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Readers' Front

Dear readers,

We invite comments and suggestions on improvements to the Kaowao newsletter. With your help, we hope that Kaowao News will continue to grow to better serve the needs of those seeking social justice in Burma. And we hope that it will become an important forum for discussion and debate and help readers to keep abreast of issues and news. We reserve the right to edit and reject articles without prior notification. You can use a pseudonym but we encourage you to include your full name and address.

Regards,

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I have not seen the article or opinion pieces about giving advice good and bad on the political stand from the New Mon State Party (NMSP) for a long time from Mon journalists at newspaper or even online while the NMSP leaders understand that giving advice means criticize them. Later, they put on blacklist to the journalists who criticize them and it is difficult to get news from them.
I only see today the Mon journalists only support the NMSP, and never criticize the NMSP, so they can get news easily. I don’t want to mention which media group and who. I think all Mon people know who it is. In fact, this is not media or journalists. It is propaganda who writes about only good things.

Some of our Mon people misunderstand what is the journalist’s duty. ‘It is to tell the truth.” Even we can’t tell it today, we should tell it tomorrow if we all are real journalist and stand for the people. Journalists must love their people. This is very true. But, they cannot be benefit from any political group. They must love people more than any political group.

I feel time for Mon media need to write about NMSP. If NMSP accept border guard forces, what will happen to Mon people. If they plan they will not accept border guard force, what they need to do for their future political stand. Time is to tell NMSP. If not, there will be no Mon army who real protect Mon Land and Mon people. There will be only army who protect private belong economy like Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, which has less political ideology.

L Weng (via monnet)

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Some journalists are in blacklists by their sources because they only follow the duties of journalists, but they sometime forget about the rules and ethics of journalists. Sometime they do not care the On Record and Off Record, and they use Off Record source like informal talking as news. I am not one of the journalists (I am a student), but I have learned the duties, rules, and ethics of journalists from my university course "Media Law and Ethic".

Jaw Wang

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NMSP reaches final decision on joining BGF
Kaowao: April 24, 2010

The New Mon State Party has rejected a plan to transform its army into a Border Guard Force, Kaowao has learned. The NMSP’s armed wing, the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), was ordered to form a Regional Militia Force (or) Hta-Nay Pyithu-Sit at a meeting held earlier this month between the NMSP and SPDC in the capital of Mon State, Moulmein.

The ethnic armed cease-fire groups including the NMSP were given an April 22nd deadline on whether to form a BGF according to the junta’s demands. The Burmese junta wants the ethnic armed groups to be administered by the Burmese Army Tatmadaw forces along the border areas.

The NMSP responded to Major General Ye Myint, the military junta’s chief negotiator from Military Affairs Security, who had warned the Mon last week that failing to agree to the plan will be an act of war against the Burmese government.
The NMSP’s Vice President Nai Rotsa said the final decision was made during the Central Committee meeting this week with a reply being sent to the SPDC.

After reaching their final decision not to transform their army, Nai Hongsar, the secretary of the NMSP, commented that, “Our revolution will never weaken. There is no democracy and ethnic rights in Burma . . . these are the root causes of the conflict in Burma”.

The first meeting between the NMSP, comprised of Vice President Nai Rotsa, Nai Chan Toi, Nai Tala Nyeh, Nai Htawara and Colonel Layeh Gakow, and the junta’s Chief Military Affairs Security Maj-Gen Ye Myint took place at the Southeast Command in Moulmein on April 7th, 2010.

The President of the NMSP General Htaw Mon said to a Kaowao reporter, “It is a critical time not only for the NMSP but for the Mon population as a whole.”

“It is very impressive to see the judgment day for the NMSP and how our leaders responded to it. Pressure is mounting and it is unacceptable for the NMSP and MNLA to become a border guard force or militia. The NMSP leaders know how to serve the general population and deal with problems in a peaceful manner,” said a veteran of the NMSP who lives in Thailand.

The Burmese Army is stepping up plans to enforce state security by controlling all the ethnic armed ceasefire groups in the border areas who are being pressured to provide security along Burma’s border regions ahead of the general elections which are to be held later this year. Many observers believe the SPDC is pressuring the ethnic cease-fire groups to become a BGF in order to restrict and control their movements.

During the cease-fire deal in 1995, the NMSP was designated 14 areas but the SPDC has occasionally intruded into their zones in recent months.

At the Central Committee meeting of the NMSP last month, the Mons decided not to join the Border Guard Force or the upcoming general election.

The recent meeting after the Songkran New Year was a critical moment for the NMSP and, many Mons are waiting on the edge of their seats to know what the junta’s next move will be on whether it will carry out its threat or back down on launching a war against the ethnic groups.
Mon Reject Militia Plan
By Lawi Weng, Irrawaddy: April 23, 2010

The Mon cease-fire group, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), announced at a press conference on Friday evening that the party has rejected both the junta's border guard force (BGF) and militia proposals.

Speaking at a conference in Sangkhalaburi in western Thailand, Nai Chay Mon, the spokesman of the NMSP, told delegates: “We sent a letter to Regional Southeast Command on April 22 stating that we will not accept the militia offer. This is a difficult time to transform our troops, because our people do not yet have any rights. “If the Burmese army uses force, we will have to defend ourselves,” he said.

“We will maintain the cease-fire and we will be open to discussions about transforming our troops at some time in the future when there is a democratic government, elected by the people,” he said.

The NMSP central executive committee and the central committee held a meeting on Wednesday at their jungle headquarters when the leaders made a decision to move their troops out of urban areas into the jungle, according to a source.

Lt-Gen Ye Myint, the junta’s chief negotiator, reportedly told NMSP leaders at a meeting on April 7: “If you don't accept the militia plan [an order to station Mon soldiers as security guards in Mon villages], war will break out like it did in 1989.”

The NMSP leaders have reportedly ordered their troops not to shoot first; however, if Burmese government forces open fire on them, they should return fire.

Nai Hang Thar, the secretary of the NMSP, said, “Our revolution will never weaken. We will wage guerrilla warfare against the Burmese army if conflict breaks out. “If there is no democracy and ethnic rights in Burma, they cannot be another political step. These are the root causes of the conflict in Burma.”

Several observers have said that the Burmese government forces can easily contain the Mon troops in combat, as the Mon have only 700 regular troops while the Burmese army can call on up to 400,000 soldiers.

Nai Kao Rot, the former deputy of the Mon National Liberation Army, said, “I advise the NMSP not to fight a defensive war. Don't set up bases. If they (government forces) come to our area, let them. We will attack them outside the towns at their own bases.”

He added: “Our revolution will never end while Mon people live and breathe. Even is the NMSP fails to win this conflict, the Mon people will rise again.”

Many analysts say the Mon soldiers are not sufficiently battle-hardened as they have not fought since the cease-fire 15 years ago.

Officially, the NMSP has 3,500 members, though perhaps only 700 currently serve as soldiers. The party leaders said they hope that many of their members will come back and join them if war breaks out.

Although hundreds of Mon officials and soldiers are preparing to leave their homes to retreat to jungle base camps, observers have predicted that many NMSP members will not abandon their property and livelihoods. However, they expect Mon refugees and many Mon living in Thailand will join up to support the ethnic army in the event of war.
The junta has set a deadline of April 28 for the cease-fire groups to accept the BGF plan, or be declared illegal organizations. Tension has increased between the NMSP and the Burmese military since the Mon rejected the regime’s order to transform its army into a BGF last year. In March, the NMSP moved some of its administration and a stockpile of weapons to a new undisclosed base, a source close to the group said. The NMSP signed a cease-fire agreement with the regime in 1995. After 15 years of cease-fire, government forces have about 30 battalions in Mon State. Before the cease-fire, there were about 10 battalions. The Burmese regime recently deployed three battalions near the NMSP headquarters in Ye Township.

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Major Boost for Global Indigenous Rights Movement
Chinland Guardian: 22 April 2010

In an intriguing turn of event that could lead to greater recognition of the rights of nearly 400 million indigenous peoples around the world, New Zealand this week reversed its former position and gave a key endorsement to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The announcement was made Monday in New York to a standing ovation from over 2000 delegates attending the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. “Today New Zealand changes it position: We are pleased to support the Declaration,” said the Minister of Maori Affairs Dr. Pita Sharples.

With the latest endorsement from New Zealand, only Canada and the United States remain on the opposing side of the UN document that accords special rights to the indigenous peoples, which was formally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007. Among the rights contained are political, social, economic and cultural rights as well as access to resource and lands.

Australia last year backed down on its former position and gave its approval to the Declaration.

“Of course this is significant,” says indigenous rights expert Dr. Sui Khar, “not just for the indigenous peoples within New Zealand, but for others around the world in terms of the Declaration having greater weight of authority than before as part of a customary international law.” Sui Khar is Chair of the Asia Indigenous Peoples’ Pact (AIPP), a regional coalition of indigenous organizations from across Asia.

Meanwhile, US Ambassador Susan Rice has announced that the Obama administration will set up a special commission to review US position on the Declaration. The main dilemma for the US in endorsing the Declaration had been the fact that the under the American
Constitution, any international treaty entered into by the US government becomes part of a national law.

UN Side Event Discusses Development Challenges in Asia

An important event on the sidelines of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was a joint initiative sponsored by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the UN Development Program’s Regional Initiative on Indigenous Rights and Development (RIIRD), and the Asia Indigenous Peoples’ Pact (AIPP).

“Indigenous peoples across the world particularly in Asia are grappling with impacts of modern development resulting in their further discrimination, exploitation, oppression and marginalization,” Sui Khar said in his opening remark. He said that the challenges of sustainable development should be tackled in a way consistent with the simple life-styles and the indigenous peoples’ symbolic relationship to their natural environment.

Election 2010: Mon Democracy Party Prepares For Registration

Reported by Siha Ong, Kaowao: April 14, 2010

Sangkhlaburi -- Mon activists and politicians are preparing to register their political party for the upcoming election, according to local sources in Moulmein. Following the announcement of the SPDC’s party registration laws; the activists, eager to participate in the general election, banded together to form the ‘All Regions’ Mon Democracy Party.’

The newly formed group is led by Nai Janu Mon (aka) Nai Ngwe Thein, a well-known song writer and retired State Education Administrator.

According to Dr. Banya Aung Moe, the ARMDP was created as another option for those wishing to take part in the election in opposition to the ‘Mon Working Committee’ which has decided to boycot the 2010 general election.

“We understand the position of the MNDF and NMSP who have boycotted the election, but we feel we should take part in the election so we can represent the civilians in the Mon region as well as the other ethnic groups who live in the Mon area. We will register after the Songkrant New Year Festival, but the 15 member grouping is now working on our party platform,” said Dr. Banya in a telephone interview.

After a divisive meeting on March 30, which decided to boycott the election after the election laws were posted, members from the Mon Working Committee who wanted to take part in the election immediately recruited new leaders for a new party. The party leaders include Nai Janu Mon, Nai Saik, Dr. Min Hla Aung, Dr. Min Nwe Soe, Dr. Banya Aung Moe, Min San Tin and Nai Lawee Ong (retired colonel of New Mon State Party).
“Many expressed a willingness to support the new Mon party and want a chance to discuss their issues rather than standing on the sidelines during the election,” said Dr. Banya who is a veteran of the New Mon State Party and Mon community leader at the Three Pagodas Pass border town.

The original 15 member Mon Working Committee was formed to prepare for the upcoming 2010 election during a gathering of the ceasefire agreement celebration hosted by the NMSP in June 2009. The committee is comprised of NMSP veterans, the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) members, and retired civil servants. However, the Mon Working Committee had decided not to take part in the upcoming election after the election laws were released.

The two main political parties, the MNDF and NMSP have repeatedly stated that they will not participate in the 2010 election.

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Mon State USDA Speeds Up Campaign
Kaowao: March 19, 2010

The Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) in Mon State has stepped up its election campaign in Ye township, according to local sources.

“We are a social organization and work for the interest of the general public. We will focus on local development and replace unfit local headmen who abuse their power with good leaders if we are elected,” says a USDA leader during a meeting in Ye.

However, a civil servant from Yan Kyi Aung Quarter in Ye reacted differently and expressed the opinion that the civilians know full well the USDA is backed by the military and will not vote for them.

Other sources reported that USDA election campaigns have been launched throughout other parts of Mon State, including Paung, Kyaimayaw, Mudon and Thanbyu Zayat Townships.

Local village headmen in Ye are being pressured into recruiting only USDA members ranging from 50 to 100 people. “It is not easy, the people are not interested and don’t want to support the USDA,” says a village headman from northern Ye who spoke under condition of anonymity to a Kaowao field reporter.

In November last year, the USDA launched a number of similar campaigns in Ye and Kyaikmayw of Mon state and Kawkareik township in Karen State.

The USDA, founded by the SPDC as a GONGO (government organized non-governmental organization) in 1993, has a main office which is in charge of 17 State and Division Associations, 66 District Associations and 320 Township Associations, and boasts over 24 million members as of April 2007.
Meanwhile, many Mon leaders and activists who gathered at the funeral service of Nai Thein Maung, who passed away on March 17, 2009, expressed their views on the new election.

“We are studying the SPDC’s election law and will soon decide for the interest of the Mon people,” said a spokesperson from the Mon working committee which was formed in June of last year. The Mon working committee, comprised of NMSP veterans, the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) members and retired civil servants, was formed to prepare for the upcoming 2010 election.

On March 16 2009, the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) sent an open letter to the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, calling for international pressure that ensures the SPDC holds a free and fair 2010 election. Nai Ngwe Thein, the Spokesman and the Member of Secretariat for the UNA, states that the SPDC election laws are against the opinions of the international community and the desires of the people.

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UNA calls for a free and fair 2010 Election
Kaowao: March 16, 2010

The United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) has sent an open letter to the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon asking him to pressure the Burmese government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), for a free and fair election in 2010.

The letter stated that the SPDC’s election laws are not in accordance with the UN’s proposals and urged the UN leader to apply the appropriate pressure on the Burmese government’s planned 2010 election, while ensuring that is inclusive, free and fair.

The UNA letter stated, “The (current election) laws are also against the opinions of the international community and the desires of the people of Myanmar. All these election laws are based on the unjust and legally unapproved 2008 constitution, and we feel that the coming elections cannot be free and fair.”

The UNA also requested the UN to pressure the Burmese junta to free all political prisoners, hold a tripartite dialogue with the SPDC and the democratic forces led by Aung Sann Su Kyi and the ethnic nationalities, and to halt all military operations in the ethnic areas.

Nai Ngwe Thein, the Spokesman and Member of Secretariat for the UNA, who is also the Vice-Chairman of the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) that won 5 seats during the 1990 election, previously stated it will not contest the 2010 general election because the party did not accept the approved 2008 constitution.

The United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), is a coalition of the Burmese ethnic political parties which contested and won (67) seats in the 1990 general election.

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Opinion/Analysis

2010 Election: Direction for democracy or autocracy

By Apar Hong Mon

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has recently announced its election laws which many believe will not meet the international standards for a democratic election. The political space for the development of fundamental human rights and freedom of expression for the Burmese people will not take shape unless the ethnic peoples are given some basic rights.

Since coming to the power in 1988, the SPDC/SLORC has sought to enforce state power over the whole country at the cost of driving its own people into poverty or exile. This state of affairs will likely continue in yet after another reconstruction of its image when it assumes power in the 2010 General Election. Meanwhile internationally, the military government has outmaneuvered pressure to its autocratic rule with the tacit support of its Asian neighbors such as China and the other ASEAN members.

Military repression is nothing new to Burma or even Southeast Asia. Since Burma gained independence from the British in 1948, civil war broke out as a result of non-compromise with the ethnic nationalities.

Burma’s civil war is a product of the underrepresentation and the segregation of the ethnic peoples who have strived for the same political and cultural rights of the Burman majority since the “Panglong Agreement” was created by General Aung San in 1947. “We stand for full freedom of all the races of our country,” he argued shortly after expressing his views on British rule which he felt had “kept the peoples of Burma apart.” But the agreement was ill-conceived and never got off the ground. It left many issues unresolved concerning the rights of the ethnic groups including the Mon, Arakan, and Karen - very little discussion had taken place on how Burma was to be governed after independence and divisions and schisms soon became the norm of politics. Today the ethnic groups are not allowed to form into legal organizations to voice their concerns while the military regime ignores a joint proposal for the formation of a federal union which the ethnic groups presented to them during the National Convention in 2004.

In 1947, before Burma gained its independence; displaying colors of discontent was a common practice among opposing factions as it is today in Thailand’s political arena between the Yellow and Red shirts. Arakanese groups, sharply divided among the various groups, including the communists and nationalists, formed into Red, White, Yellow Flag factions who protested for a separate Arakan State, and is but one example of the many ethnic and political divisions that sprang up after Burma gained independence. And like the Thai protests today, bandits and infiltrators (many Red Shirts are paid up front by Thaksin infiltrators for instigating riots) turned Burma’s hard won independence for freedom and democracy into a chaotic and unruly rebellion on many fronts. So when the military government led by
General Ne Win seized state power in 1962, it was a sign of worse things to come. Many people fled as refugees to many areas of the world and internally displaced peoples hid in the jungles of Burma, which has reached to half a million today, highlighting the new international norm for post World War Two conflict in developing countries.

Many ethnic groups have overwhelmingly rejected the SPDC’s new Constitution which will be a continuation of the policies of Ne Win era who built up the military elite class. The 2008 Constitution only serves the military elite who will continue to escape the crimes they commit against the Burmese people. Many are Ne Win followers who have written their own policies on how Burma is to be governed in their so-called parliament, where twenty-five percent of the seats are for the Burmese Armed Forces, while the ethnic people have little political say in how to govern their own people. When they do express their rights for self-determination they are often labeled as “separatists” or “terrorists” that threaten Burma’s stability, which is plastered all over Burma's newspapers.

Nowadays, the military government imposes rule over the daily affairs of all the ethnic people who are finding it increasingly difficult to teach in their own language and celebrate their national holidays. Add to this the ongoing human rights violations that continue unabated in the rural areas, hidden from the international community such as arbitrary arrest, killing, torture, forced relocation and portering, and gang rape occurring in the areas where no foreigners are allowed and where an international press is unable to document the horrors committed by the Burmese Army.

The many weaknesses in the 2008 Constitution are a continuation of the 1974 Constitution and the recent election laws, which will only prolong a political quagmire for the ASEAN countries who wish to do business in Burma - who themselves are no less confounded on how to collectively define what is meant by “human rights” - let alone deal with Burma’s intractable ethnic problem.

Burma will handle their crises as they see fit by arresting and killing dissidents. It is absurd to forcibly approve of a Constitution which automatically hands over 25% of the seats for a group of people who are in turn destroying the country from within.

From the ethnic nationality viewpoint, their rights will not be fair while the majority Burmans are taking at least seven Divisions compare to one Division (State) each for the Karen, Kachin, Karenni, Arakan, Chin, Shan and Mon. Even though the new Constitution will grant some political space for some of the other ethnic peoples such as Naga, Danu, and Wa, who will form some autonomous region or Administer Zones, the Burmanization policy will continue because the new Constitution does not clearly state our ethnic rights to preserve our culture and literature, except for some ethnic candidates who will be able to sit on the parliament seats. These are very similar to Ne Win’s 1974 Constitution where the ethnic peoples really had no voice in parliament.
Militarily, the SPDC has been applying stronger pressure to the ethnic armed forces to form Border Guard Forces. If their rights to self-determination and the preserving of their culture are not guaranteed by the new Constitution, they will not give up their arms so easily.

Unless solving the problem politically, forcing the ethnic armed forces to disband their armies will never be the right course of action for Burma’s government and failing to motivate the majority of the Burmese people, as they have recently done with the new party registration laws which restrict the NLD to participate in the upcoming election, will only dash the hopes of Burma’s youth who dream of a better future.

We can only ask: will the SPDC ever learn to give some political space for Burma’s peoples based on trust? This is long overdue no doubt, but peace is the only sure way forward to ensure economic development for the whole country, not brute force and bloodshed, this is one circumstance which is different from the 1948 when most groups opted to fight militarily against the central government. Today most of the ethnic peoples want peace not war.

A Lesson from the Past: the fate of the Karen Revolutionary Council

A year ago in April 2009 Burma’s military rulers proposed that all seventeen armed cease-fire groups transform their armies into Border Guard Forces (BGF) administered by the junta. Tension has increased in recent months between the Burmese military and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and other ethnic resistance groups who have rejected the regime’s order to transform their armies into a border guard force.

According to local news, the armed wing of the New Mon State Party, the Mon National Liberation Army, has relocated all its ammunition and military hardware to a more secure area obviously in preparation for a conflict. Pressure from the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to coerce the cease-fire groups into the BGF unavoidably means that the NMSP will be preparing for the worst. Now is a timely reminder to look back on history.

The fate that the NMSP and other armed resistance groups have been facing in recent months is quite similar to what happened to the Karen Revolutionary Council (KRC) in 1965. All the old memories of those days amazingly become new and fresh again in my mind as if it had happened yesterday. The pictures of Saw Hunter Tha Hmwe, president of KRC and General Saw Ohn Pe and Bo Lin Htin, the leaders of KRC, clearly appear in my memory.

The current situation reminded me of the political developments after the Revolutionary Council led by General Ne Win seized the state power on 2nd March, 1962. As soon as it seized State power, the Revolutionary Council detained all the cabinet members of U Nu’s government, including Nai Aung Tun and most of the politicians throughout the country. On 7 July 1962 to show its might, the Revolutionary Council killed over 100 students from Rangoon University who peacefully staged a demonstration in the university compound. The next day, early in the morning of 8 July, 1962, RC ordered Major Sein Lwin to blow up the
Students Union Building with dynamite. All the students, who were still sleeping inside the building, were killed. I was lucky to be a student at Moulmein College at the time. Following the death of the students, the sentiment of civilians against the Revolutionary Council grew bigger and bigger day by day.

On 11 June, 1963, to everyone’s amazement, the Revolutionary Council announced Peace-Talks with the armed resistance groups. It seemed to everyone that, as Revolutionary Council desperately needed to buy time during the early stages of the coup, calling the Peace-Talks was none other than to quell the dissident civilians and to stall its legitimacy.

Let me highlight the contrast between the Revolutionary Council Peace-Talks and the Peace-Offer launched by Gen. Khin Nyunt in 1992. During the 1963 Peace Talks every armed resistance group could freely take part and raise their political issues. Above all these parties were treated respectably with equal consideration alongside the government representatives.

In contrast, the armed resistance groups which accepted the Peace-Offer in 1992 had no rights to raise political issues; instead they could only hope and bargain for some political rights and social assistance from the government. In most cases the cease-fire groups could only accept the terms provided to them by the government. For instance, in 1995 the NMSP had no chance to raise any political issues such as the right of self-determination for Mon people. They were ordered to live in twelve designated places defined by the SPDC whilst the NMSP could only retain their arms within these areas. In addition, the NMSP received financial assistance and monthly rice quotas. Since then no further political discussion has taken place between the groups.

Now let us look back again to the 1963 Peace-Talks. Almost all of armed resistance organizations came to Rangoon, including the Burma Communist Party (BCP), Communist Party, Burma (CPB), Karen National United Party (KNUP), New Mon State Party (NMSP), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and Karen Revolutionary Council (KRC) etc. Nearly all the prominent leaders of the armed resistance groups, such as Thakin Soe, General Secretary of CPB, Yeni Kyaw Win and Ma Ngwe San from CPB, Yabaw Htay, Bo Zeya, Bo Yan Aung, Bo Pu and Thakin Aung Gyi from BCP, Mahn Ba Zan of KNUP, Nai Shwe Kyin of NMSP and Saw Maw Rai of KNPP, came to Rangoon for the Peace-Talks. Media outlets had their photos appearing in all the major newspapers and periodicals. This is still fresh in my mind and I remember clearly that Thakin Soe of CPB and Yebaw Htay (BCP) wore their party uniforms. Nai Shwe Kyin wore a white shirt and gray trousers. The KNUP representatives Mahn Ba Zan, Sakaw Letaw, Bo Kyin Pe, Bogyouk Tanbala Paw, Saw Than Aung, and Padou San Lin wore full western attire while KNPP leaders Saw Maw Rai wore their Karenni’s national dress.

From the very beginning of military rule in Burma which began in 1962 there has been no sincerity on part of the government, the peace initiatives in 1963 collapsed without any fruitful result. The Revolutionary Council announced their failure on the 14th of November 1963 and in customary dictatorial fashion blamed the armed resistance groups for their intransigence and duly arrested politicians and student leaders that very same evening. Mon
leaders, Nai Tun Thein, Nai Ngwe Thein, Nai Thein Maung, Nai Chan Mon, Nai Nonlar, Nai Kyaung, Nai Konbalai and Nai Tin Aung, from Mon People’s Front, were also arrested. All the armed resistance groups, including BCP, NMSP and KNUP were able to escape and return to their respective camps in the deep jungle again. Student Unions, throughout the country, immediately staged a demonstration demanding that the RC immediately resume the Peace-Talks and release all political and student leaders.

Following the collapse of the Peace-Talks, to everyone’s surprise among the parties which took part in the peace-talks, only the Karen Revolutionary Council (KRC) led by Kawcasa Saw Hunter Tha Hmwe and Bo Lin Htin, reached a peace-agreement with Revolutionary Council. According to the political agreement, the name of Karen State was changed into “Kawthoolei State” and the KRC could remain peacefully in the areas Thaton District and had the right to retain their arms. As an outcome of the peace-agreement, the members of KRC enjoyed social assistance from the government such as rice and money. But as everyone predicted there was no further political discussions whatsoever between KRC and RC after 1963. Instead the only news heard was about Kawcasa Saw Hunter Tha Hmwe who was appointed as a Special Education Official while General Saw Ohn Pe was appointed as a government official.

To get a clear picture of KRC we need to go back a few decades to review the Karen revolution. Let me tell you a little bit about Bo Lin Htin. At the time of peace-agreement, he was the commander of 5th Brigade of KRC and was very popular during 1954-63 for his bravery in the battlefields. He was the one person who could not only humiliate the Burmese army but could at anytime derail the train which ran between Moulmein and Rangoon. The train was totally at the mercy of Bo Lin Htin in those days. He also humiliated the Thai’s authorities by burning the town of Maesot in Tak Province 1954-55. Since then his name was well-known among the civilians.

Then the KRC army split, one faction was led by Saw Hunter Tha Hmwe. In 1951 Karen Leaders led by Mahn Ba Zan adopted a new political strategy called the Second Path. This was a guideline for KNU to seek self-determination Rights for the Karen People; however, apparently some Karen Leaders who were not happy with this new strategy. Saw Hunter Tha Hmwe and his colleagues had occasionally criticised the new Political Strategy as left-leaning on communist’s political ideology. In 1956 at the 2nd Kawthoolei Congress in line with the new political strategy, KNU changed their name to KNUP. On the 26th of May, 1956, at the Karen National Congress, eleven members of Karen Revolutionary Council were elected and led by Saw Hunter Tha Hmwe. Literally the KRC was functioning as an administrative body (government) while the KNUP stood as the Political Party.

On 20 April, 1963, the leaders of KNUP and the members of KRC held a joint meeting at Kasawa Camp. Ten members of KRC led by Saw Hunter Tha Hmwe were not satisfied with the new political strategy called the Second Path and openly broke away from KNUP. This is the background history of KRC in a nutshell and during the 1963 Peace-Talks, the KRC, led by Saw Hunter Tha Hmwe, separately negotiated with Revolutionary Council. The KRC got a
peace deal with the Revolutionary Council, while KNUP and other armed resistance groups headed back to their camps in the deep jungle.

After the KRC signed the peace-agreement, to every one’s surprise, Bo Lin Htin was unusually respected by the Burmese Army Officers who provided him with a military helicopter for his own personal use. By helicopter he went back and forth from Thaton to Rangoon and to everyone’s amazement he unexpectedly married a very famous young lady, Naw Louisa Benson, who was Miss Burma and a movie actress at the time.

Their wedding ceremony was a celebrity affair held in Rangoon in front of Gen. Ne Win and State Leaders with some observers saying that their wedding was like a state wedding ceremony. Politicians ventured to say that Bo Lin Htin was actually detained in Rangoon and that the marriage would enable Bo Lin Htin to forget all the Karen national interests and obligations except for his family affairs.

In reality, Bo Lin Htin never forgot his political obligations for the Karen people’s self-determination. He always spent time with his comrades in Thaton after his marriage and approached the Revolutionary Council many times for the political rights of the Karen people, but to no avail. He was pressured to transform his troops into a militia group or Kakwaeye, but came to realize that he could do nothing for his people according to his peace-agreement. Later he secretly set up an arrangement and organised to go back to the jungle again. But Gen. Ne Win soon detected his strategy and clandestinely planned to eliminate him before he could return. Before his dream came true in 1965, Bo Lin Htin was assassinated by the Military Intelligence (MI) soldiers in front of his comrades. But the newspaper headlines the next day read: “Bo Lin Htin was accidentally killed” which appeared in every daily newspaper, as I remember one paper reported: “The body guards of Bo Lin Htin opened fire on MI soldiers who had honestly came to see Bo Lin Htin to discuss some very important issues, and out of self-defence the soldiers of MI returned fire. During the cross-fire between the Karen soldiers and MI, a stray bullet hit Bo Lin Htin who was killed on the spot.”

This story was obviously made up and a far cry from what actually happened. As a result, the Karen Revolution Council was dismantled with their soldiers being either killed or detained, but some managed to escape to the jungle such as Naw Louisa Benson who fled to the Thai-Burma border areas. Bo Hmu Win and Bo Hmu Phar Lu Kyaw, second commanders of KRC, were sent to the Moulmein Jail and student leaders of Moulmein Degree College, including me, were detained after the 1963 demonstration which urged the Revolutionary Council to resume Peace-Talks.

The fate of the KRC highlights the fragility of all the cease-fires with the Burmese Military Regime. When we consider the repercussions of the Border Guard proposal, this is a timely reminder that we must never forget our history.

Nai Pe Thein Zar
(Federal University)
April 9, 2010
Reference: Myanma Pyi Chit Kayin National Leaders/Maung Sin Kyai
Songkran Greetings from Kaowao Team

Dear Reader,

On this traditional Songkran Water Festival, we wish you happy holidays and a prosperous New Year 1372. The word “Songkran” is Sanskrit for sankranti which means “the shift of the sun from one zodiac sign to another.” According to legend, this festival was held to mark the day when the goddess Sangkhan passes by, which is the last day of the old year.

Water is a source of fertility and protection in Southeast Asia including Laos, Burma, and Thailand. For many centuries in Thailand, the Songkran festival was created to uphold female status and to support the renewal of nature through lovemaking rituals. Traditionally, local beauty contests are held for young and old women where they are blessed in a water ritual. Generally, it is a time when social rules are turned inside out and thrown out the window in a “no holds barred” party atmosphere. Ordinary Burmese and Thais, young and old alike, will let their hair down and shut their eyes to seniors, the military, and the Buddhist Sangha.

With an eye toward the future then, it is time to thank all of you who have contributed in the last couple of years for supporting Kaowao. Your support allowed for the expansion of the Kaowao office and maintained living expenses for our staff, who work hard to ensure regular communication with our reporters inside Burma who gather news for the Mon people.

You have made a real difference in supporting our commitment for peace, justice, and democracy in Burma. Your encouragement and financial support directly affects the amount of articles we publish which in turn increases local and international awareness regarding Mon State and southern Burma.

Many thanks to all donor organizations and individuals who have contributed funds, equipment, training and other contributions for the operations of Rehmonya Radio, Video, Kaowao E-news and the four language versions of the Kaowao Website.

We hope to serve you better in the coming New Year.

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ABOUT US

Kaowao Newsgroup is committed to social justice, peace, and democracy in Burma. We hope to be able to provide an in-depth analysis that will help to promote lasting change and peace within Burma. Editors, reporters, writers, and overseas volunteers are dedicated members of the Mon activist community based in Thailand.

*Our motto is “working together for change and lasting peace.”*