National League for Democracy

Statement 170 (12/99)

on the 79th anniversary of National Day December 2, 1999
(10th day after the full moon of Tazaungmon, BE 1361)

The tenth day after the full moon of the month of Tazaungmon of the year 1361 (2 December 1999) marks the 79th anniversary of our National Day. It is a day when all the different ethnic groups; the Kachins, Kayahs, Karens, Chins, Burmese, Mons, Arakans, Shans and others dependent and residing in Burma despite their different cultures, religious beliefs, skills and social customs can come together with genuine national pride to celebrate this most auspicious day.

National day is the day of days among all the celebrated days in Burma. It is a landmark that stands out prominently in our history for independence. The National League for Democracy cannot accept the attitude that it is just another National Day without dwelling on its importance and relating its full significance.

This day was the outcome of the Rangoon University Students boycott against the Rangoon University Education Act imposed on the Burmese by the British colonialists to restrict and hamper achievement of a higher education. This boycott movement was not confined to the students alone. It was a torchbearer for the movement against imperialists, fascists and for the final push for independence. As a matter of fact, National Day was the first landmark of daring demonstration of national fervor by all citizens, students and youths.

How this students boycott (a symbol of our historical independence movement) originated needs to be told.

On the 1st December, 1920 the colonial imperialist government proclaimed its new Rangoon University Act which specified that
* Only boarding students would be allowed to study in the university while day students were disqualified. This would enable only the rich to receive higher learning.
* Though a person matriculated, one had to pass a university entrance examination first before he/she could receive a university education.

Because this was a deliberate attempt to impede the attainment of higher education, on 5 December 1920, (BE 1282 10th day after the full moon of Tazaungdaing) students of the Rangoon University and Judson College staged a students strike. This led to these provisions of the Act being amended. The good result was that the entire country realized that peaceful and united resistance could successfully overturn unjust imperialist actions. A spirit of national unity was kindled and began.
In relation to the word "national", worldwide political leaders and knowledgeable academics of political affairs have observed that in this world there are many countries where different people, with many different religious beliefs, speaking many different languages, observing many different social customs and cultures live together. Therefore, the word "national" refers to different people with different origins, beliefs, religions, color and status who inhabit and depend on a territory jointly without any discriminating demarcations. In defining "nationalism" a narrow meaning should not be applied. In some countries, nationals of other countries have been recognized as naturalized citizens by law if they take the oath of allegiance and all national rights have been bestowed on them.

A national affair is defined as "all and every matter that effects the good and prosperity of the people. Uniting and organizing in an effort to achieve the good of the people is a national affair. Working to achieve a loving and compassionate spirit between the different nationalities is a genuine national affair. It dispels hatred. In fact and in truth, national affair ideology is the concern of all nationalities."

Those who are concerned about national affairs believe in political fairness, social justice, equitable trade and the rule of law as opposed to unjust laws of subjugation. It is a national and legitimate affair to resist the authorities and a government that brutally oppresses its people.

The preamble in the United Nations Human Rights Declaration states - "Whereas, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".

All citizens and nationalities have a right to freedom. Opposing a government by a group (albeit by ones own kind) which denies you freedom is a legitimate national affair. Though the country may be free from foreign rule, the national spirit requires that freedom be obtained from oppression of rulers who govern and oppress its people with unjust and discriminatory laws.

We have evidence of the past and the present. The AH-NA-SHINS (power holders) have suppressed, imprisoned, and subjugated all opposition. Life and living is intolerable and impossible for friends and relatives of the opposition. Genuine national spirited people detest the dictatorial system of government. The day of reckoning will come for those who are treating the living as if they were dead.

Instead of nurturing a deep and wide concept of nationalism, a narrow limited myochit (loving one's kind) spirit is being encouraged. This is not right. While proclaiming repeatedly and loudly that one should have
a myochit spirit, people are being persecuted, forced to give their labour and exploited. Shouts and proclamations will not achieve a genuine myochit spirit. This genuine myochit spirit must be nurtured through a good equitable educational system, sincere health care system and social welfare for all. Education should be for the purpose of raising one's standard of living through knowledge. This can only be achieved if human rights are guaranteed through a genuine democratic system. It is a historical fact that Bogyoke Aung San, founding father of independence, was the product of a true national educational system. But today that national educational system is extinct and leadership qualities of the youth have been extinguished. The closure of universities since 1996 has caused "national damage" that is incapable of assessment.

"Everyone has the right to education" is contained in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which this country was a signatory.

Closure of schools and colleges with no time limit is
* a denial of the right to education of the youth of the country;
* demoralizes them, they have no employment and they stagnate;
* the future of the youth of the country is bleak and impossible to predict;
* parents also suffer immensely because of this predicament.
* lack of education causes parents and children to suffer equally and the saying "Education - The golden pot; stolen it cannot be" is no more applicable.
* "Get education in the first years of life" is a saying that is completely obliterated.

The closure of universities and colleges is an act to prevent good leaders of the future by plucking off the tender tips. This is a dastardly act by the perpetrators.

Though the civilian universities and colleges have been closed, the army has allowed its own medical college, technical college, science and technological institutes and other educational institutions to remain open. This enables them to breed students who will be under their authority. This is very disturbing for the country. More disturbing is the fact that those with money and authority have been able to send their children to foreign countries to obtain higher education thus creating an upper class to last for eternity. People born in the same country, with the same motherland have not been given equal rights but the military authorities have created these demarcations which should never be allowed or countenanced.

Looking back we don't find the British ever closing the colleges, universities and schools for such long periods. Students were never arrested and jailed for long periods because of strikes and
confrontations. Wherever possible appeasement was adopted and peaceful settlements were arrived at. Today, though citizens and rulers belong to the same country, a strict military discipline is enforced and no compassion is shown. Because of hard heartedness and without foresight they closed the colleges and universities and the result is that there is no hope for the future of the youth of Burma. National affairs too are mishandled and off the track. This is a measure to prevent the blossoming of good leaders in the future.

"Of all the strengths, knowledge is the greatest". We must be ever mindful that "genuine education provides mankind with all the characteristics he needs while counterfeit education makes provision for one group, one particular set or organisation to enable them to rule and creates slaves of all others". People with a genuine national spirit must be able to sow and endeavor to cultivate the spirit of nationalism that goes deep and embraces all. Hindering, restraining and preventing education for all and only educating some who can be controlled and willing to do one's bidding is something that should never ever be contemplated or practiced.

There are no proper fixed or set policies in the educational system of today. Changes are always being introduced and policies are made on the run. ("Test the soil by growing brinjal" is a Burmese saying.) This is the greatest drawback that the country suffers from.

National Day came into existence because of a genuine spirit of nationalism that was the product of an educational system that encouraged genuine nationalism. This is a historical fact. We are convinced that this national spirit gives us the strength to forge ahead for freedom and to forge ahead with unity and solidarity.

National Day came into being through great perseverance and persistence, a genuine spirit of nationalism and a genuine national education. Therefore, this is living proof that education and political affairs are intertwined. National Day stands out as an auspicious day in our history and struggle for independence. Peace and development of a country is a matter of politics. Education develops the mindset, moulds the thought patterns and achieves maturity of the people. Therefore only if a correct political system is adopted, development and stability will follow.

The person and the group that are shouting out about having a myochit spirit while working only for their own personal advancement, should not be exploiting the country and working for the detriment and destruction of the future generation. It is especially desirable that they have an open and honest mind and the ability to plan for the future.

We need to have a correct political system and genuine democracy for stability and the development and prosperity of the country. A genuine
and correct educational system will then follow. For the entire country to flourish we need academics and technicians. We will gain prestige only with a high standard of education. This is a matter that is the concern of the entire country. It is a genuine national affair. It concerns specially the young and the students. Just as political affairs are intertwined with educational matters, democracy cannot be separated from the affairs that concern students and the youth.

Therefore
* Universities that have been closed without any time limits should be re-opened and unions be allowed to function where student issues can be settled amicably through consultation.
* Facilitate the obtaining of democracy and human rights.
* Shift from counterfeit to an era of genuine education to produce knowledgeable scholars.
* Strive for a new educational system that will emulate the 1920 student boycott leaders who, filled with genuine nationalism, persevered, persisted and pressed on till they succeeded.

For this purpose and at this time that is so close to the year 2000, we emphatically urge all, including members of the Tatmadaw (army), all citizens and peoples of all the nationalities regardless of class or status, young and old, and all students to join hands with us to achieve honourable outcomes for our motherland.

Central Executive Committee
National League for Democracy
Rangoon

2 December 1999