TRANSITIONS TO DEMOCRACY

IN HER OWN WORDS:
Aung San Suu Kyi

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TRANSITIONS TO DEMOCRACY

Over the past two decades, the world has witnessed remarkable transformations of authoritarian regimes into fledgling democracies from Africa and Latin America to Eastern Europe. The July 10 release of Aung San Suu Kyi, after nearly six years of house arrest, has triggered much speculation as to whether Burma will now move toward political reform. Like South Africa's Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi has called for reconciliation and dialogue in the hope that it might lead Burma on a course toward a representative government. But how valid are comparisons between Burma and South Africa, Chile or Haiti? Do the ingredients exist in Burma today to allow for a transition to democracy as in other parts of the world?

IN HER OWN WORDS:
Aung San Suu Kyi

Since her release Aung San Suu Kyi has met with a steady stream of opposition leaders, diplomats and journalists, and continues to address citizens who gather daily outside her home. Her message to all has been one of reconciliation, negotiation and thoughtful restraint. It has also been firmly rooted in her conviction that democratic reform for Burma is the goal, and dialogue is the vehicle to reach that goal. Through words and photographs, Aung San Suu Kyi speaks to the world, now — at long last — as a free individual.

JAPAN ON BURMA

Many believe Japan had the greatest influence on the decision by Burmese military leaders to release Aung San Suu Kyi. Japan's announcement to resume Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Burma almost immediately after the release lent credence to the Japanese argument that soft persuasion, rather than harsh condemnation, could move the SLCR in the right direction. The two countries have enjoyed what has been referred to as an "historically friendly relationship" and, since World War II, ODA has been used as an important foreign policy tool. What is the true motivation behind Japan's foreign policy toward Burma? Will Japan use its substantial influence in Burma to try to affect political reform or to advance its own economic interests?
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Democratic Transitions
With the release from house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi, some observers have drawn parallels between Burma and South Africa, as the *Economist* did in its July 15th leader, "Asia's Mandela". And it makes sense that Suu Kyi herself would cite the example of South Africa — as an inspiration to Burma's battered democracy movement, and in hopes of generating the level of international support enjoyed by South Africa's anti-apartheid movement. But a closer look at South Africa and other countries indicates that many of the conditions conducive to democratic change are still lacking in the case of Burma.

Burma's Will Not Be Easy
Over the last two decades a number of democratic transitions were rooted in profound internal crises of those regimes. For example, the Argentine military government collapsed in 1982-83 following a humiliating defeat in the Falklands/Malvinas war with Britain. Similar regime implosions led to transitions in Greece and Portugal in 1974. And imperial overreach played a key role in the unraveling of Communist rule in the former Soviet Union. Neither military defeat at the hands of an external force, disastrous foreign adventures or a profound internal crisis threatens the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) regime in Burma.

In some countries, externally supported armed resistance movements applied critical pressure that helped lead to transitions to elected civilian rule — for instance, in El Salvador and Nicaragua in the 1980s. However, armed groups in Burma have received little or no foreign backing and the SLORC has had significant success in subduing them through a combination of cooptation and sheer military might.

Democratic transitions in Eastern Europe owed much to the declining economic and military strength of the Soviet overlord, and to the proximity of dynamic Western European democracies, whose political and cultural influences the Iron Curtain ultimately could not withstand.

In Latin America during the 1980s, some military regimes stepped aside in large part because the generals did not want to deal with severe economic crises. In Brazil, for example, the military was practically clueless in the face of a staggering $100 billion-plus debt load and chronic hyperinflation. Once opposition political elites agreed not to hold the military accountable for past human rights violations, the return to civilian rule in 1985 was accomplished with relative ease.

As the democratic momentum spread from one Latin American society to the next, promoted by a plethora of non-governmental organizations and a number of governments from the developed world, other military governments began to yield, however reluctantly, to civilian rule.

One of the more recalcitrant was the Pinochet regime in Chile. In 1980, seven years after the coup that overthrew Salvador Allende, Pinochet imposed an anti-democratic constitution on Chile with the aim of lending his rule a veneer of legitimacy. It was also designed to engineer his own succession through 1997 via a national plebiscite that he expected to control. What he did not count on was steadily increasing international pressure throughout the
1980s, a change of heart by the Reagan Administration that had originally supported him and the fact that his repressive rule had not snuffed out 150 years of democratic rule and strong civic traditions that Chile had enjoyed prior to the coup.

As the 1988 plebiscite approached, Washington pressed Pinochet to allow the democratic opposition to campaign freely by lifting Chile’s General System of Preferences (GSP) benefits and suspending Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) guarantees. As Pinochet conceded to a more level playing field and the presence of hundreds of international observers, the multi-party Democratic Alliance and dozens of allied civic organizations launched a dynamic campaign. In the end, a majority of Chileans voted “No” to eight more years of Pinochet. However, it was not until two of the other three generals in the military junta recognized the opposition victory that Pinochet reluctantly stood aside to make way for a competitive presidential election in 1989.

In two Latin American countries, regimes resorted to brute force to retain power after annulling elections (Panama) and overthrowing a duly elected president (Haiti). General Noriega and the Haitian junta were subsequently ousted by U.S. military intervention, a “soft” invasion in the case of Haiti. No such thing will happen in Burma. Half a world away from U.S. shores, Burma presents no threat to U.S. security and is far from the daily thoughts of average Americans.

Democratic rule remains unsteady in Eastern Europe and is especially fragile in Latin America, where there have already been setbacks. In Peru, for example, since 1992 President Alberto Fujimori has connived with the military to erect a Lee Kuan Yew-style government in the Andes. Nonetheless, Eastern Europe and Latin America did undergo a wave of sweeping, regional change.

Burma, on the other hand, is nestled among several authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states and the trend among many of Burma’s Southeast Asian neighbors is now actually toward even tighter political control. That has made it easier for the SLORC to ward off outside democratic influences. At the same time, unlike the former Communist governments of Eastern Europe, the SLORC has been gaining rather than losing a powerful patron. China’s heavy military and economic investment in Burma, and Beijing’s political recognition (Chinese Premier Li Peng visited Rangoon last December), have been crucial to the SLORC’s effort to consolidate its rule since the events of 1988 and 1990.

Aung San Suu Kyi also invites comparisons to Corazon Aquino, who galvanized and rode the crest of the “People Power” movement in the Philippines in 1986. But it was not until several top Philippine military officers declared their support for Aquino — a critical development that parallels the transition in Chile — that Ferdinand Marcos was compelled to flee the country.

Two years later, the Burmese military, when confronted by similar massive pro-democracy demonstrations, cracked down decisively. In 1990 the SLORC also exhibited little hesitation in annulling the elections, and since then has systematically suppressed political and civic opposition to forestall the re-emergence of any People Power-type movement. The modern Burmese military has never openly split, and there are few indications that SLORC officials are about to break ranks now.

Then there is the role of religious institutions. The Catholic Church played an important role in
supporting a number of pro-democracy efforts, particularly in Poland and Chile. Burma is probably the most religious country in Asia. Aung San Suu Kyi has written about the democratic foundations of Buddhist thought, and Buddhist monks were in fact at the forefront of the demonstrations in 1988. That is why they were targeted in the ensuing crackdown.

Since then, SLORC intelligence has penetrated monastaries and seems to have gained effective control over many religious leaders through intimidation and cooptation.

All of which leads to the key difference between South Africa and Burma. In 1990 the de Klerk government released Nelson Mandela and began negotiations toward a transition because it believed it was too weak to do otherwise. The SLORC released Aung San Suu Kyi because it believes that it is now strong enough to neutralize her and fend off external pressure to negotiate seriously with her. And it is betting that by merely releasing her, it can break the embargo against international loans and foreign aid needed to strengthen Burma’s ailing economy — at this point the only real weak link in the SLORC dictatorship.

Consider the forces arrayed against the de Klerk government prior to its release of Mandela in 1990. Few regimes had ever experienced such international political and economic isolation; sanctions, despite some loopholes and leaks, were biting deeply. A primary reason was that the issue was more about ending white rule than democracy per se.

Racial justice and democracy are integrally linked. But the apartheid question allowed non-democratic governments from around the world and especially in Africa to contribute to the fight against the regime, while immunizing them against charges of hypocrisy. So, even though there were few democratic members in the Organization of African Unity, the OAU was a united voice against the South African government and the so-called front-line states eagerly provided critical concrete support to Nelson Mandela’s African National Congress (ANC).

The cause in Burma is more specifically about democracy and human rights. The pertinent regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), is not about to promote those principles given the authoritarian nature of some of its member governments. That was made abundantly clear recently when ASEAN accepted Vietnam, one of the most repressive regimes in the world, for full membership. At that time Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad stated, “We welcome Vietnam’s entry into ASEAN because we are of the opinion that we do not need to question their system of government so long as they accept a free-market system.” Such are the tenets of market authoritarianism, currently defended by its practitioners as "Asian democracy."

Now compare the domestic situation in South Africa in 1990 with the situation in Burma today. Despite the ANC being “banned,” the apartheid regime had allowed sufficient space for it and its allied organizations, especially trade unions, to develop into a powerful national organization with an armed component. South African state security increasingly had to utilize brute force to suppress the mounting popular demand for change. Despite some government restrictions, much of the repression was reported or seen in the domestic and foreign media, deepening the regime’s international isolation.

At the same time, the tide was turning in South
Africa's relatively well-developed civic society — churches, legal groups, non-governmental development organizations, the media and universities, many of which were interacting with international counterparts. In these circles there was a growing belief that continued intransigence by the government could lead to a maximally destructive civil war. That view was gaining ground, too, among the powerful, urban-based white business class, which also was concerned about economic decline caused by international sanctions.

With so much arrayed against it, the de Klerk government and much of the white elite came to the realization that trying to maintain the status quo could mean losing everything. (The South Korean military and its civilian backers seemed to have come to a similar realization in the face of widespread, sustained student and middle class protests in 1987-88.) The release of Mandela was not a token gesture. It was a conscious first step toward establishing a democratic system in which whites could hope to retain a say, and protect some of their interests, in a post-apartheid South Africa.

In Burma, however, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy has suffered serious setbacks. Trade unions are banned. There are no independent media and the ability of foreign journalists, especially the broadcast media, to put a spotlight on Burma is severely restricted.

Many in Burma's budding entrepreneurial class backed the pro-democracy movement in 1988 because they opposed the socialist policies of the former Ne Win government. Now they are profiting from the SLORC's opening of the economy and are more likely to acquiesce in maintaining the status quo. Meanwhile, ASEAN's "constructive engagement" policy has been to SLORC's advantage because it is more about enhancing the prospects of foreign investors in Burma and diminishing Chinese influence than it is about promoting political change.

But increased foreign investment, whether from Asia, Europe or the U.S., and the promotion of tourism (taking a page from Fidel Castro's book in Cuba) will not be enough to solve the SLORC's economic problem. Maybe the SLORC's claim of six percent annual growth over the last two years is true. But no amount of foreign investment will be enough to push ahead the economic restructuring needed for Burma to compete with its Southeast Asian neighbors. Restructuring, particularly the revaluation of Burma's overvalued currency, requires a resumption of aid from international agencies, particularly the IMF and the World Bank.

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If in 1990 the South African government came to one type of realization, the SLORC, over time, came to a completely different one — namely, that only the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi stood in the way of fortifying its economy and consolidating its rule. And the SLORC indeed has reason to believe that it can now gain the international economic assistance it needs by simply releasing her and ignoring her calls for serious negotiations.

Despite the strong language of United Nations resolutions, international pressure on Burma by governments remains haphazard at best. The United States has taken a relatively hard-sounding line, but the SLORC duly noted, as did every other autocrat-
ic outfit in the world, the Clinton Administration's decision last year on China to separate human rights issues from trade relations. That underscored the primacy of commercial interests in current U.S. foreign policy, as did Washington's recent reestablishment of relations with Vietnam and its tendency to look the other way when confronted with the suppression of democracy and the violation of human rights in Indonesia.

The SLORC, therefore, calculated that what made Burma different from similarly repressive countries like China, Vietnam and Indonesia, and what kept Burma from enjoying the type of recognition and economic relations afforded to them by the United States and other Western nations, was the continued detention of a world-renowned political prisoner.

The SLORC also noted the Clinton Administration's decision at the end of 1994, made simply on the basis of two meetings between Burmese military officials and Aung San Suu Kyi, to adopt a more conciliatory approach toward Burma. To stop the apparent slide of the White House into the cynical "constructive engagement" of ASEAN, Republicans in the U.S. Congress prepared a bill, sponsored by Sen. Mitch McConnell, that would sanction any nation that aids or trades with Burma.

The initial indications were that the SLORC's tactical release of Aung San Suu Kyi was paying off. The Clinton Administration promptly asked Congress to put off considering the McConnell bill. Japan, eager to profit from investments in Burma, stated the day after Suu Kyi's release that it was willing to start talks with Burma on the resumption of official loans, suspended in 1988. On August 4th, the Bank of Tokyo announced it was reopening its office in Rangoon to assist Japanese companies wishing to do business in Burma. The SLORC must have been particularly pleased as the announcement came after Suu Kyi's appeal for foreign governments to wait to see if there were genuine moves toward democracy in Burma before resuming economic aid. The SLORC therefore had reason to hope that Tokyo, through its strong influence in the Asian Development Bank, would eventually break the ice on direct aid to Burma by multilateral agencies.

The SLORC appears to be in the driver's seat and Aung San Suu Kyi is facing a number of difficult decisions in the coming months. Her popularity, like Mandela's, is not in question, nor is her courage. But her followers lack organization and the resources necessary to rebuild the pro-democracy movement.

Moreover, the decree banning any type of gathering by a group of five or more people remains on the books, and the deployment of 20,000 extra troops in Rangoon at the time of her release indicates the SLORC is prepared to enforce it. That is a far different picture than South Africa in 1990, or Chile, where the opposition had great latitude to campaign against Gen. Pinochet in the 1988 plebiscite that led to the return of civilian rule.

The SLORC may try to finesse the issue of negotiations by inviting Aung San Suu Kyi to participate in the National Convention it has rigged for the purpose of formalizing an Indonesia-style, military-dominated polity, a process she has already referred to as a farce. The convention is scheduled to resume on October 24th. If she agrees, she may risk losing credibility among her followers. If she does not, she is left with the option of testing and trying to widen the narrow political space allowed to her.

Aung San Suu Kyi will have a very difficult time of it without renewed international pressure on the SLORC. Given that governmental pressure already appears to be easing, the non-governmental organizations that make up the international movement on behalf of democracy in Burma will have to step up their actions and convince governments and Western investors not to strengthen the SLORC's already formidable position any further. The movement has grown measurably and its efforts were integral to Aung San Suu Kyi's release. But with the prevailing conditions both inside and outside Burma, she and her followers need support more than ever. SLORC leaders believe they are actually in a stronger position with Aung San Suu Kyi released from house arrest. She will not be able to prove them wrong on her own.

The original painting on the cover of this issue of Burma Debate was inspired by the events of July 20, 1989, the day Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD) was placed under house arrest. The artist, a student activist, was present at the home of Suu Kyi when the announcement came that she was to be put in detention. He describes what took place:

Rumors of the coming arrests were circulating on the 19th of July and leaders of the NLD began discussing what to do if Daw Suu and others were to be arrested. That night, I slept at the NLD headquarters [two doors down from Daw Suu's house]. I told myself that it was an important time and therefore I did not go home.

In the morning, we received news that they were laying barbed wire in front of Daw Suu's home around Inya Road and that armed men were gathering.

Without even washing our faces, I went with four of my friends to Daw Suu's compound. There, together with those colleagues who were already in the compound, we discussed strategy while keeping a close eye on the front of the house. At the back of the house, on the far bank of Inya Lake, several trucks were parked and three or four rowboats were kept in readiness. Outside there were armored cars continuously stopping and moving around, with a great show of weapons.

Daw Suu was preparing to call an urgent meeting with the leaders. At 8 a.m. Daw Suu, U Kyi Maung, U Aung Shwe, U Lwin and U Chit Khant began an emergency meeting of the NLD's Executive Committee. Uncle Tin Oo's house had also been surrounded, and that's why he was unable to come [to the meeting].

Outside, many of our friends arrived, group by group, and other people came, in spite of the many barriers. At the entrance there were arguments going on with the armed men. By order of the military, no one was allowed to enter or exit the compound. Soldiers had stationed themselves near the compound but they had not yet entered.

Inside the house, the elders [NLD party leaders] were holding a meeting. At approximately 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the soldiers brought the Na-Wa-Ta's [SLORC] order that the elders [leaders] must leave the house. They left after being interrogated by the soldiers.

Inside the compound Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's family remained, along with about thirty of us friends and supporters. Daw Suu appeared very calm though very busy throughout the afternoon. Then about 6 pm, armed men, young and old, entered the compound and positioned themselves throughout the grounds. Those that were to meet with Daw Suu took their position in front and entered her house.

There, the duty officer relayed the information by radio [to an outside place] that Daw Suu has been placed under arrest.

Daw Suu was not at all ruffled. She told the men that although they were there to arrest her as a person who was disruptive to the nation, she totally disagreed with them. She asked them however, that they carry out their duty. "I do not hold this against you," she said. They, in turn, taped and photographed the events.

Then they asked Daw Suu's permission to take us [the students] to another area. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said that we should not worry about her, but we were not comforted. We were taken into the meeting room and questioned. Afterwards, the armed men kept us a short distance from the house. They were searching here and there, and questioning everyone as well. The entire compound was thoroughly searched and videotaped.

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At about 9 pm, everyone in the compound except Daw Suu and her family was taken to the front of the house and made to squat in a row with our hands behind our heads and our heads bowed.

Around 30 minutes later, Daw Suu came out of the house with a pitcher of water and glasses. She gave water to those of us who were about to be taken away and spoke quietly with us.

At 10 o'clock that night we were sent to the Insein jail. Daw Suu accompanied us to the car. Her last words to us were those of encouragement — (Ah hman ta yar har te ne do paw ya hmar pe) "Truth will come one day."
People have to accept that we are nowhere near democracy yet.

I've been released, that's all...

the situation hasn't changed"

The Financial Times, July 15/16, 1995
"You must have heard the general view that the NLD in the last six years was a completely spent force and no longer viable as a political party. I do not think this is true at all. Of course, it has been dampened considerably by all the restrictions imposed on it during the last six years. But we still have the support of the people."

The Nation (Bangkok), August 2, 1995

"...I always felt free because they have not been able to do anything to what really matters — to my mind, my principle, what I believe in. They were not able to touch that. So I am free."

BBC interview/ABC Nightline
July 13, 1995
"I think they [the Japanese] should watch and see a bit and not rush into it [resuming aid]. Aid should get to people who need it most and should be given in the right way at the right time.

If it is a reward for my release, I'm just one political prisoner released, and there are others as well. The change in condition of just one person is not enough.

Far Eastern Economic Review, August 31, 1995

"The opinion of other countries, of the international community, does matter, and I don't think anybody with any sense can really ignore it."

Reuters, July 13, 1995
"Most of our people who have lived under far worse conditions than I, in Insein jail and other jails, have no ill feelings... I was under house arrest... All right, this is not the most beautiful house in the world but it is a lot [more] comfortable than Insein jail or any other jail in the country."

The Nation (Bangkok), August 2, 1995

"I do sincerely believe, and I think most of the people of Burma share this belief, that in the end our problems will have to be settled through dialogue. And let's hope that this comes sooner rather than later."

The Christian Science Monitor, September 1, 1995
IIS a wonderful but daunting task that has fallen on me to say a few words by way of opening this Forum, the greatest concourse of women (joined by a few brave men!) that has ever gathered on our planet. I want to try and voice some of the common hopes which firmly unite us in all our splendid diversity.

But first I would like to explain why I cannot be with you in person today. Last month I was released from almost six years of house arrest. The regaining of my freedom has in turn imposed a duty on me to work for the freedom of other women and men in my country who have suffered far more — and who continue to suffer far more — than I have. It is this duty which prevents me from joining you today. Even sending this message to you has not been without difficulties. But the help of those who believe in international cooperation and freedom of expression has enabled me to overcome the obstacles. They made it possible for me to make a small contribution to this great celebration of the struggle of women to mold their own destiny and to influence the fate of our global village.

The opening plenary of this Forum will be presenting an overview of the global forces affecting the quality of life of the human community and the challenges they pose for the global community as a whole and for women in particular as we approach the twenty-first century. However, with true womanly understanding the Convener of this Forum suggested that among these global forces and challenges, I might wish to concentrate on those matters which occupy all my waking thoughts these days peace,
security, human rights and democracy. I would like to discuss these issues particularly in the context of the participation of women in politics and governance.

For millennia women have dedicated themselves almost exclusively to the task of nurturing, protecting and caring for the young and the old, striving for the conditions of peace that favour life as a whole. To this can be added the fact that in context of the home and family, it is time to apply in the arena of the world the wisdom and experience thus gained in activities of peace over so many thousands of years. The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.

If to these universal benefits of the growing emancipation of women can be added the "peace dividend" for human development offered by the end of the Cold War, spending less on the war toys of grown men and much more on the urgent needs of humanity as a whole, then truly the next millennium will be an age the like of which has never been seen in human history. But there still remain many obstacles to be overcome before we can achieve this goal. And not least among these obstacles are intolerance and insecurity.

This year is the International Year for Tolerance. The United Nations has recognized that "tolerance, human rights, democracy and peace are closely related. Without tolerance, the foundations for democracy and respect for human rights cannot be strengthened, and the achievement of peace will remain elusive." My own experience during the years I have been engaged in the democracy movement of Burma has convinced me of the need to emphasize the positive aspect of tolerance. It is not enough simply to "live and let live": genuine tolerance requires an active effort to try to understand the point of view of others; it implies broad-mindedness and vision, as well as confidence in one's own ability to meet new challenges without resorting to intransigence or violence. In societies where men are truly confident of their own worth women are not merely "tolerated," they are valued. Their opinions are listened to with respect, they are given their rightful place in shaping the society in which they live.

There is an outmoded Burmese proverb still recited by men who wish to deny that women too can play a part in bringing necessary change and progress to their society: "The dawn rises only when the rooster crows." But Burmese people today are well aware of the scientific reasons behind the rising of dawn and the falling of dusk. And the intelligent rooster surely realizes that it is because dawn comes that it crows and not the other way round. It crow to welcome the light that has come to relieve the darkness of night. It is not the prerogative of men alone to bring light to this world: women with their capacity for compassion and self-sacrifice, their courage and perseverance, have done much to dissipate the darkness of intolerance and hate, suffering and despair.

Often the other side of the coin of intolerance is insecurity. Insecure people tend to be intolerant, and their intolerance unleashes forces that threaten the security of others. And where there is no security there can be no lasting peace. In its Human Development Report for last year the UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] noted that human security "is not a concern with weapons — it is a concern with human life and dignity." The struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma is a struggle for life and dignity. It is a struggle that encompasses our political, social and economic aspirations. The people of my country want the two freedoms that spell security: freedom from want and freedom from fear. It is want that has driven so many of our young girls across our borders to a life of sexual slavery where they are subject to constant humiliation and ill-treatment. It is fear of persecution for their political beliefs that has made so many of our people feel that even in their own homes they cannot live in dignity and security.
Traditionally the home is the domain of the woman. But there has never been a guarantee that she can live out her life there safe and unmolested. There are countless women who are subjected to severe cruelty within the heart of the family which should be their haven. And in times of crisis when their menfolk are unable to give them protection, women have to face the harsh challenges of the world outside while continuing to discharge their duties within the home.

Many of my male colleagues who have suffered imprisonment for their part in the democracy movement have spoken of the great debt of gratitude they owe their womenfolk, particularly to their wives who stood by them firmly, tender as mothers nursing their newly born, brave as lionesses defending their young. These magnificent human beings who have done so much to aid their men in the struggle for justice and peace — how much more could they not achieve if given the opportunity to work in their own right for the good of their country and of the world?

Our endeavors have also been sustained by the activities of strong and principled women all over the world who have campaigned not only for my own release but, more importantly, for our cause. I cannot let this opportunity pass without speaking of the gratitude we feel towards our sisters everywhere, from heads of government to busy housewives. Their efforts have been a triumphant demonstration of female solidarity and of the power of an ideal to cross all frontiers.

In my country at present, women have no participation in the higher levels of government and none whatsoever in the judiciary. Even within the democratic movement only 14 out of the 485 MPs elected in 1990 were women — all from my own party, the National League for Democracy. These 14 women represent less than 3 per cent of the total number of successful candidates. They, like their male colleagues, have not been permitted to take office since the outcome of those elections has been totally ignored. Yet the very high performance of women in our educational system and in the management of commercial enterprises proves their enormous potential to contribute to the betterment of society in general. Meanwhile our women have yet to achieve those fundamental rights of expression, association and security of life denied also to their menfolk.

The adversities that we have had to face together have taught all of us involved in the struggle to build a truly democratic political system in Burma that there are no gender barriers that cannot be overcome. The relationship between men and women should, and can be, characterized not by patronizing behavior or exploitation, but by metta (that is to say loving kindness), partnership and trust. We need mutual respect and understanding between men and women, instead of patriarchal domination and degradation, which are expressions of violence and engender counter-violence. We can learn from each other and help one another to moderate the "gender weaknesses" imposed on us by traditional or biological factors.

There is an age-old prejudice the world over to the effect that women talk too much. But is this really a weakness? Could it not in fact be a strength? Recent scientific research on the human brain has revealed that women are better at verbal skills while men tend towards physical action. Psychological research has shown on the other hand that disinformation engendered by men has a far more damaging effect on its victims than feminine gossip. Surely these discoveries indicate that women have a most valuable contribution to make in situations of conflict, by leading the way to solutions based on dialogue rather than on viciousness or violence?

The Buddhist paravana ceremony at the end of the rainy season retreat was instituted by the Lord Buddha, who did not want human beings to live in silence (I quote) "like dumb animals." This ceremony, during which monks ask forgiveness for any
offense given during the retreat, can be said to be a council of truth and reconciliation. It might also be considered a forerunner of that most democratic of institutions, the parliament, a meeting of peoples gathered together to talk over their shared problems. All the world's great religions are dedicated to the generation of happiness and harmony. This demonstrates the fact that together with the combative instincts of man there co-exists a spiritual aspiration for mutual understanding and peace.

This forum of non-governmental organizations represents the belief in the ability of intelligent human beings to resolve conflicting interests through exchange and dialogue. It also represents the conviction that governments alone cannot resolve all the problems of their countries. The watchfulness and active cooperation of organizations outside the spheres of officialdom are necessary to ensure the four essential components of the human development paradigm as identified by the UNDP: productivity, equity, sustainability and empowerment. The last is particularly relevant; it requires that "development must be by the people, not only for them. People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives." In other words people must be allowed to play a significant role in the governance of their country. And "people" include women who make up at least half of the world's population.

The last six years afforded me much time and food for thought. I came to the conclusion that the human race is not divided into two opposing camps of good and evil. It is made up of those who are capable of learning and those who are incapable of doing so. Here I am not talking of learning in the narrow sense of acquiring an academic education, but of learning as the process of absorbing those lessons of life that enable us to increase peace and happiness in our world. Women in their role as mothers have traditionally assumed the responsibility of teaching children values that will guide them throughout their lives. It is time we were given the full opportunity to use our natural teaching skills to contribute towards building a modern world that can withstand the tremendous challenges of the technological revolution which has in turn brought revolutionary changes in social values.

This forum of non-governmental organizations represents the belief in the ability of intelligent human beings to resolve conflicting interests through exchange and dialogue.

As we strive to teach others we must have the humility to acknowledge that we too still have much to learn. And we must have the flexibility to adapt to the changing needs of the world around us. Women who have been taught that modesty and pliancy are among the prized virtues of our gender are marvelously equipped for the learning process. But they must be given the opportunity to turn these often merely passive virtues into positive assets for the society in which they live.

These, then, are our common hopes that unite us — that as the shackles of prejudice and intolerance fall from our limbs we can together strive to identify and remove the impediments to human development everywhere. The mechanisms by which this great task is to be achieved provide the proper focus of this great Forum. I feel sure that women throughout the world who, like me, cannot be with you join me now in sending you all our prayers and good wishes for a joyful and productive meeting.

I thank you.
Among all the Asian countries, Japan has been in a position to exercise the strongest influence on Burma. It is worthwhile, therefore, to examine diplomatic relations between the two countries in order to understand the realities of Japan's version of a "constructive engagement policy" and the possibilities that exist for Japan to promote democracy in Burma.

Kei Nemoto is an Associate Professor of modern Burmese history at the Institute for the Studies of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.
JAPAN-BURMA RELATIONS FROM 1954 TO 1988

Japan’s post-war diplomatic relations with Burma can for the most part be characterized as that of the donor of Official Development Aid (ODA), and the recipient of that aid. In December 1954, the two countries reopened formal diplomatic ties and beginning the following year, Burma became the first country in Asia to receive war compensation from Japan. Burma eagerly accepted this Japanese compensation because the Pyidawtha Program, the economic plan of Premier U Nu’s administration aimed at developing a welfare state, was encountering serious financial difficulties.

From 1955 through 1965, the Japanese government paid 72 billion yen (which was then the equivalent of $200 million) in goods and services. A major portion of this was used for the construction of the Baluchaung Dam in Karenni State and four major industrialization projects: light vehicle production, heavy vehicle production, farming machinery production, and electrical machinery production.

In 1965, at the completion of the compensation agreement, it was discovered that Burma had received less than that paid to Indonesia and the Philippines. In order to make up the difference, additional compensation was offered under the Economic and Technical Cooperation Treaty.

Japan also began promoting Official Development Aid (ODA) to Burma in the form of loans from 1968. ODA towards Burma was small in the beginning, as General Ne Win, (who ousted U Nu in a military coup in 1962) pushed the country toward self-sufficiency. However, from the latter half of the
1970s, Burma changed course to actively receive ODA in order to overcome its seriously stagnant domestic economy. Japanese grant aid was initiated in 1975 and from this point on, ODA from Japan rapidly increased.

Burma received ODA funds for large-scale projects, mainly for the development of social infrastructure such as electrical power, transportation and irrigation. It also received product loans for the four major industrialization projects which included funds for procuring parts from four specific Japanese companies.

The total amount of Japanese ODA to Burma (loan aid, grant aid and technical cooperation) from the time Japan began funding until 1988 amounted to 511.7 billion yen. This figure is extraordinarily high compared with Japanese ODA to other countries, with Burma ranking seventh in line of aid recipients during this period. Japan had become Burma's largest single donor of aid. Of the $332.71 million in bilateral aid Burma received in 1988, 78 percent was from Japan.

WHY JAPAN CONTINUES TO GIVE ODA TO BURMA

From 1962 to 1988, the period of Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism," Burma not only promoted inactive and neutral diplomacy, it strictly regulated the introduction of foreign capital. In spite of this Burmese attitude, why did Japan continue to give extraordinary amounts of aid to Burma — and why did Burma accept it?

For Burma, perhaps it was the critical state of its domestic economy in the late 1970s. But why did Japan decide to give Burma a higher priority than other underdeveloped countries? And why did Burma prefer Japan to other donor countries when it did seek foreign aid? The answer may lie in non-rational reasons, such as Japan's special consideration for Burma and vice-versa, rather than rational ones, such as the economic or political relationship between the two countries.

Ever since the compensation after World War II, Japanese influential in diplomatic and economic matters have referred to a "special relationship between Japan and Burma", or the "historically friendly relationship."

The thinking behind these expressions is that while Japan brought a great deal of inconvenience to Burma during World War II, it also made significant contributions to the country. Young nationalists such as the "Thirty Comrades", which included Aung San and Ne Win, were educated by Japanese Army officers known as the Minami Kikan, leading to the birth of the Burma Independence Army (BIA). This army developed into the Burma National Army (BNA). Japan also accepted many Burmese students, providing them scholarships during the war. Many of these people (military and civilians) rose to positions of national leadership in Burma after independence. Therefore, when they stood up to build a new Burma, the feeling was that Japan should give them support.

Takashi Suzuki, the former ambassador to Burma who was stationed there from 1971 through 1974, details this line of thought in his memoir on the history of Japan-Burma relations [T. Suzuki, 1977, A Country Called Burma, PHP Research Institute, Tokyo]. He especially emphasizes the achievements of Burma's anti-colonial vanguard forces, the Thirty Comrades, and the BIA, then goes on to declare... "Burma is one country that is most worthwhile for Japan to support." He points out that... "the people of Burma are friendly and good natured, sincere, thrifty, forgetful of past misery with their hearts of Buddhists [sic], with good
communication with the Japanese people and very little resentment towards Japanese, and that Japan had a special relationship with Burma from a historic perspective."

Suzuki's memoir, however, fails to consider other important elements that cannot be ignored when recalling the history of independence in Burma including the anti-Japanese struggle that developed among the BNA in 1945 and the process of crucial negotiations for independence with British authorities under the leadership of Aung San between 1945 and 1947. Clearly, Suzuki and others of similar views share a very one-sided interpretation of history.

At the same time, we need to realize that the Burmese did their part to foster this idea of a special relationship with Japan. One need only to look at the views of the Burmese government regarding the struggle for independence as written in school textbooks after independence and particularly after 1962. These views center around the Minami Kikan and the birth and activities of the BIA. Although the historical significance of the all-out revolt against the Japanese Army by the BNA in 1945 is strongly stressed, the Minami Kikan, which gave birth to and guided the BIA is described as a group of Japanese people who understood the Burmese nationalists' aspiration towards independence. This posture of describing the Minami Kikan (which was actually no more than a one-time spy organization of the Japanese Army) positively, or at least not labeling the Kikan as fascist, came about through the friendly relationship that existed between the organization's members and the Burmese Thirty Comrades. This view justified to the Burmese nation the creation of the National Army.

In 1980, the Burmese government publicly announced the achievements of the Minami Kikan by decorating former members with the Order of Aung San. Also, in March 1983, during a visit to Burma of then Japanese Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe, Burmese President San Yu told the Foreign Minister that, in one sense, Japan had helped Burma to achieve independence. He openly stated that the Japanese Army made it possible for the young Burmese nationalists to acquire political skills. At a later date, Foreign Minister Abe wrote that through his talks with important people in the Burmese government, he could sense "their strong friendliness and great expectations with Japan."

Reactions by the Burmese government, though perhaps mere gestures for obtaining as much aid from Japan as possible, helped to justify the Japanese one-sided "understanding" of Japan-Burma relations. It is worth noting for instance, that every Japanese ambassador to Burma in the 1960s, '70s and early '80s enjoyed better access to Ne Win than other ambassadors.

In 1987, a year before the nationwide democratic uprising, Japan secretly tried to persuade Burma to shift toward an open economic system. Then in 1988, Burma witnessed the largest anti-government mass movement in its history, and on September 18 of that year, the Army (Tatmadaw) regained control over the movement and established the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

The Japanese government was among the first nations to recognize the SLORC (February, 1989). Although Japanese ODA stopped temporarily during the time of the uprising, it was later resumed, but limited to on-going projects, technical cooperation, and emergency humanitarian assistance. A freeze was put on new loans.

From the beginning, the basic Japanese posture toward SLORC has been one of soft persuasion. It
has not resorted to economic sanctions. Japan behaves as a good friend, persuading SLORC to open up Burma’s economy as well as to move toward democracy and stop human rights violations. The Japanese government expects the Burmese military regime to change on its own, even though it has sometimes been irritated by SLORC’s stubbornness.

While this soft approach towards SLORC is rooted in the perceived historically friendly relationship between the two countries, it should be noted that Japan’s purpose in maintaining this approach has shifted gradually over the last seven years. Though still friendly towards Burma, Japan’s reasons for being so have changed significantly.

First, China’s increasing influence in Burma since 1989, both economically and militarily, has made Japan nervous. The Japanese government has responded by urging Burma to enter the international community and to decisively adopt a market-oriented economic policy. This position is basically shared by the members of ASEAN and India — the countries that most fear China’s penetration into Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean.

Second, Burma’s rapid economic growth since 1992, which has been supported by the ample foreign investment of several countries belonging to the Newly Industrializing Economies (NIES), made Japan even more confident in its policy. Even though Japan is aware that SLORC has little intention of developing a long-term economic plan, the Japanese government has encouraged and appreciated the economic “change.” This position is essentially based on a presumption that economic development itself will be followed by democratization; a presumption which is debatable among scholars, and unacceptable to Aung San Suu Kyi and the opposition. Although Burma faces a serious problem of an enlarging gap between rich and poor — a barrier to democratization — this fact is underestimated by Japan.

Third, Burma is one of the few countries where Japan can exercise independent diplomacy, free from the influence of the United States. Japan realizes that the U.S. has little economic or diplomatic interest in Burma and that America’s rigid human rights-oriented position towards Burma has not brought fruitful results. Clearly, SLORC feels little pressure from the United States. It seems then that the more the U.S. adopts rigid diplomacy, the more Japan adopts a “friendly” posture.

Last but not least, it is undeniable that Japan’s big corporations have become more interested in Burma than ever before. They see the country as the last big market in Southeast Asia and believe that, should they procrastinate in their investments, they may lose a chance to gain the economic upperhand in Burma. Some of these impatient corporations were already investing, long before Aung San Suu Kyi’s release. This eagerness by Japanese businessmen for early investment may have encouraged the government to persuade SLORC to show more changes on the economic and political fronts. Very likely the Japanese government indicated to SLORC its willingness to resume full-scale ODA in the near future — if SLORC released Aung San Suu Kyi.

JAPAN AND BURMA: A NEW LOOK AT THE “HISTORICALLY FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIP”?

SLORC understands very well that in order to sustain investment from major multinational corporations it must have infrastructure. The military administration knows that the type of foreign investment presently in Burma, which consists mainly of smaller corporations, is insufficient for the country’s long-term economic development. Burma will need the investment of major multi-
national corporations. At the same time, SLORC realizes that it must not depend too heavily on China. It is natural for SLORC, therefore, to turn to Japan for large scale ODA.

As a result, SLORC took advantage of the Suu Kyi card. It released Aung San Suu Kyi unconditionally, but thus far has ignored her request for dialogue. Her release is a nominal concession for SLORC, which is not looking toward promoting democracy or working toward national conciliation. SLORC's aim was only one: Japan's positive response. Japan has not only welcomed the release but also indicated gradual resumption of full-scale ODA to Burma in the near future. For the moment then, SLORC has achieved its goal.

Japan and Burma have entered into a new understanding of their "historically friendly relationship". Now, they need each other for different reasons than they did before 1988. It is difficult, however, to know whether this relationship will advance democratic reforms in Burma, because it is apparent that democratization and human rights have been given at best, secondary importance by both governments. Instead, the focus of the two countries is economic growth.

At this stage it is anyone's guess as to whether this will bring about democracy in Burma. Certainly, the world is watching to see whether Japan will choose to help steer the course in that direction.

NOTES
1. The Minami Kikan was a special Japanese military unit led by Colonel Keishi Suzuki. It was established in February 1941 and abolished in July 1942. The unit's aim was to weaken British rule in Burma by clandestinely providing arms and military training to young Burmese nationalists.
Japan on Burma

Embracing the Future:
Japan Must Rethink Its Myanmar Policy

By Ichiro Uchida

The release of Aung San Suu Kyi provides Japan with an important chance to rethink its policy toward Myanmar. Keeping in step with Europe and America, the Japanese Government substantially suspended Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Myanmar following the 1988 coup d'etat and the subsequent establishment of the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

Japan's decision to halt ODA was the appropriate measure at that juncture. Certainly, most Japanese would never condone SLORC's violations of human rights, nor believe it should remain in power after having ignored the results of the 1990 general election. It is doubtful, however, that it continues to be appropriate to maintain sanctions on Myanmar because of its track record on human rights and democracy.
Perhaps it is more useful to focus on the way SLORC has been able to build the nation while isolated from the world over the past six years. True, the Myanmar people have been denied freedom of speech and assembly and many have unjustly jailed for political reasons. At the same time, the lives of farmers have definitely improved when compared to General Ne Win's era, primarily because SLORC has raised the government procurement price of rice. Urban dwellers are also aware that their lives are on an upswing by the fact that more schools are being built and more commodities are on the market. Although people remain cautious about SLORC leadership, certain aspects of life in Myanmar have gotten better.

There has also been a shift in the geopolitical situation which cannot be ignored. Over the past six years, China has been the only country supporting Myanmar. The two have built deep relationships, both politically and economically, as consumers in Myanmar become more and more dependent upon Chinese products. The continuation of worldwide sanctions will serve to strengthen military ties between the two countries as well.

ETHNIC MINORITY PROBLEMS

SLORC has managed to bring many of the diverse minority rebel forces to the negotiating table. It unilaterally announced a ceasefire with all minority rebels in 1992. Before that, SLORC maintained open communications with the rebels for six years, finally reaching ceasefires with 14 of the 16 groups involved. One of these groups, the KIO (Kachin Independence Organization), had the second largest army in Myanmar.

Of the two remaining rebel armies, SLORC refuses to recognize the Mong Tai Army (MTA) led by General Khun Sa as a minority group — regarding it as a mere terrorist organization that will be eradicated if it does not surrender. Therefore, the last remaining rebel army is the influential Karen National Union (KNU). Although internal disputes between the Buddhists and Christians in the KNU have recently developed into armed conflict, SLORC still expects to reach a ceasefire agreement with the whole of the Karen. It may, however, require more time to establish a peace. Making matters even more difficult, internal KNU conflicts are going on near the boundary with Thailand. This, in turn, strains Myanmar-Thai relations.

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Yet, no other administration in the long history of Myanmar has succeeded in solving ethnic problems without outside assistance, and this point is praiseworthy. SLORC has given priority to the issues of the ethnic minorities by raising the standard of living and developing industries in local areas following the signing of the ceasefires. When I met General Khin Nyunt (Secretary No.1) in 1992, he emphasized that it was his government's mission to prevent his nation from becoming a second Bosnia.

The ethnic minorities also see the importance of negotiations. They are putting much effort toward achieving a true peace in all of Myanmar with SLORC. The world must be made aware of these accomplishments.

For example, in July of this year, the KIO leader, U Zaw Maing, met SLORC and observers from
Japan, the UNDCP [United Nations Drug Control Programme], and the United States. The following agreements were reached:

Ethnic problems in Myanmar derive from the large number of groups involved, each with their differing interests. They do not share languages or life styles. Raising the standard of living for all groups is an important theme for SLORC.

1. To halt poppy cultivation by educating the farmers and moving them into other areas of crop production.
2. To strengthen regulations on the trafficking of drugs in Kachin State. Presently, there are routes into the Kachin State from Pakistan and India, as well as Shan State, China and Nepal.
3. To build rehabilitation centers for drug addicts and establish job training programs.
4. To deal with the narcotics issue not as a problem in Myanmar, but as a regional one requiring the active involvement of Myanmar's neighbors.

Ethnic problems in Myanmar derive from the large number of groups involved, each with its differing interests. They do not share languages or life styles. Raising the standard of living for all groups is an important theme for SLORC. In order to achieve this goal they are promoting peace by constructing schools, building roads and increasing the production of agricultural goods. Both Japan and the U.S. should lend more support to these efforts.

International Engagement of the SLORC

The relationship between the SLORC and the international community changed a great deal after its peace agreement with the KIO in 1994. The SLORC set about carrying out several measures such as: releasing political prisoners; allowing Professor Yozo Yokota, the special envoy of the U.N. Human Rights Commission, to meet with political prisoners; having a dialogue with U.N. representatives; and arranging the meeting between U.S. Congressman Bill Richardson and Suu Kyi. This created an environment that set the stage for Myanmar's entry into the international community.

As a result, ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] announced its 'Constructive Engagement' policy with Myanmar and invited the country to attend the ASEAN Ministerial Meetings in 1994. Other neighboring nations besides ASEAN have rapidly increased exchanges with Myanmar in recent years. Chinese government officials go back and forth to Myanmar almost every month. The U.S. and Britain each sent high-level government representatives to begin discussions with the SLORC in 1994. Singapore's Prime Minister Goh visited the country the same year.

Myanmar's Economy

As a result of SLORC's economic policy, Myanmar's economy has greatly improved. The share of Myanmar industries in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is: 53% agriculture; 22.3% trade; 6.5% manufacturing; and others. The majority of the 22.3% in trade is in primary goods. This reflects SLORC's policy to develop the nation's economy by expanding agricultural production.

In developing nations, it is an appropriate step to advance agricultural productivity over manu-
facturing, as the agricultural industry provides prosperity to the nation despite its low productivity. Therefore, the Japanese Government should actively support SLORC’s promotion of agricultural development.

European and American companies, as well as those from the ASEAN and Newly Industrialized Economies (NIES) countries have entered into Myanmar’s market in a big way. Siemens of Germany reached an agreement to establish a communications network throughout the country. As a result, it is now possible to make international phone calls instantly, where only a few years ago it would take as long as two to three hours.

Thailand has agreed to a sales contract for natural gas, which will be effective in 1998 for the next 30 years, greatly contributing to the influx of foreign currency into the country.

Singapore founded a joint-venture airline in 1994 and the Korean automobile company, Daewoo, is planning to manufacture cars in Myanmar. Leading into the government-promoted “Visit Myanmar Year of 1996,” many hotels have opened or are under construction.

It is widely said among business people that Myanmar has fewer regulations on foreign investment and is easier to make inroads than Vietnam. Because the people of Myanmar generally speak English, communication is not a problem. There is no income tax for the corporations for three years and custom duties on raw materials are also waived; both measures serve as an incentive for foreign investors.

JAPAN’S POLICY

The Japanese Government maintains the same position as Western countries, that is — Myanmar should improve its human rights record and create a viable democracy. To achieve results in these areas however, diverse approaches must be adopted. Some countries apply strong pressure on Myanmar to force change. The Japanese Government’s approach has been to generate change through continuous peaceful talks.
based on mutual understanding.

The democratization process does not need to follow one route. SLORC, during General Saw Maung’s era (from 1988 to 1990) certainly took the wrong road. Since General Than Shwe came to power in 1990, however, policies have changed. Many important efforts toward achieving democracy have

The Japanese Government should evaluate to what degree the Myanmar Government is improving human rights and pursuing democracy. In this process the Japanese should consider ways to encourage steps toward these goals.

been made. As mentioned, political prisoners have been released, universities have been reopened, and discussions were held between Aung San Suu Kyi and SLORC officials prior to her release.

History has proven that a certain amount of discipline is necessary in order to maintain social stability during the process of democratization. This said, basic human rights in all societies should be absolutely protected. Achieving this universal value is a great challenge and we must always seek to stop violations of human rights where they exist.

The question to ask, however, is whether a nation is seriously pursuing this objective and whether it is showing any progress. In this regard, President Clinton’s political decision to separate human rights problems from Most Favored Nation (MFN) renewal with China was the right decision. The Japanese Government should evaluate to what degree the Myanmar Government is improving human rights and pursuing democracy. In this process the Japanese should consider ways to encourage steps toward these goals. It should especially provide active support for humanitarian purposes such as improving the infant mortality rate, fighting drug abuse, and dealing with AIDS and other life-threatening diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria.

Grant aid of 100 hundred million yen (about $10 million) which the Japanese Government promised in March of this year helps SLORC’s aim to increase food production for minority ethnic groups living near the borders. This is effective support that will help solve the tribal conflicts in Myanmar and help the areas develop peacefully.

To achieve real democratization it is indispensable to create a middle class. SLORC is throwing its energies into economic development, but there is a pressing need to improve the infrastructure throughout the country.

The Japanese Government announced in July 1995 its review of ODA policy toward Myanmar. As a result of that review, Tokyo will reopen basic humanitarian assistance on a project-by-project basis. Now the time has come for the Japanese Government to consider resuming full-scale ODA in order to advance economic development in Myanmar, while paying close attention to that country's progress with regard to human rights and democratization.

Ichiro Uchida is Senior Advisor at the Mitsui Marine Research Institute in Tokyo. He served as political advisor to Japan’s Foreign Minister, Michio Watanabe, and as a research fellow with the Asia Foundation.
THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

While the article "Student Activism in Burma" by Dr. Thaung Htun, in your April/May 1995 issue was interesting, I am constrained to point out some serious historical omissions, especially since it was subtitled "A Historical Perspective".

To an informed and sensitive reader, the omissions indicate a bias or prejudice in the writer which is inappropriate at a time when all efforts are directed towards restoring democracy and ensuring respect and equal rights for all of Burma's minority peoples. Historical accuracy is also important since the military dictators have done enough damage over the past 30 years by their distortions and revisions to the political history of Burma.

The most serious omission is the absence in the entire article of any mention of my father, Mr. M. A. Raschid. No history of student activism in Burma can be complete without mentioning him, as he was a very major figure in the landmark student strike of 1936. This omission is even more glaring since the photograph of the Executive Committee of the Rangoon University Students' Union (RUSU) which accompanies the article shows my father as President of the Union. He was also the very first General Secretary of the RUSU at its founding in 1930. At the successful ending of the student strike, among many changes and amendments to the University Act, was the provision of a seat for a student representative on the University's Governing Council. My father was honored by his colleagues to be the first student Councillor nominated by the Union.

The formation of the All Burma Students' Union (ABSU) soon after the strike is mentioned by the author, and of Aung San's election as its first General Secretary. At that time M. A. Raschid was unanimously elected its first President, thereby having the unique privilege of being President of both the historic Student Unions simultaneously.

As space does not permit me to provide all the complimentary comments of my father and his leadership role by a variety of authors, let me just refer the interested reader to the following: U Nu of Burma by Professor Richard Butwell; The Union of Burma by Professor Hugh Tinker; "M. A. Raschid — a Profile," by Dr. Maung Maung in the Guardian magazine of December 1956; and Aung San of Burma also by Dr. Maung Maung. Both General Aung San and U Nu had great respect and affection for my father...

...Dr. Thaung Htun writes about the arrival of thousands of students to the areas controlled by the ethnic minorities without any reference either to the role of the Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma (CRDB) or of the Karen National Union (KNU). Without the help and assistance extended by these organizations, the only thing which would have happened is the slaughter of all the student refugees by the Karen ethnic army, whose distrust and hatred of the Burmans was intense. U Ye Kyaw Thu, the founding Secretary General of the CRDB, was at one point in his discussions with the KNU almost shot by a lieutenant of General Bo Mya, the Chairman of the KNU. Mention should also have been made of the Democratic Alliance of Burma, a historic grouping of 22 different ethnic and Burma organizations including the students.

In concluding, the author of the article looks with hope to a return of democracy to the beloved land of our birth. But it is important at this critical juncture to understand that ingredients to establishing a viable and lasting democracy are tolerance, respect and equality for all the people that inhabit this beautiful but presently tragic land.

Yours truly,
Bilal M. Raschid
President of the Foundation for Democracy in Burma
Founding member of the CRDB

I have read the article of Dr. Thaung Htun in your vol.1, #2 of April/May, 1995, as well as the IRI report of Mr. Michael Mitchell.

I note with the utmost consternation the brave face put on by both the authors but, between-the-lines, the message is clear as to the miserable defeat both suffered in the hands of the rude, crude, murderous and rapist Burmese military junta who are, unfortunately, still calling the shots even after [more than] 30 years.

Nevertheless, there have been two or three occasions when the military junta had to eat its own words. I refer to the anti-Rohingya operations against the ethnic Rohingya Muslims, conducted under names such as Operation A-Yaing Za-Be, Operation Naga Min and recently in the year 1992-3, Operation Pyi-Tha-Ya. These operations were launched using brute force with indiscriminate killings, torching of houses, raping of Muslim women and young girls... The international community immediately stood behind not only the Bangladeshi government but on the side of the innocent refugees driven out by the thousands to Bangladesh.

The overwhelming moral and material support rendered by the world community brought the monstrous military regime to its knees. Today the God-fearing Muslim Rohingya families are gradually trekking back to the homes of their ancestors.

What I feel betrayed about is the indifferent attitude towards these unfortunate victims [exhibited] by the leadership of the student community in general and ABSU in particular. What is all the more ironic is the fact that the Islamic role in the history of the fight for independence against the British, as well as the origins of students politics is indispensable however hard they may try to belittle it.

Now that the ABSDF claims to have reviewed their position we do hope they will not only [remember] their Islamic brethren but will also revive the Panglong agreement. Only then can history repeat itself [with] giants like Saya U Razak, U Raschid and U Khin Maung Latt and others prominent in Burmese politics and history.

Yan Ko Naing
Bangladesh

THE HIERARCHY OF POWER

I have to disagree, though only slightly, with Chao-Tzang Yawngwhe's letter to you (Apr/May issue): it is not a matter of "a few top brass" only. Any successful tyrant in history would agree that his power depended upon the creation of a layer of servants, separated from the people and somewhat privileged, who would fight to keep the system going so as to preserve their economic and social advantages. Under the Konbaung kings this part was played by the king's ahmu-dan service units, hereditary servants of the Court in capacities ranging from water carriers and laundry workers to soldiers, boatmen, let-mayun executioners and bodyguards. These people, particularly the major units, the au-gyi, when not called for service at the capital, lived...
in their own quarters scattered throughout the country under their own leaders, not subject to the regular civil administration of the townships. Pagan U Tin reports that Taw Sein Koe, the Director of Archaeology in the 1890s, Chinese by birth, said that the kings’ government with the royal service units operated as an army of occupation in a conquered country. In any case the royal power depended upon the service units, which in turn depended upon the royal power for their privileges. The people at large, the ahti, had, in theory, no regular call to service apart from payment of taxes, though a demand for irregular service might be hard to resist.

Today this situation looks familiar, with the tatmadaw taking the ahmu-dan place. Indeed, the Royal Order of 1147 might well be spoken by a member of the SLORC (flattery always helps): "The establishment of the service groups has been the foundation of the State and through it the State will be perpetuated through the long future and, because of the country's peace, the Religion will flourish." Today it looks as though the country is back in the time of the kings and it will not get out of it until the mutual dependence of army and government is ended.

L.E. Bagshawe
Durham, North Carolina

ROUNDTABLES

WASHINGTON, DC — The Washington Roundtable of August 1 will feature a showing of Life on the Line, a documentary by Damien Lewis of Bare Faced Productions. The film, which premiered on British television in July, covers social, human rights and environmental issues surrounding the development of the Yadana gas pipeline.

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

NEW YORK — The guest speaker of the August 23 meeting of the New York Roundtable will be Dr. Christina Fink, an anthropologist who has conducted research on the Karen in Thailand and Burma.

The New York Roundtable is a periodic meeting of organizations and individuals interested in Burma. For more information contact: The Burma Peace Foundation by phone: (212) 338-0048 or fax: (212) 692-9748.

MASSACHUSETTS — A Roundtable will be held September 11 featuring the ABC Nightline broadcast of an interview with Aung San Suu Kyi. On September 21, the Roundtable will host Kevin Heppner of the Karen Human Rights Group. Mr. Heppner has spent the past five years along the Thai/Burma border documenting human rights abuses against ethnic groups from Burma.

The Massachusetts Burma Roundtable is an informal group 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 Franklin Research & Development Corporation by phone: (617) 482-6179 or fax: (617) 482-6179.

SAN FRANCISCO — The Bay Area Burma Roundtable is held the third Wednesday of every month. For more information contact Jane Jerome by phone: (415) 424-8643 or e-mail: jjerome@igc.apc.org

SEATTLE — The July 27 meeting of the Burma Interest Group featured guest speaker Jane Peterson of the University of Washington who offered her personal observations from her two month stay in Rangoon with the World Health Organization.

The Burma Interest Group is a non-partisan forum attended by representatives of NGOs, business, academia and other interested parties that meets monthly to discuss Burma related topics. For more information contact Larry Dohrs by phone: (206) 784-6873 or fax: (206) 784-8150.

LONDON — The guest speaker for the Burma Briefing of August 29 will be Robert Gordon, the recently appointed British Ambassador to Burma who will be posted in Rangoon as of early September.

The Burma Briefing is a periodic meeting of NGOs working on Burma. For information contact Edmond McGovern by phone: (441-392) 876-849 or fax: (441-392) 876-525.

HONG KONG — Information on upcoming Burma Roundtables can be obtained by contacting the Asian Human Rights Commission by phone: (852) 2698-6339 or fax: (852) 2698-6367.

PARIS — A Burma Roundtable will be held in Paris on September 22 to discuss NGO activities in France.

The NGO community in France and Belgium host periodic roundtables in Paris and Brussels. For more information on this European forum contact Brian McGee of Agir-ici by phone: (33-1) 40-35-06-98 or fax: (33-1) 40-35-06-20.
MEDIA RESOURCES

INFO BIRMANIE
Info Birmanie
Agir-ici
14, passage Dubail.
75010 Paris, France
Tel: (33 1) 40 35 06 98
Fax: (33 1) 40 35 06 20

Info Birmanie is a French language newsletter produced by collective associations and individuals. The bi-monthly bulletin was launched in May/June 1995.

BURMA: ENTRENCHMENT OR REFORM?
Human Rights Watch/Asia Report
Human Rights Watch/Asia
1522 K Street, NW Suite 910
Washington, DC 20006-1202 U.S.A.
Tel: (202) 371-6592
Fax: (202) 371-0124
E-mail: hrwdc@igc.apc.org

This July 1995 report details the ongoing pattern of human rights violations by the current regime and poses a series of recommendations for the international community.

A CRY LEFT UNHEARD
A special report of the Karen National Union
Mergui-Tavoy district
April 1995
Kwe Mu Huaw
P.O.Box 11
Kanchanaburi 71000
Thailand

Using interviews with laborers and military documents, this report highlights the abusive practices of the Burmese authorities toward the people of the Tenasserim division of Burma, the site of a soon-to-be constructed natural gas pipeline. The pipeline is a project of a consortium of private, foreign and Burmese government oil companies.

COUNTRY COMMERCIAL GUIDE: BURMA
An annual report from the U.S. government’s International Trade Administration.
National Technical Information Service
Springfield, VA 22161 U.S.A.
Tel: (800) 553-6847

This report, details economic trends, promising import markets and local organizations that can supply information to U.S. exporters. It can be ordered for USD $23.50 by contacting the sales office listed above.

BURMA: THE POLITICS OF CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT
by John Bray
The Royal Institute of International Affairs
Chatham House
10 St. James Square
London SW1Y 4LE
United Kingdom
Tel: (044-171) 957-5700
Fax: (044-171) 957-5710

This booklet examines Burma’s future economic prospects and debates whether economic liberalization should proceed or follow political reform.

INSIDE WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT CLINTON WELCOMES RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI
The White House issued the following statement on July 10 upon the release of Aung San Suu Kyi:

President Clinton welcomes the announcement earlier today by the Burmese authorities that Aung San Suu Kyi has been unconditionally released after almost six years of house arrest. The President, who has repeatedly called for the Nobel Prize winner’s freedom since the beginning of his Administration, expressed gratification that the efforts of the international community had finally secured her release. If her release enables her to participate freely in a genuine process of political reconciliation leading to the installation of a democratically-elected government, today’s development would mark a major milestone towards the restoration of peace and stability in Burma.

Even while welcoming her release, President Clinton expressed concern about a number of serious and unresolved human rights problems in Burma, including the continued detention of other political prisoners and the ongoing military campaigns against a number of ethnic groups.

SENATOR MCCONNELL CALLS HEARINGS ON BURMA

Senator Mitch McConnell, chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee on Foreign Operations, held a hearing on July 24 to determine whether Burma’s military regime has made progress regarding human rights, narcotics eradication and the restoration of democracy. The hearings were called as part of his initiative to introduce trade and investment sanction legislation. Among those testifying were Winston Lord, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs; Robert Gelbard, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Crime; Mike londrezjczyk of Human Rights Watch/Asia; Phillip Fishman of the American labor federation, the AFL/CIO; and Burmese student activist, Ohmar Khin.

U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS TO VISIT BURMA

Madeleine Albright, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, plans to visit Rangoon in early September, following the U.N. Conference on Women in Beijing. The State Department announced that Ambassador Albright will meet with Burmese authorities, members of the democratic opposition including Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of the various United Nations agencies while in the country.

SANCTIONS LEGISLATION TO GO TO A VOTE

Legislation imposing trade and investment sanctions on Burma known as the “Free Burma Act” (S.1092) and introduced by Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, is poised to go to the Senate floor as an amendment to the Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill according to sources on Capital Hill. The bill is expected to be brought to the Senate for a vote around the third week in September.

HOUSE TO HOLD BURMA HEARINGS

The Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific of the House International Relations Committee has scheduled a hearing on “Recent Developments in Burma” for September 7. The list of witnesses includes Kent Weideman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs; Holly Burkhalter, Washington Director of Human Rights Watch; Josef Silverstein, Professor emeritus of Rutgers University; and Ernest Bower, President of the U.S./ASEAN Business Council.
VOICES OF BURMA

The following excerpts are from a letter written by an expatriate Burmese who recently visited Burma. The writer's name is withheld by request.

...Upon my arrival, it was required that I exchange $300 USD in Foreign Exchange Certificates (FECs) at Rangoon airport. One FEC is now equal to 150 kyats on the black market. (One U.S. dollar will bring about 120 kyats at black market rates.) This means that FEC is more valuable than USD and ensures that SLORC earns more in hard currency

...There are many Korean and Singaporean garment factories in Rangoon. Garments are sent to Taiwan and labeled there for export. Workers I spoke with told me that they are not treated very well. For example, some workers were fired the first time they reported late to work. There is a lot of anger and frustration toward these companies. One Singaporean manager of a garment factory was beaten up by a group of Burmese women because they could no longer tolerate her rudeness and mistreatment

...In Insein township, where Insein Prison and many factories are located, I noticed that most of the workers who were waiting in the long bus lines were teenagers who should have been going to school. They told me that their average wage was 1,000 kyats per month which is equal to around USD $8 on the black market...

...Many of the local residents from Insein have been moved to far away places, and new hotels, restaurants, night clubs and golf courses had replaced their homes. Many historical buildings in Rangoon have been replaced by hotels. I also heard that a new international airport was to be built in Pegu (50 miles away from Rangoon.)...

...Movements of people are being closely monitored. Everyday after 10:00 p.m., there are groups of armed uniformed soldiers in front of important buildings like the Myanmar Broadcasting Service (MBS), the Parliament compound and along U-Wizaya road

...Druglord Lo Hsing Han and his followers are making a lot of money. Heroin in Rangoon is widely available and very cheap...

...I visited the house of one of the SLORC generals. His teenage son had the latest model Japanese-made TV with remote control, a CD player, and the most expensive, top-brand accessories in his well-furnished room. The General's wife looked like a golden statue. Her bracelets, rings, necklaces were shining so brightly that she could hardly be seen. Each family member owned at least one car

...Low-level officers in the army were also wealthy enough to be buying houses...

...Song writers I spoke with have been warned that they are to write only love songs. Well-known songs of Moon Aung (who is now with the Democratic Voice of Burma in Norway) have been recorded by other singers, but Moon Aung's name is not mentioned in publishing credits. No one leaving Burma is allowed to bring his original cassette tapes

...People told me that some youths who have been arrested and imprisoned were actually set up by the military intelligence. They were approached at tea shops and asked if they wanted to read underground newspapers. When they were given newsletters or papers of the outside democratic forces a hidden camera recorded them. Later, they were called in for interrogations. People believe that those who have brothers and or sisters who fled to the border in 1988 are more likely to be victims to this sort of set-up...

...Most people see great danger in talking to anybody about what is going on

BUSINESS WATCH

CORPORATE CAMPAIGN GROUPS TO HOLD ANNUAL MEETING

The Coalition for Corporate Withdrawal from Burma, an international network of organizations working on issues around foreign investment in Burma, will meet in New York August 24 and 25. The group will examine strategies for activities such as shareholder resolutions, selective purchasing legislation and product boycotts. Ways to initiate grass roots support for U.S. sanction legislation currently before the Senate will also be discussed.

U.S. COMPANY TO BEGIN GOLD EXPLORATION IN BURMA

The East Asia Gold Corporation of the United States and the Myanmar Department of Geological Survey and Mineral Exploration have signed a contract which will cover mineral prospecting, exploration and a feasibility study for developing gold and copper resources in Thabeikkyin township in northern Burma. East Asia Gold joins six other foreign firms involved in gold exploration in the country, among them companies from Canada, Australia, Singapore and the United States.

JAPANESE FIRM UNDERTAKES $700 MILLION GAS PROJECT

Mitsui & Co., the Japanese trading house, has entered into a $700 million project with Burmese authorities which will involve the construction of a 200 megawatt electric power plant and a fertilizer plant near Rangoon with an annual production capacity of 570,000 tons. Mitsui will also direct the building of a 250 kilometer pipeline between the offshore Yadana gas fields and the plant sites. The natural gas fields are being developed under a production-sharing contract between Unocal of the United States, Total of France, the Petroleum Authorities of Thailand and the SLORC government.

U.S. CITY JOINS IN BOYCOTTING FIRMS IN BURMA

The City Council of Madison, Wisconsin has passed a law that strongly discourages city contracts with companies such as Pepsi, Unocal and Texaco which continue to do business in Burma. Other cities in the United States including Berkeley, California, Seattle, Washington and Chicago, Illinois, have also adopted legislation that restricts contracts with companies active in Burma.
"LET THERE BE NO JEALOUSY OR ENVY"
by U Phyoe

On the night of 15 July, the BBC in its news programme, broadcast a news item at hindering foreign countries helping and assisting Myanmar. I, U Phyoe, personally heard it.

What was astonishing to me in that was that the person who dis-suaded foreign countries from helping and assisting Myanmar was not of the ilk of Khun Sa, the opium bandit or Bo Mya, the imperialist henchman terrorist. It was just one ordinary individual from among the masses who expressed that malice against the State Law and Order Restoration Council and the masses of the people.

That had been diametrically opposed to the person’s usual rhetoric about forgiveness, unity and cooperation.

Friends and governments who, with a sincere desire to help Myanmar in economic and social development, have been assisting the State Law and Order Restoration Council government that has been effectively serving the interests of the country, are in reality contributing in one way to the welfare of the clergy and laity of Myanmar. It is the 45 million peoples of Myanmar who are going to directly benefit from such foreign assistance.

The only government capable of really and so swiftly achieving so much progress in promoting the peoples’ living standard, in developing towns and countryside, in providing airports and seaports and in building pagodas, monasteries, hospitals, dispensaries and parks, so far as I have clearly seen in my whole life as a clergy and later as a layman, is the present government.

...At a time when a government, capable of decisively implementing its noble intentions, is in power, there are certain financial and technological limitations restraining the government from doing everything it might wish to do everywhere. If not for such limitations and restraints, the State Law and Order Restoration Council would have definitely achieved a higher level of development than it has now achieved.

In recognition of this state of affairs, a number of sympathetic countries of the East, are now getting ready to help, as much as they could, the State Law and Order Restoration Council Government that has really, sharply and successfully been serving the interests of the peoples. At this juncture, as the Myanmars use to say, that a soup of Pyipannyo vegetable could have been quite sweet if not for an excess of salt in it, the above-mentioned hindrance was uttered by a person from inside the country, unafraid of the purgatory, unaware that it was a sin and unknowing that it was a mental defilement.

In order that lessons may be taken from this episode by the pious keeping sabbath during the Lenten Period, by the devout doing meditation and by all the benevolent and charitable Myanmars across the whole country, I might here offer some canonical advice as a gift.

What is Defilement (kilesa)? It is something that scorches, that torments, that defiles, that causes sufferings. There are ten Defilements —

...Of the ten... jealousy and envy is most abominable...

...In this connection, envy (issa) is common mostly among those who do not know the Law.

Just consider the matter which I, U Phyoe the ex-monk, mentioned at the beginning. The State Law and Order Restoration Council is striving to build up the country in all sectors and all aspects. It has successfully organized all national groups to reunite. This is where a rejoicing is due, but that person shows no rejoicing. This is where any possible help is due, but that person offers no help: indeed the person even tries to obstruct and impede. My heart goes out in pity to that person for a deed so vile and so abominable.

During the current Lenten Period, may all creatures be able to ponder, practice and proliferate virtuous religious laws, may they be able to cleanse themselves of the evil laws of defilement that are scorching and that are sinful, may those that are already thickly coated with such defilements be able to peel them off with attention and awareness, may they be able to shed their vanity that has put their heads in the clouds and their feet off the ground, may they be able to eschew envy and jealousy, and may they be able to repent and remedy any envy and jealousy had they already committed them. This is to be my spiritual gift.

The above is excerpted from an article that appeared in The New Light of Myanmar on August 1, 1995.

BRIEFINGS AND DEVELOPMENTS

BBC, VOA BROADCASTS JAMMED BY SLORC

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has reported that its World Service broadcasts in Burmese have been jammed since early August. According to the BBC, this is the first time in its 55 year history that such jamming has occurred in Burma. Broadcasts of the Voice of America (VOA) have also been jammed since August.

In a country where all media is controlled by the State, BBC and other foreign operated radio broadcasts are the only accurate source of information. Reports from inside Burma indicate that the government has also suddenly clamped down on the proliferation of satellite dishes and has made it illegal to own a parabolic antenna.

HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP INTENSIFIES CAMPAIGN FOR ACTIVIST

The Physicians for Human Rights has again made an appeal to the international community to intervene on behalf of Dr. Ma Thida, a 28 year old physician, writer and political activist who was arrested in August 1993 for her involvement with the National League for Democracy (NLD). Dr. Ma Thida was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment and remains in solitary confinement. It has been reported that she was recently diagnosed with tuberculosis and ovarian tumors that require surgery. A letter writing campaign requesting information on her current state of health and calling for her immediate and unconditional release is underway. For more information contact: Physicians for Human Rights, 100 Boylston St., Suite 702, Boston, MA, 02116.

BURMA DEBATE
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.