics. In return, they would receive limited 'development assistance' from the regime. These terms, however, turned out to be something of a poisoned chalice.

NON-CEASEFIRE GROUPS AND CEASEFIRE GROUPS

The KNU, et al. If the KNU was going to make a ceasefire with Rangoon, then it would have been in a far stronger negotiating position before the fall of its Mannerplaw headquarters in January 1995, than afterwards. The KNU was further weakened by the loss of its remaining 'liberated zones', during the *Tatmadaw's* 1997 dry season offensives (which also targeted a NMSP break-away faction in the southern Mergui District). Since the mid-1990s, the KNU leadership has chosen to make a virtue of necessity, refusing to negotiate with Rangoon (despite some hesitant 'talks about talks'), without the inclusion of a substantive political element in any talks.

The persistence of Karen insurgency, though probably militarily insignificant to the SLORC-

SPDC, bears considerable symbolic importance; General Bo Mya and colleagues are mindful of their place in history. Meanwhile, Burma's one million-plus internationally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, including many tens of thousands of Mons and Kachins, continue to suffer abuses, largely at the hands of the *Tatmadaw*.



A march for solidarity for the national identity of the Mon people, Mon State, 1999.

Since 1995, individual NMSP officers have kept up low-level contacts with their erstwhile allies. However, on more than one occasion, the government has punished the NMSP for maintaining these contacts by withdrawing Mon economic concessions.

The Ex-Insurgents. Although critics have accused the ceasefire groups of profiting financially from these agreements, this has only been true of the narco-traffickers in northern Burma. Since the ceasefires, the coffers of both the NMSP and KIO have been depleted due to limited opportunities to collect 'taxes' in areas previously patrolled by their troops. These resources have been only partially replaced with revenues from business enterprises and assistance from the SLORC/SPDC that supplies the NMSP with cash to buy rice. The ex-insurgents have not demonstrated much commercial acumen: while the NMSP-controlled Rehmonya International Company has made money from logging (and to a certain extent, fishing) licenses, its trading and transport ventures have not flourished.

The NMSP continues to be prone to splits and internal power struggles (as does the KIO: on 24th February 2001 General Zau Mai was forcibly replaced as KIO Chairman by a group of 'Young Turks'). However, despite the dangers of being compromised, corrupted or emasculated by the relationship with Rangoon, the Mon ceasefire has also presented the NMSP new opportunities to work among communities inside Burma, while maintaining limited liberated zones in the border areas.

Over the 1995-96 academic year, the NMSP's Mon National Education Committee administered 283 schools, including eight in the refugee settlements, and 177 'mixed' institutions (state schools where Mon is sometimes taught after hours, its use being banned in the government's education system). Like the refugee relief operation, the Mon National School system was largely dependent on foreign donors. By 2001, there were 148 Mon National and 217 'mixed' Mon schools, teaching 51,050 pupils, approximately seventy per cent of whom lived in government-controlled areas.

In the late 1990s, Mon community workers began to develop fruitful contacts with Kachin and other indigenous NGOs in Burma. By 1999, the Mon Textbook Committee was printing materials in Moulmein rather than Bangkok: the party had reoriented itself towards a Burmese axis, after decades of dependency on Thailand. Developments in the field of education were not matched on the political front, despite KIO initiatives to develop an alliance of all ceasefire groups.

OTHER MON GROUPS — 'INSIDE' AND OUT

As well as various precariously positioned Mon armed groups in the border areas, a number of Mon NGOs developed in the 1990s among the refugee and activist populations in Thailand (and among the Thai Mon). These small groups enjoyed close links with Mon exiles in North America, Australia and Europe, and with the wider Burmese opposition. Their young members, many of whom were ex-NMSP personnel and tended to be at least partly supported by Western donors, concentrated on human rights reporting and political lobbying. Most of these organizations were members of the Mon Unity League, a nationalist umbrella front, which the NMSP left in 1999, when the league's

criticism of the SPDC became an embarrassment to the party's leaders in Rangoon and Moulmien.

Other sectors of the Mon nationalist community remained 'inside' Burma. As well as the MNDF (some members of whom founded an Overseas MNDF, in exile), these included Mon students and literary societies and fledgling local NGOs. Many of these groups were associated with the prestigious Mon *sangha*, which retained a distinct identity within the monkhood of lower Burma. The influence of the *sangha* cuts across all sectors of the Mon community in both Thailand and Burma, helping to integrate the people into the majority culture, while simultaneously retaining Mon characteristics.

The continued strength of this 'sleeping giant' was illustrated by the participation of members of the *sangha* in programs to revive and promote Mon language and culture. Together with the Mon Literature and Culture Committee, since 1996 the *sangha*'s Association for Summer Mon Literature and Buddhist Teachings Training has been at the forefront of a series of successful Summer Language Training campaigns, which in 2001 saw more than 45,000 (mostly state primary school) students take Mon language classes during the school holidays. This is surely testimony to the continued relevance of a distinctly Mon education to families across lower Burma. It also illustrates the degree to which the NMSP has been sidelined in recent years as the Mon community has struggled to maintain itself. This marginalization has been compounded by the party's inability to mitigate the ongoing human rights crisis or significantly influence the political process.

TALKS AND TRANSITION

Talks commenced between Aung San Suu Kyi (but not ethnic minority representatives) and the SPDC in October 2000. On 27th January 2001, a KIO spokesman went on record, in an interview with the DVB opposition radio station, welcoming the renewal of dialogue between the government and NLD. He hoped that the ceasefire groups would soon be involved in the discussions, which might develop into substantive negotiations. The DVB reported that the NMSP also supported the talks, but was wary of issuing a public statement to this effect.

Once again, developments in Rangoon are setting the ethnic nationalist agenda. A delegation

from the European Union visiting Burma declared that the talks offered the best prospect for change since 1990. While this may be the case, they also represent a potential threat to the ethnic nationalists. While the Burman political class remains divided between pro- and anti-democracy camps, the minorities are of some use as allies to both the government and opposition, and might therefore negotiate from positions of relative strength. However, ethnic nationalist politicians remember previous instances of Burman duplicity and fear the consequences of any deal struck in Rangoon without their participation. As members of the urban, predominantly Burman, political elite, NLD (and SPDC) leaders are members of a different political class from the veteran ethnic minority leaders. It is therefore not surprising that differences exist, especially at the level of political culture.

The issue is finely balanced. Most ethnic nationalist politicians are convinced of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's personal integrity. However, if the SPDC and NLD were to agree a common position, without consulting the minority groups, then these groups might again find themselves marginalized and overlooked as decisions regarding Burma's future were made in the capital.

Although the NLD promises future political participation for all ethnic groups, political changes in Rangoon would not necessarily translate into improvements in the troubled countryside. In fact, any upheaval is likely to involve further violence and suffering. Ethnic nationalist support for the urban democracy movement is therefore tempered by the reality of a powerful and divisive military regime.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, the international community has been slow to recognize the significance of the ceasefires. These agreements have undoubtedly strengthened the position of the *Tatmadaw* and allowed the military regime to make much of the ex-insurgents' 'return to the legal fold.' However, they have also created some political space within which Mon politicians and community leaders have begun to work on the rehabilitation and development of 'civil society'. Despite the ongoing repression of political and human rights, the sheldrake may yet fly again.

If the NMSP is to play a central role in this tentative revival, then the party will have to reinvent itself as a post-insurgent group, with a clear and relevant political vision. The ageing NMSP leaders will have to determine where they stand on the big issues of Burmese politics. In particular, the party must adopt a consistent policy towards the mainstream democracy movement (i.e. the NLD), and explain this position to constituencies inside Burma, on the border and overseas. Such political

If the NMSP is to play a central role in this tentative revival, then the party will have to reinvent itself as a post-insurgent group, with a clear and relevant political vision.

repositioning will have to be accompanied by a reconceptualization of democracy as a process — which must be reflected in the party's policy and practice — and not just an end-state, to be achieved in some distant future.

The international community can play a part here. As well as continuing to bring pressure on the SPDC to initiate political reform, foreign governments, UN and donor agencies, and International Governmental Organizations and NGOs must engage with and empower those non-regime groups attempting to work inside Burma under the most difficult of circumstances.

Ashley South is the author of the upcoming book, Mon Nationalism and Civil War in Burma: The Golden Sheldrake (Curzon Press, London, Spring 2002). He lived and worked with the Mon in Thailand for seven years and is currently studying at the University of London's School of Oriental and Asian Studies (SOAS).

BURMA AROUND THE WORLD



WASHINGTON, DC — The Free Burma Coalition held its weekend-long conference at American University from October 27-29. Panel speakers discussed official U.S. policy, updates on the situation inside Burma, and activism. Workshops focused on various activist campaigns.

U Win Naing, a Burmese national living in Tokyo and working for a member of the Japanese parliament, presented his views on Japanese-Burmese relations at the September 5th Burma Roundtable. Following his talk, State Department official David Schlaefer detailed U.S. perspective on Japanese policy as it relates to Burma.

The Washington Burma Roundtable is co-sponsored by Human Rights Watch/Asia, Jesuit Refugee Service, The International Center, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Refugees International. For more information contact Refugees International by phone: (202) 828-0110 or by fax: (202) 828-0819.

NEW ENGLAND — The New England Burma Roundtable met on October 9th to discuss lobbying strategies for supporting the Burma Freedom Act, (S 926 and HR 2211), and to plan upcoming actions.

The New England Burma Roundtable is an informal groups of individuals and organizations working to promote human rights and democracy in Burma. Meetings are held the second Monday of every month. For information contact Simon Billenness of Trillium Assent Management by phone: (617) 423-6655 Ext. 225 or by email: sbillenness@trilliuminvest.com

NEW YORK, NY — On October 14th, the Committee for the Revival of Burmese Literature sponsored the second annual Literature Talk, where noted writers U Tin Moe, Dr. Tin Maung Than, U Aung Saw Oo and Ko Aung Din gathered to discuss the deterioration of Burmese literature. The event took place at Sun Yat Sen School, in New York.

The New York Roundtable holds periodic meetings of organizations and individuals interested in Burma. For more information contact the Burma UN Service Officer by phone: (212) 338-0048 or by fax: (212) 338-0049.

SEATTLE, WA — The Burma Interest Group is a non-partisan forum attended by representatives of NGOs, businesses, academia and other interested parties that meets monthly to discuss Burma-related topics. For more information contact Larry Dohrs by phone: (206) 784-5742 or fax: (206) 784-8150 or email: burma@u.washington.edu.



LONDON — On November 8th the Britain-Burma Society hosted a slide and video presentation by Justin Watkins entitled "The Meaning of Wa." Watkins, a lecturer in Burmese at the School for Oriental and African Studies, recently traveled to the mountainous Wa homeland while conducting research for his

new Wa dictionary.

The Britain-Burma Society held its October Reception on October 3rd at the Medical Society of London, at which Ma Khin Khin Htwe performed traditional Burmese dance.

The Britain-Burma Society meets seven times a year to focus on cultural and historical issues and facilitate academic exchange. For more information contact Derek Brooke-Wavell by phone: 44-118-947-6874 or by fax: 44-118-954-6201 or email: d.wavell@ntlworld.com.



CANADA — The Toronto Burma Roundtable meets monthly to discuss issues relating to Burma and to plan educational and political events. For more information contact Elizabeth Shepherd by phone: (416) 465-3458 or email: mandalay@sprint.ca.



NETHERLANDS — The Netherlands Burma Roundtable is held once every two months with the goal of updating organizations and individuals on current events and activities surrounding Burma. For more information contact The Burma Centrum Nederland by phone: 31-20-671-69-52 or by fax: 31-20-671-35-13.

SPDC SPEAKS

THOSE WHO DAREN'T SHOW THEIR FACE

The world is full of disheartening things and events. There are many persons who are devoid of common sense.

The ex-representative-elect Khin Kyaw Han of Yengyoung Township constituency was freed from custody on 28 June 2001. Later on 4 August, Khin Kyaw Han fled to Myanmar-Thai border. He is now associating with the fugitive terrorist insurgents who are taking refuge at the

Myanmar-Thai border where he, too, is living at present. He held a Press meet [*sic*] two days later at the border....

Khin Kyaw Han told big lies at the so-called Press meet. He said "Although the military government has freed the representatives-elect and the party members, we do not have the freedom of movement as the military intelligence is always watching our activities. For that reason, I

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**KARENNI NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE PARTY
STATEMENT NO. 04/01**

The statement of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) on the discussion between the Thai Defense Minister and the British Ambassador to Bangkok on national reconciliation in Burma.

We, the KNPP, warmly welcome the October 16, 2001 discussion between Thai Defense Minister General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and the British Ambassador to Bangkok, Mr. Lloyd Smith, on the national reconciliation program in Burma.

However, the KNPP believes that a final agreement on national reconciliation cannot be reached if the discussion is only between the SPDC and three ethnic nationalities armed opposition groups — namely the KNPP, Karen National Union (KNU) and Shan State Army (SSA). The KNPP believes that the reconciliation process must include talks between all the ethnic nationalities and democratic forces, once ceasefire agreements have been reached between the SPDC and the armed ethnic groups.

The KNPP would also like to see the SPDC accept and implement tripartite dialogue, as proposed by the UN, so that the problems of Burma can be solved by political means.

Central Committee
Karenni National Progressive Party
Date: October 17, 2001

The following interview with former political prisoner U Khin Kyaw Han was broadcast by the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) radio on August 7th, 2001. U Khin Kyaw Han was elected to parliament during the 1990 elections. He was arrested for the first time in 1992. Arrested again in 1998, U Khin Kyaw Han was released from prison on June 28th, 2001. He fled to the Thai/Burma border in August, for which he was criticized in Burma's state-controlled media.

U Khin Kyaw Han I gave it a very hard thought when I was back in Burma, whether to remain in the country or leave for the liberated area. Although they are saying that reconciliation talks are under way, in reality there is no political freedom internally. After my release, when I planned to go to Rangoon the regional military intelligence asked me where I will be staying. Then when I reached Rangoon they want my contact phone number and so on. That means they will always be shadowing me and following me. There is no real political freedom. In the long run they can find some cause and try to do something to me. I believe that I can do more political activity liberally outside than inside the country. That is why I left.

DVB According to the newspaper, the SPDC issued a statement and accused you, saying your absconding could affect the reconciliation process that is taking place between the government and the NLD, when most believe the situation is improving and more political prisoners have been released. How do you want to refute this allegation?

U Khin Kyaw Han I did not do that to derail the reconciliation process. They did release some political prisoners. Apart from the talks, if the SPDC really has the goodwill to let democracy flourish in the future state, they should release all the political prisoners at once rather than release them in dribs and drabs. For example, even the elected representatives [MPs] held at the detention camp [preceding two words rendered in English] were released piecemeal. The three MPs held at Chauk were released in three lots while the five MPs held at Magwe camp were released in two lots. By looking at that, I am doubtful whether they are really sincere or not. Well, those remaining inside can do what they can but I personally feel I can do much better outside. That is why I left the country.

SPDC SPEAKS (CONTINUED)

left Myanmar to freely participate in the struggle for democracy."

Members of the remnant KNU insurgent group were also present at the meet. A representative of the insurgent group in his speech lauded him, saying, "Khin Kyaw Han has done the right thing. There is no benefit nor security for him if he continues to stay in the country. It is the right decision to come into the revolutionary area where he can serve the people's interest more."

I take pity for them for daring to say preposterous lies to that extent. The so-called Press meet was full of lies, provocations and flatteries. They are the kind of persons who are always trying to make lies....

When the authorities released Khin Kyaw Han from custody, he was in big trouble. His wife was not at home as she had run away to the other country, for she could not pay back the loans. Besides, Khin Kyaw Han does not know how to earn a living. All the luxuries including freely served delicious meals and evening drinks he enjoyed daily during his detentions were not available for him any more as he was freed from custody. So, the lazy Khin Kyaw Han ran away to his wife where he could find life much easier without needing to work. He ran away to the border not because of any democracy cause, and as such the intelligence personnel never put a person like him under constant watch.

How could he run away from the back door of the country if he was being put under constant watch by the military intelligence as he had

said? How could he hold such a set-up Press meet at the border and could tell a lot of lies? It is food for thought. The authorities released him from detention without any terms as they believed that he would uphold the moral conduct and would freely live in accord with his own view. As the authorities were working under mutual trust in releasing him from the custody, the idea of putting him under constant watch is out of the question....

The government detained over 200 persons in order to prevent danger and safeguard stability and peace and tranquility of the State. I believe that if they are asked how they were taken care of, the goodwill of the government will be understood.

If a sensible person makes a careful assessment of this, he can understand that Khin Kyaw Han who abused the trust of the State belongs to the reactionary class.

[T]he National League for Democracy (Liberated Area), whose members are leading the lives of runaways and insurgents, and remnant KNU insurgents, who are making a living under the sway of imperialists by committing violent acts, murdering people and planting mines, wholeheartedly joined hands with Khin Kyaw Han, democracy lazy rat. I understand that they are of the same ilk.

Excerpts from an article by Pauk Sa, which appeared in the August 19th and 20th, 2001, issue of The New Light of Myanmar.

HOST OF COMPANIES END INVESTMENT IN BURMA

In a September 2nd letter to the Free Burma Coalition (FBC), Sara Lee announced the divestment of its Hanes underwear manufacturer from Burma. Sara Lee's decision to terminate the factory operations of both Hanes Her Way and Hanes University brands occurred after a boycott by the activist organization. Following a similar publicity campaign, the Pottery Barn said it would both cease purchasing Burma-manufactured goods and remove of all such goods from its stores and catalogs, detailed in a September 10th letter to FBC. Later in the month, Crate and Barrel announced their cancellation of the Thai-operated Elephant House line of wares that was importing from Burma. J.O.S. Banks also reaffirmed their ban on investment in Burma when they stopped stocking a line of Burma-manufactured apparel items.

NEW ENGLISH TV CHANNEL BEGINS BROADCASTING

Termed a "Myanmar mosaic" by the *New Light of Myanmar*, a satellite television service that offers internationally-accessible English-language programming, MRTV-3 represents a fresh tack of the junta to clean up its image. Debuting in early August, it is the only English-language TV network to broadcast from Burma. According to the channel's brief, MRTV-3 seeks to "respond to what is often whimsical and fanciful coverage" of the country by broadcasting positive images of Burma to 120 countries worldwide. The government-funded channel is run by Thai-Com satellite station, which is owned by Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's Shin Corp, and will use over US\$1 million in equipment imported from Japan.

UVA ANNOUNCES DIVESTMENT OF UNOCAL STOCK

The University of Virginia sold over 50,000 shares of UNOCAL stock. The move, made in response to protests from students, faculty and seven Nobel Peace Prize winners, including His Holiness, the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, protested against the California-based oil company for operating in Burma.

UNOCAL TO STAND TRIAL IN CALIFORNIA COURT

California Superior Court judge Victoria Chaney shot down UNOCAL'S move for the dismissal of a human rights abuse case introduced by Burmese villagers. The case, which was dismissed in the federal court last spring, charges the California-based oil company with facilitating and abetting human rights abuses against the plaintiffs during its work on the Yadana pipeline project. In her September 5th decision, judge Chaney determined that the case will be heard in California state court, where a jury will review Unocal's alleged violation of California state law. The plaintiffs' federal case remains on appeal.

JAPANESE COMPANY CONTRACTED IN HYDROELECTRIC PLANT DEAL

In an August 3rd announcement Kansai Electric Power Co. unveiled its plans to work with Burma's state-run utility firm in the development of hydroelectric power plants. The contract, under which Kansai Electric will give technical assistance at 12 plants over the next five years, marks the first collaboration ever between the military regime and a Japanese firm on large-scale power projects in Burma.

INSIDE WASHINGTON

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS MEET WITH SUU KYI, SPDC

U.S. State Department officials met with Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as Burma's generals, in two visits during August and October. During his early August visit, then US deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Ralph Boyce also met with Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt, Foreign Minister U Win Aung and members of the National League for Democracy. On October 13th, Judith Strotz, U.S. State Department's East Asian and Pacific Bureau talked with Aung San Suu Kyi at her house in Rangoon, and also with SPDC officials.

MON NATIONALISM AND CIVIL WAR IN BURMA: THE GOLDEN SHELDRAKE

By Ashley South
Spring, 2002

Curzon Press Ltd., 51a George Street,
Richmond, Surrey TW9 1HJ UK
publish@curzonpress.co.uk

South's study chronicles the political history of the Mon people from ancient times to the present. Examining the sources of ethnic conflict and its relationship to civil war, the work functions as a sociological analysis, a political study and a historical account. A 25% discount will be offered to the readers of *Burma Debate* following its release.

ONLINE BURMA LIBRARY

September 2001
www.burmalibrary.org

The Online Burma Library, compiled and managed by David Arnott, offers an extensive and evolving online catalogue of Burmese and non-Burmese documents. Archiving texts already available on the Internet, OBL also provides an array of activist resources, including the Burma Action Directory (BAD), the BAD-Corp List of corporations investing in Burma, discussion groups and the Burma Press Summary archive.

CHILD SOLDIERS COUNTRY REPORT

By Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
October 2001

PO Box 22696
London N4 3ZJ
United Kingdom
Telephone number: +44 20 7226 0606
Facsimile number: +44 20 7274 0230
Email: info@child-soldiers.org

This annual report details the prevalence of child soldiers in Burma, which has one of the largest numbers of child soldiers in the world. Giving context as well as statistical information, the report examines the governmental climate, political developments and the military angles surrounding the exploitation of child soldiers.

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES: THE ART OF SURVIVAL IN MODERN DAY BURMA

Produced and Directed by Lindsey Merrison

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Ebereschallee 15
D-14050 Berlin
Germany
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merrison@aol.com
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Filming in Rangoon without a permit, Merrison explores the cult worship of *nat[s]*, or spirits who have perished at the hands of unjust kings, homing in on the lives of several spirit

mediums called *nat kadaw*. The documentary, narrated by an animated pair of septuagenarian Burmese women, views faith, myth and society through the lens of *nat* worship.

**THE SHORE BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL:
A REPORT FROM INSIDE BURMA'S OPIUM
KINGDOM**

By Hideyuki Takano
December 2001
Kotan Publishing
www.kotan.org
kotan@kotan.org

APA Publications GmbH & Co Verlag KG
38 Joo Koon Road,
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Journeying to a region of the Golden Triangle renowned for opium cultivation and ethnic conflict, Hideyuki Takano spends seven months in a Wa village tending poppy fields and studying Wa culture. Examining a broad spectrum of Wa life, Takano observes everyone from the opium farmer to the addict, the military mogul to the common soldier, and ultimately finds the professional converging with the personal as he is forced to reckon with his growing opium addiction.

LANDMINE MONITOR 2001

By Landmine Monitor
September 2001
www.icbl.org
Phone: (202) 547-2667
lm@icbl.org

This year's edition of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines' annual report includes details on the extent of landmine pollution in Burma. Examining the landmine crisis from a variety of perspectives, the Landmine Monitor 2001 explains the military junta's official landmine policy, speculates on mine sales and mine production, explores the state of landmine use by *Tatmadaw* forces and ethnic militias, and probes survivor assistance initiatives.

**AUNG SAN AND THE STRUGGLE FOR BURMESE
INDEPENDENCE**

By Angeline Naw
October 2001
Silkworm Books
Chiang Mai
Thailand

Angeline Naw's biographical study adumbrates the political and personal life of the great leader. Observing Aung San against the weft of Burma's fight for independence, the author focuses on the evolution of Aung San's politics and the development of his keen sense of leadership.

ILO TEAM EXAMINES FORCED LABOR PRACTICES

A High-Level Team of the International Labour Organization arrived in Burma on September 17th, commencing a three-week mission to assess use of forced labor by the country's military regime. Led by Sir Ninian Stephen, the four-member team will evaluate the effectiveness of governmental measures implemented to combat forced labor practice since the ILO imposed unprecedented sanctions on Burma in November of last year. Sir Ninian Stephen formerly served as both the Australian governor-general and as a high judge on the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia. Other members of the ILO team are former Philippines labor secretary, Ms. Nieves Roldan-Confesor, a former Sri Lankan chief justice, Mr. Kulatilaka Ranasinghe and a former deputy foreign minister of Poland, Mr. Jerzy Makarczyk. Burma's regime had agreed to unhindered access to all parts of the country for the High-Level Team.

UN OFFICIALS REPORT PROGRESS

United Nations Special Envoy Razali Ismail met with democratic opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt during a four-day visit to Burma that began in late August. Razali arrived in Burma on August 27th, a day after the junta released National League for Democracy (NLD) chairman U Aung Shwe and vice-chairman U Tin Oo from house arrest, a move widely interpreted as a gesture of goodwill from the junta designed to galvanize the dialogue it is holding with the NLD. Razali also met with representatives from six pro-democracy ethnic political parties, marking the first inclusion of ethnic party leaders since the Malaysian diplomat facilitated the talks in October of last year.

During his planned 18-day October visit, the UN Commission on Human Rights rapporteur Paulo Sergio Pinheiro met with Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt, democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and leaders of various ethnic militias. Pinheiro and his team visited a Burmese prison and a labor camp, but the UN's itinerary reportedly elicited criticisms from the NLD, which remarked on Pinheiro's lack of focus on local communities. The UN rapporteur was forced to cut his visit short for health reasons and left Burma on October 17th.

KHIN NYUNT'S THAILAND VISIT SOOTHES BORDER TENSIONS

Lt.-Gen. Khin Nyunt arrived in Thailand on September 3rd to a ceremonious welcome, indicating a reversal of the antagonism that has characterized Burma-Thai relations in recent months. Plans of Thailand's new Prime Minister, tycoon-cum-politician Thaksin Shinawatra, to develop bilateral relations had been foiled when Burmese troops and the pro-regime Wa ethnic army clashed with Thai soldiers over drug trade and territory disputes. During his trip, which was hosted by Thai Defense Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, the intelligence chief had a private audience with King Bhumibol Adulyadej, visited Thai Com Satellite station and discussed labor issues with Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai.

MALAYSIA AND BURMA STRENGTHEN MILITARY, ECONOMIC TIES

Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed and SPDC Chairman Gen. Than Shwe shook hands over a new trade agreement during the junta leader's September 25th conference with his Malaysian counterpart. The two leaders also broached possible investment in fishing, oil and gas, and a joint venture in timber industry. Before returning to Burma, Gen. Than Shwe visited several Malaysian commercial centers, including the National Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and was feted by the Kedah Government at a Langkawi beach resort.


A month earlier, Malaysian Defense Minister Datuk Sri Mohamed Najib Tun Haji Abdul Razak had traveled to Rangoon where he met with Gen. Than Shwe, Lt.-Gen. Tin Hla, the deputy prime minister, the minister for military affairs and foreign minister U Win Aung. These meetings focused on bilateral military and economic ties, including possible collaboration with Malaysia in setting up Burma's first Internet network (*Bernama News Agency*).

Burma Debate is a publication of The Burma Project of the Open Society Institute.

Mary Pack, *Editor*

THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE (OSI) was established in December of 1993 to promote the development of open societies around the world. Toward this goal, the institute engages in a number of regional and country-specific projects relating to education, media, legal reform and human rights. In addition, OSI undertakes advocacy projects aimed at encouraging debate and disseminating information on a range of issues which are insufficiently explored in the public realm. OSI funds projects that promote the exploration of novel approaches to domestic and international problems.

The Burma Project initiates, supports and administers a wide range of programs and activities. Priority is given to programs that promote the well-being and progress of all the people of Burma regardless of race, ethnic background, age or gender.

The logo of the Open Society Institute, featuring a stylized circular emblem with concentric lines and a central dot, resembling a globe or a network.

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