SPEAKING TO THE UNGA IN THEIR OWN WORDS

ASIANS LOOK AT ASEAN
SPEAKING TO THE U N G A

With the convening of this year's session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, representatives of Burma's State Law and Order Restoration Council were once again given the opportunity to address the international community. In his statement to the UNGA, SLORC's Minister of Foreign Affairs speaks to the way in which his government has tackled such issues as peace and development, narcotics, the environment and human rights. In turn, representatives of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), which is comprised of members of parliament who were elected in May 1990 but never allowed to assume power, react to SLORC's claims.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

On October 28 and 29, over eighty participants, representing fifty non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from twenty different countries met in Bangkok to discuss ways to build a parallel network to the region's governmental forum, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Entitled "Alternative ASEAN," the meeting provided an opportunity for Asian activists, academics and others to develop options to ASEAN's current policy toward Burma. Two of the individuals spearheading this initiative speak to Burma Debate about the role of NGOs in Asia and why they view the issue of Burma to be critical.

ASIANS LOOK AT ASEAN

For several years, Burma's neighbors have adopted the approach of "constructive engagement" with the military regime, which basically has meant access to the markets and resources of what some call the next "Asian tiger." This year Burma was granted observer status to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and membership to the group was seen as imminent. Some governments, however, appear to be seriously questioning just how "constructive" this approach has been, whether more should be expected from the Burmese regime in return, and whether the country is, in fact, ready to join the region's most respected forum.
STATEMENT BY U OHN GYAW
To the United Nations General Assembly

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A NEED FOR YIELD IN MYANMAR

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THAILAND’S UN MISSION
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REASONS FOR ASEAN TO DELAY MYANMAR
By Dewi Fortuna Anwar
May I begin by extending to you the warmest congratulations of the delegation of the Union of Myanmar on your most deserving election as President of the Fifty-First Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Your election to the important office is no doubt a reflection of the high esteem in which your country, Malaysia is held by the international community for its active role in world affairs and for your wealth of personal experience and diplomatic skills. We are confident that under your leadership our deliberations will be fruitful. On a personal note, I would like to say how deeply honored I was to have accompanied the Head of State Senior General Than Shwe on his state visit to your country last month. The visit was a success. We were much impressed by the warm reception accorded us as well as by the outstanding achievements of the leadership in bringing peace and prosperity to the people of Malaysia.

I wish also to express our appreciation to your distinguished predecessor, His Excellency Professor Diogo Freitas do Amaral for his invaluable contribution to the work of the Fiftieth Session of the General Assembly.

MR. PRESIDENT,
The United Nations today is at a crossroads. On the one hand there is hope for a new era in international relations as post Cold War trends compel nations towards ever growing inter-dependence and the globalization of the world economy. On the other hand issues which have been dormant for decades have emerged, drawing the world into a pattern of conflict, ethnic strife and violence. In this time of global transformation the United Nations has an important role to play. It must actively work to guide the world through the transitional period to a new peaceful, secure and stable era based on respect for the Charter.

In this "UN Debate for International Law" it would be most appropriate to rededicate ourselves to achieving a world where principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs of states are respected.
Myanmar truly believes that we can overcome the political, economic and social challenges we face and avoid confrontation and chaos only if we seize the opportunity to strengthen the organization and promote a multilateral system based on the primacy of international law and freedom of choice and equality of all States.

MR. PRESIDENT,
Disarmament, sustainable development, enhancement of the environment and suppression of narcotic drugs are priority issues that affect the security and well-being of peoples throughout the world. Concern continues to mount over the lack of adequate progress in these areas.

The proliferation of arms, particularly of weapons of mass destruction, remains the greatest potential threat to mankind's survival. All states, large and small, nuclear and non-nuclear have a vital interest in ensuring the success of negotiations on disarmament. The primary responsibility for removing the threat of a nuclear holocaust, however, rests with the nuclear-weapon states. It is essential that nuclear-weapon states show the political will to accommodate the concerns of non-nuclear-weapon states to achieve a mutually acceptable basis for universal disarmament.

Myanmar continues to regard a comprehensive test ban treaty [CTBT] as an essential step to nuclear disarmament. The adoption of the CTBT by the General Assembly on September 10, 1996 is a welcome development. It will contribute significantly towards the process of nuclear disarmament and to our efforts to achieve the goal of general and complete disarmament.

Myanmar has always supported the establishment of nuclear free zones. In our own region we have, together with our neighbors, signed and ratified the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty.

MR. PRESIDENT,
Peace and security in the world needs to be built upon economic development. Without development there can be no lasting peace. It must be realized, however, that economic progress in developing countries depends as much on a fair and equitable inter-
national economic environment as it does on domestic reforms to effectively confront the challenge of poverty and economic malaise. In this regard, we share the Secretary-General's view that development should be recognized as the foremost and most far-reaching task of our time. At the same time we are deeply concerned that the process of globalization of the world economy has ended up with many more losers than winners. The situation has been most eloquently described by the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, President Samper of Columbia, when in his address to the Meeting of the Ministerial Committee on Methodology held earlier this year in Cartagena he said, "The cake of progress continues to be handed out in large slices for a few, and in crumbs for the rest." Indeed it is distressing to note the dangerous tendency of certain states to link trade and commerce with other issues. We find unacceptable the threat or use of economic sanctions and the extraterritorial application of domestic law to influence policies in developing countries. The use of economic sanctions as a tool of policy is indefensible. It is a flagrant breach of the United Nations Charter.

MR. PRESIDENT,
Narcotic drugs are a growing menace to the international community. Myanmar, aware of the problem, is presently carrying out narcotic suppression as a national cause. From the outset the Government has realized that the drug problem can only be tackled with a multisectoral approach and has laid down national strategies to combat the menace. The nationwide drug abuse control program covers many activities: crop substitution and livestock distribution for farmers in the border areas where opium is grown; treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts; preventive education; and law enforcement. The areas where poppy is grown are underdeveloped regions where the national races depend on cultivation of opium as the principal means of livelihood. Hence, the government has set up an entire Ministry devoted to the development of border areas. The development of these areas will no doubt ensure the success of the eradication campaign. In parallel with the national effort, the government has sought closer cooperation with the UNDCP [United Nations Drug Control Programme] and neighboring countries and is actively participating in the international campaign against the production and trafficking of illicit drugs. Our efforts are meeting with success as one armed group after another has returned to the fold to join hands with the Government in the development endeavors. An encouraging development this year is the unconditional surrender of the Mong Tai Army of nearly 20,000 men led by U Khun Sa. We are confident that this unprecedented achievement will result in the drastic reduction of opium supply.

I would like to firmly reiterate Myanmar's commitment to the total eradication of poppy plantations in our country. The sheer magnitude of the problem would require new ways and means to address the problem. There must be additional efforts to curb demand just as we work to deter production and trafficking. We would welcome increased support for our national programs or for development projects administered by UNDCP.

MR. PRESIDENT,
Environment issues are among the most widely discussed topics of our times. Environment and development top the international agenda as human impact on the environment has increased dramatically and mankind faces challenges unprecedented in scope and severity. The tremendous growth in population coupled with industrial development in every region of the world has taxed the carrying capacity of the earth. The struggle even to support the present population at today’s standards of living will cause environmental degradation on an unprecedented scale. However, in the last few years seeds of hope have been sown as there is growing awareness in the world that the causes and consequences of environmental degradation transcend boundaries and that our future world must be one of partnership.

Myanmar is aware that different elements of ecological systems are interlinked. It is only through an integrated approach at the national, regional and global levels that we can achieve sustainable development. For this reason we have been endeavoring to contribute to the protection and promotion of the environment at every level.
In developing countries like Myanmar forests, farmlands, fisheries and freshwater constitute the foundation of development. In Myanmar we are fortunate that these resources are abundant and are not under stress. This is largely the result of the traditional culture that pervades daily life. The planting of trees, construction of gardens and parks, building bridges, digging wells, providing rest houses and monasteries are considered meritorious deeds. The people of Myanmar love and respect nature and seek to live in harmony with the environment. The history of Myanmar is replete with accounts of environmental conservation carried out by Myanmar monarchs. The ancient kings had the vision to protect teak forests by royal decree and to ensure systematic management of forest resources.

Mr. President,

In the three years following the World Conference on Human Rights, increasing emphasis has been placed on the promotion and protection of human rights. While we can welcome the spirit in which the question of human rights is considered, we are seriously concerned by the growing tendency by certain Western Countries to politicize the question of human rights and to use it as a tool to interfere in the domestic affairs of states. We firmly believe that the international community should take a more holistic approach to the question of human rights and not be preoccupied with individual rights and freedoms.

Any government, institution or individual seeking to promote human rights should bear in mind the significance of national and regional peculiarities as well as historical, cultural and religious backgrounds together with the stage of economic development. In Myanmar and other developing countries poverty remains an effective obstacle to the full enjoyment of those rights. For this reason we are redoubling our efforts to ensure their right to development of our peoples so that they can be delivered from the clutches of poverty.

The allegations that wholesale repressive measures are being carried out in Myanmar have never been borne out. On the contrary the peace and stability that now reigns in the country has allowed it to achieve significant progress. Continued economic reform will positively impact the living standard of all citizens. At present there is potential in Myanmar for unprecedented peace and development and for her to join the ranks of the fast-growing economies in her region. The international community can do no better than to help Myanmar by playing a constructive role.

The allegations that wholesale repressive measures are being carried out in Myanmar have never been borne out. On the contrary the peace and stability that now reigns in the country has allowed it to achieve significant progress.
The Government has initiated economic reforms aimed at transforming the centrally-planned economy into a market-oriented one. Private investment and domestic entrepreneurial activity have been encouraged, and the economy has been opened to direct foreign investment. Private-sector participation in both domestic and foreign trade has been promoted. The economic reforms are bearing fruit and has led to sustained growth. In the past four years the economy recorded an average growth rate of 8.2 percent resulting in increased employment opportunities and significantly rising living standards in the country, primarily in urban areas where private enterprises are flourishing, and in fertile rural areas where farmers have better incentive to grow and market their produce. Foreign investment in Myanmar today totals US $4.3 billion and is expected to grow in the coming years. That the pace of economic activity has quickened is reflected not only in the country but abroad where a growing number of Myanmar representatives are taking part in international and regional forums including sports, business and intellectual meetings.

We in Myanmar are aware that the best hope for a brighter future lies in our national races joining together to ensure the stability of the state, community peace and tranquility. To this end a national convention is being held to adopt guidelines for a new state constitution in accordance with which a peaceful, modern and developed nation will be built. It should be appreciated that Myanmar is a union composed of 135 national races from which 16 armed groups have evolved, some dating back to 1948, the year of our independence. It should also be noted that despite the magnitude of the task, the Myanmar Government has succeeded in bringing back to the fold 15 out of the 16 armed groups and has established a separate Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs. Insurgency, which for decades hindered development, is now virtually over and all the energy of the defense forces and the people are being devoted to nation building. A fact which is often overlooked is the pervasive influence of traditional culture in Myanmar as a result of which leniency has been shown to offenders. Although a number of death sentences were passed by Civil and Military Courts following the 1988 unrest in the country, none have been carried out.

One example that demonstrates our confidence in the positive changes taking place in Myanmar is our readiness to open our doors to tourists. This year has been designated "Visit Myanmar Year" and we are expecting hundreds of thousands of visitors despite the negative campaign launched by critics. Those who call for a travel boycott to Myanmar should remember that tourism benefits a wide range of people — the visitors as well as the hosts. The big hotels and travel agencies as well as the family run stalls selling everything from hand-crafted jewellery to lacquerware and wood carvings stand to make a living. Why not encourage tourists to come to Myanmar and see for themselves the vast transformations taking place?

MR. PRESIDENT,

Today as we stand on the threshold of a new millennium, we have before us both opportunities and challenges. At this time of important change and transformation, the United Nations and its Members must strive to ensure that all nations can live in peace and harmony. To this end, we will need a man [sic] of exceptional skills and wisdom at the helm of the Organization in the years ahead. We should continue to seek the best man for the job, bearing in mind personal skills and integrity that the important post demands. The choice of the Secretary General of the Organization assumes an even greater importance at this time as we see increasing resort to the threat or use of force in a manner inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the Organization.

To conclude, I would like to renew Myanmar's pledge to work with all nations to strengthen the Organization and to achieve universal peace.

Thank you.
UNTOLD FACTS

...behind the Speech of SLORC’s Delegate to the UNGA

A response by the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). The NCGUB is comprised of representatives of the May, 1990 elections who are now living in exile.

In Burma, while the ruling military junta was arresting democracy activists and elected representatives of the National League for Democracy (NLD) to prevent the convening of an NLD conference to mark the party’s eighth founding anniversary, SLORC’s Representative, Ohn Gyaw, was justifying these human rights violations in New York. Speaking to the 51st Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Ohn Gyaw contends that poverty remains an obstacle to the full enjoyment of human rights in Burma but that the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was redoubling its efforts to ensure the right to development of its people. He cited the report of the UN Secretary-General, "An Agenda for Development," which says that "development should be recognized as the foremost and most far-reaching task of our time."
Ohn Gyaw, however, failed to mention the Secretary-General's assertion in that report that peace, justice and democracy are basic foundations needed to bring about long-term sustainable development.

In order to dissipate the growing international pressure and rising interest among nations to explore the question of punitive action against the SLORC, Ohn Gyaw said, "We find unacceptable the threat or use of economic sanctions and the extraterritorial application of domestic law to influence the policies in developing countries." He never found it in his heart to understand that all the trouble SLORC is facing could be avoided if the generals had behaved and acted according to the norms of a civilized government.

Ohn Gyaw said the UN plays an important role in guiding the world to a new peaceful, secure and stable era based on the respect for the Charter. But he failed to present any evidence that SLORC is complying with the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights and other applicable human rights instruments — all of which make it necessary for member States to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all regardless of race, sex, language, or religion.

The UN General Assembly [UNGA] and the UN Commission on Human Rights [UNCHR] have already adopted five consecutive resolutions that urge the SLORC to improve the situation of human rights in Burma and accelerate the process of democratization. The resolutions also call on the UN Secretary-General to assist in the implementation of the points mentioned in the resolutions as well as in the process of national reconciliation and democratization in Burma. Ohn Gyaw had no comments at this UNGA session about SLORC's willingness to implement these resolutions or to cooperate with UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights. He defended SLORC by accusing Western countries of politicizing human rights questions and of using them as a tool to interfere in the domestic affairs of states.

In the same way, while on the topic of the "UN Decade for International Law," Ohn Gyaw circumvented the question of the rule of Law and only mentioned Burma's respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs of states. This is because SLORC by its own admission is a "martial law administration" and has only applied the law when it suits its needs.

Here are some other observations regarding Ohn Gyaw's speech:

**ON DEVELOPMENT**

Ohn Gyaw: "The economic reforms are bearing fruit and has led to sustained growth. In the past four years, the economy recorded an average growth rate of 8.2 percent resulting in increased employment opportunities and significantly raising living standards in the country, primarily in urban areas where private enterprises are flourishing, and in fertile rural areas where farmers have better incentive to grow and market their produce".

SLORC has claimed that because of the economic reforms it has initiated, the centrally-planned economy is being transformed into a market-oriented one. Facts belie that argument. There has been little or no encouragement to develop the private sector. Private investment as a share of the GDP [Gross Domestic Product] has been declining since 1990, and only a tiny number of state enterprises have been privatized. At the end of March 1995, only 30 percent of foreign investors in Burma found private-sector partners.

At the same time, state firms are encouraged to compete with small private businesses even though the state firms have better access to utilities and government permits. State firms and government agencies dominate Burma's international trade. The State Sector accounts for more than half of Burma's exports and more than a third of its imports. The government already monopolizes trade in rice, teak and many minerals.

The Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH) is a major player in Burma's economy. It is 40 percent-owned by the Defense Ministry's Procurement Division and exemplifies state monopolized military command economy being pursued by the SLORC. UMEH owns a large industrial estate near Rangoon airport and has joint ventures with major foreign enterprises.

Despite claims of an economic growth in
Burma, SLORC actually is spending far more than it earns. The deficit in the year ending March 31, 1995, was more than 6 percent of the GDP. SLORC spent more than 45 percent of the 1995 budget on defense and only 22.8 percent on health, education and other social services which have been falling since 1991 ("Enter At Own Risk," Far Eastern Economic Review, August 15, 1996). Foreign debt, meanwhile, has grown to U.S. $5.5 billion while the per capita income is only about U.S. $113 for fiscal year 1994-95. The Foreign Economic Trends Report on Burma, released by the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon, also noted that "Burma's recent rates of GDP growth may prove unsustainable in the medium and long terms without greatly increasing investment in both physical and human infrastructure".

The ruling junta has also been consistent in patting itself on the back, saying it has a good record on economic and social rights. Reports from UN agencies and other official bodies, however, cite the shortcomings of the SLORC's record on economic, social and cultural rights, particularly in non-Burman areas. One could cite, for instance, the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, which characterizes Burma as a country in crises, with very high levels of child malnutrition, absolute poverty, and displaced persons.

In a complementary analysis, the World Bank issued a report, "Myanmar: Policies for Sustaining Economic Reform" on October 16, 1995. The report criticizes, inter alia, SLORC's paddy procurement program that requires farmers to sell high proportions of their rice crop to the military at prices considerably below the market rate. The World Bank said: "Reforming these paddy policies would help to reduce poverty and enhance equity because they are simply large income transfers from the rural poor to the urban elite, including the military."

The failure of rural development programs can also be attributed to SLORC. It has been driving the farmers hard to boost summer paddy production without resolving the crux of the problem; that is, the inability to provide essential agricultural inputs, such as, irrigation, fertilizer and insecticides. This has resulted in the failure of the summer paddy crops scheme and has placed a greater burden on already impoverished farmers.

SLORC claims economic success by citing the fact that it exported a million tons of rice in the 1994-95 season. It was, however, not mentioned that the exported rice was from stocks reserved for domestic consumption and not from surplus or export stocks. The resulting rice shortages have caused an increase in malnutrition and health problems, especially in rural areas.

The Burmese Army has also been the source of problems in the rural areas. A consistent theme in the independently corroborated testimonies of Burmese refugees is the intolerable economic burden imposed by the Burmese Army on their villages. Arbitrary and persistent taxation, the economic impact of forced labor (which, according to the U.S. Embassy, accounts for 3 percent of the GDP), forced relocation, land confiscation, draconian rice procurement, looting, pillaging and extortion — these have contributed to the collapse of the economic and social structure of villages. This collapse has led to widespread internal displacement and mass exoduses, including the more than 100,000 people from Shan State and Karen who have been forcibly relocated since March this year.

ON DRUG ERADICATION

Ohn Gyaw said: "Myanmar aware of the (narcotic drugs) problem is presently carrying out narcotic suppression as a national cause." He cited Burma's Border Area Development (BAD) program as a part of multisectoral approach to the problem and said that it will ensure the success of an eradication campaign. He claimed the surrender of Mong Tai Army (MTA) led by Khun Sa as a victory of its campaign and expressed hope for a drastic reduction in opium supply. Ohn Gyaw welcomed an increased support for its national programs or for development projects.

The 1996 narcotics report on Burma issued by the U.S. State Department, however, points out that "the SLORC cease-fire agreements with these drug-trafficking armies have prevented the implementation of any meaningful drug enforcement operations in areas under the control of ethnic armies. As a result, these regions have become drug trafficking havens where heroin is produced and trafficked without any risk. During the past six years, there has been no progress in
reducing opium cultivation or in stopping the heroin-trafficking activities of ethnic armies now considered part of the legal fold."

Burmese opium production doubled with the opium crop harvested in early 1989 — the first crop harvested after the SLORC's seizure of power. Since then, Burma's output of opium has remained at a high level — nearly 2,300 metric tons per year. In 1995, Burma produced 2,340 metric tons of opium.

Even though Ohn Gyaw cited an increase in support for development programs, SLORC's cooperation in implementing UNDCP [United Nations Drug Control Programme] projects declined in 1995. The SLORC also seemed intent on exerting greater control over UN programs operating in the ethnic border areas. In the case of UNDCP, SLORC tried to have a say in UNDCP personnel assignments and also restricted access to project areas and leaders of ethnic militias by UNDCP personnel. SLORC has largely barred NGO involvement in aid projects in these ethnic drug areas.

ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Ohn Gyaw: "SLORC has been endeavoring to contribute to the protection and promotion of the environment at every level."

SLORC's "clearance sale" of natural resources has resulted in what UN officials and environmental groups have described as one of the world's major environmental tragedies. The rapid, massive destruction of mainland Asia's largest intact tropical forest has been called "the first ecocide of the 1990s."

Since 1988, SLORC has granted logging concessions to earn greatly needed foreign currency to timber companies from Thailand, China, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The last of the world's great teak forest is being devastated at a horrifying rate, with replanting almost nil. Burma, now has the third highest deforestation rate on the planet, with 1.2 million acres of its tree cover disappearing each year. If the rate is not curtailed, Burma will be virtually denuded in 15 years. Despite regulations prohibiting certain types of logging, SLORC has given permission to log on the banks of rivers and hillsides, disrupting river flows, causing severe erosion, and destroying wild life.

Burma's ecocide is just not limited to trees. The destruction of forest habitats, poaching and officially sanctioned trade are killing off Burma's wildlife. Endangered species in Burma include the Asian elephant, clouded leopard, musk deer, gaur, Malayan tapir, and silvered leaf monkey. There is also an active trade in ivory, tortoise shells, and tiger and leopard skins.

Foreign fishing companies have rapidly been exhausting fish stocks in Burmese waters by using dynamiting and bottom-trawling tactics. Sea bottom tin mining concessions have also been sold in auction. Environmentalists are alarmed at the damage caused by suction booms used to mine tin and tungsten from the sea floor. The damage is caused two ways; first, when the refuse matter dredged from the sea bottom is dumped back into the sea, photosynthesis by phytoplankton is reduced, altering the food chain; and second, the rotary head and suction destroys sea bottom fauna and damage coral reefs.

ON "VISIT MYANMAR YEAR"

Ohn Gyaw: "Visit Myanmar Year" is an example that demonstrates SLORC's confidence in positive changes taking place in Myanmar and tourism benefits a wide range of people.

Promotion of tourism is SLORC's latest project to earn hard currency. SLORC also hopes that tourists who see only the beautiful part of the country will help to dispel its brutal reputation and bestow its legitimacy. However, the people have to pay the cost of SLORC's tourism drive.

Since 1990, half a million have been forcefully relocated from tourist destinations in order to beautify the cities for tourists. These include Rangoon, Mandalay, Pagan, Taunggyi, and Maymyo. The relocated households are usually not compensated and have to rebuild in areas without any facilities. This has contributed to a high incidence of malnutrition, diseases and infant and maternal mortality in the new satellite towns. Distance from the cities where the jobs are, and poor transportation, have caused many husbands and job holders to become weekend residents in the satellite towns. This is causing serious problems.

In addition to city beautification, SLORC is also
building highways, railroads and airports to accommodate increased transportation requirements of tourists. To make way for these infrastructure projects, many villages have been forcefully relocated, especially in ethnic areas.

Apart from forced relocation of villages for major infrastructural projects, SLORC also requires villagers to contribute their labor. The villagers are not compensated for their land, their homes or for their labor. If they cannot work, they have to pay a fine or find someone else to take their place. The slave laborers have to provide their own tools, food and transportation. No medical care is provided. Many are known to have died on these projects.

People in urban areas are also conscripted for city beautification and tourist-attraction projects. The best known is cleaning of the Mandalay Palace moat. Prisoners were shackled and made to work together with over 2,000 residents of Mandalay conscripted for the project.

With regard to the benefit of tourism to the local people, Burmese economist U Khin Maung Kyi says: "There is also the mistaken belief that tourism will boost sales and support the local handicraft industry. Tourists may indeed buy local goods, but price reflects quality. ...If local handicraft industries are left to fend for themselves and struggle on with outdated equipment and lack of technical know-how, they will not be in place to take advantage of tourism. For example, Burmese lacquerware is of poor quality, both in terms of durability and design, in comparison to the Japanese or Chinese products." ("Oasis or Mirage: Should Burma reconsider its tourism policy?" by Prof. Khin Maung Kyi, *Burma Debate*, Nov/Dec, 1995)

**On The National Convention**

U Ohn Gyaw claims, "the national convention is being held to adopt guidelines for a new state constitution in accordance with which a peaceful, modern and developed nation will be built."

Constitutional experts and those who know SLORC's true motive have pointed out right from the onset that the National Convention was designed to legitimize military rule against the will of the people expressed in the 1990 elections. Hence, since its very inception, SLORC's National Convention has directly contradicted the principle of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that says, "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of the Government."

In his report to the 52nd Session of the UNCHR, UN Special Rapporteur Yozo Yokota concluded that: "Given the composition of the delegates (only one out of seven delegates was an elected representative of the 1990 elections), the restrictions imposed on the delegates (particularly the lack of freedom to assemble, print and distribute leaflets or to make statements freely), and the general guidelines to be strictly followed (including the principle regarding the leading role of the Defense Services), the National Convention does not appear to constitute the necessary steps towards the restoration of democracy, fully respecting the will of the people as expressed in the democratic election held in 1990."

In its statement on November 22, 1995, the NLD that won more than 82 percent of the seats in the 1990 general elections, made the following observations on the features of the SLORC's Convention:

- The elected representatives of the people constitute only 15.24 percent of the delegates and thus are permanently in the minority;
- Neither the objectives of the Convention nor its working procedures were drawn up in consultation with delegates;
• Papers to be presented at the Convention are censored and have to be corrected in accordance with the wishes of authorities;
• Decisions are laid down before an issue has been fully discussed;
• The Convention is making decisions not only on broad principles for the proposed constitution but also on details.
• There is no fixed timetable for the Convention.

The NLD concluded that "...the National Convention in its present form is not acceptable to the people of Burma and, because it is not acceptable to the majority of our people, it is not acceptable to the NLD. And a constitution that is drawn up by a national convention that doesn't enjoy the confidence of the people will itself not get the support of the people. And a constitution that is not supported by the people will be nothing more than a piece of paper. So we call upon all those concerned to discuss the matter of bringing about a national convention that is truly acceptable to the people and that will be able to draw up a constitution that will create a lasting democratic Union of Burma."

U Aung Shwe, Chairman of the NLD, sent a letter on November 27, 1995 to U Aung Toe, Chairman of the Working Committee for the National Convention Convening Commission in which he asked for a dialogue with regard to the National Convention proceedings. When the NLD received no response to its call for a dialogue in the opening speech made by Gen. Myo Nyunt, Chairman of the National Convention Convening Commission on Nov 28, 1995, it decided to suspend its participation in the National Convention.

The National Convention that is being continued without the participation of the NLD delegates no longer has legitimacy. As the nature of the National Convention process is exclusive, restrictive and undemocratic, it cannot be a venue for a substantive political dialogue as Ohn Gyaw has claimed it to be time and again at various international forums.

ON CEASE-FIRES

U Ohn Gyaw claims that SLORC has succeeded in bringing back to the legal fold 15 out of the 16 armed groups and has established a separate Ministry for Development Affairs. "Insurgency, which for decades has hindered development, is now virtually over and all the energy of the defense forces and the people are being devoted to nation building."

In reality, troops are massively deployed in the cease-fire areas and the military increases its control over the local populace through grave human rights violations. Arbitrary and persistent taxation, forced labor, forced relocation, land confiscation, looting, pillaging and extortion of money have been taking place in the ethnic areas after the cease-fire agreements have been reached. People continue to flee from their villages even though fighting has stopped between SLORC and the ethnic resistance forces. Forced relocation of 40,000 people from 489 villages after the surrender of the MTA and the mass exodus of Shan refugees is an obvious example.

People have also been fleeing from Mon areas as the demand for forced labor for the Ye-Tavoy railway project has been increasing. The local people find no time to earn their own livelihood. In Kachin areas, SLORC controls almost all of the checkpoints previously manned by Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) troops. Flow of opium from the Golden Triangle to the Kachin State now continues unhampered. With SLORC troops taking bribes and encouraging the local people to grow opium, the progress made in KIO's opium eradication program in 1990 is all but over. Opium production in Kachin State is on the rise again. High incidence of HIV/ AIDS in Kachin State is also the result of an increase in the number of drug addicts who share needles and because of SLORC's failure to address that issue.

Many of the ethnic resistance groups that have entered into cease-fire agreements are unhappy with the situation. The development assistance promised by SLORC did not materialize, foreign NGOs are not allowed to do development work in ethnic areas, no political dialogue to address the rights of ethnic groups is taking place, and various restrictions are being imposed on them. Given the circumstances, cease-fire agreements could break down at any time. Renewed fighting between SLORC and the Karenni National Progressive Party demonstrates this point.
In Their Own Words:

AN ALTERNATIVE ASEAN

INTERVIEW WITH DR. GOTHOM ARYA AND KHUN SOMCHAI HOMLAOR

Dr. Gothom Arya is the chairman of the Program for the Promotion of Non-Violence in Thai Society, Director of the Institute of Technology for Rural Development at Chulalongkorn University and an advisor to Forum-Asia.

Somchai Homlaor is the Secretary General of Forum-Asia.

The interview was conducted in Bangkok for Burma Debate
SOMCHAI HOMLAOR • Forum-Asia is a network of 24 human rights organizations from Southeast and East Asia. It was established in Manila in 1991 because many of us felt that in order to promote and protect human rights in this region we needed to collaborate and strengthen our coordination. As human rights organizations we were constantly accused of being puppets of the West or of representing Western concepts. We felt that in dealing with human rights issues in this region it would be more appropriate and effective if the people of the region are working more closely together.

Forum-Asia wants to develop the technology to promote and protect human rights. We do this through training, workshops, fact-finding missions and documentation. We organize campaigns as well and are currently focusing on three countries; Indonesia, Burma and Cambodia.

SH • We think that within Southeast Asia the human rights situation in Burma is even more serious than in other countries. We also think that the problem in Burma is a regional one and therefore a regional network is needed to deal with it.

Forum-Asia started to promote human rights in Burma one and a half years ago. Last March, our delegation visited Burma in order to assess the situation and the prospects for restoration of peace, democracy and human rights, nearly one year after the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. We came to the conclusion that her release had not brought the expected positive changes in Burma and as a result decided to develop a regional campaign, which was launched on the first anniversary of Aung San Suu Kyi's release. The campaign by members of Forum-Asia and other human rights organizations in the region pressures SLORC to put an end to human rights violations and restore peace and democracy.

SH & DR. GOTHOM ARYA • We wanted a say in ASEAN's engagement with Burma and a chance to develop an alternative to the present policy of 'constructive engagement.' ASEAN governments defend 'constructive engagement' by claiming it to be a means of improving the lives of Burmese and of persuading the SLORC to change. ASEAN gives SLORC the 'good name' it wants, in return for commercial gain and taking Burma's natural resources. This is politics without ethics. Instead, ASEAN should take from Burma by undermining the SLORC in every possible way and ask it to make a very quick transition to democracy and restoration of human rights. ASEAN should give in the sense of abstaining from business interests. ASEAN NGOs [Non-governmental organizations] cannot leave the Burma issue to their governments, they should assert themselves as part of society's voice. Delegates from all ASEAN countries, except for Vietnam, took part in the alternative ASEAN meetings and have spoken to this issue.

SH • The participants decided to set up an alternative ASEAN network on Burma. We also adopted an Alternative ASEAN Policy on Burma which calls for respecting the democratic will of the Burmese people, the promotion of human and people's rights, and the establishment of people-to-people solidarity between the citizens of Burma and the ASEAN nations.

We released a declaration in front of the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok. In this declaration we urge the United Nations to imple-
ment the resolutions and to expel the SLORC from their seat at the U.N., keeping Burma's seat vacant until a democratic government is in power. We also urge the members of the world community to impose an arms embargo and economic sanctions on the country and to investigate the junta's involvement in drug trafficking.

On the regional front we call on ASEAN members to abandon the policy of 'constructive engagement' and not to grant membership to Burma because such a regional recognition will provide the SLORC a de facto license to continue its suppression of the Burmese people. We call on SLORC to engage itself in a tripartite dialogue.

**BD** • Why do you find the issue of Burma compelling?

**DR. GA** • If you look at this region of Southeast Asia, Burma stands out. I think it is one of the worst situations in the world. Very directly, here in Thailand, we see the influx of refugees and migrant workers. And we know the Burmese dissidents, they are here, we know them well. It has never been the question why we work on Burma, but it is more how much we can do for Burma since we also have our own limitations.

**BD** • Do you see a shift or change in Thai policy towards Burma recently?

**DR. GA** • Yes, I do see a minor change. Our foreign minister, for the first time to my knowledge, formulated a condition for Burmese admission into ASEAN; completion of a constitution in Burma and transfer of power to the next government. It is not clear if he has set this as an absolute condition.

**BD** • Have any of the candidates in the upcoming Thai elections expressed a need to shift from 'constructive engagement' to a different approach?

**DR. GA** • Election themes in Thailand are highly inward looking. The only outward looking issue is how to do business better within the world economy.

If we ask small political parties they would be in a position to come up with a strong position [on Burma], while larger parties are more careful.

**BD** • Thailand seems to be playing a critical role with regard to ASEAN's approach to Burma, what direction could this go in?

**DR. GA** • Thailand has a special position. We claim to have a front-line status with Burma, in the sense that we have a long common border. If things are going to get worse in Burma it will affect Thailand more than the other ASEAN countries. Thailand has not been able to fully exploit this within ASEAN because we have had too many foreign ministers over the last four years. Remember, however, Burma contacts Malaysia directly to lobby for early admission into ASEAN.

**BD** • Some people say that regardless who wins the elections, the opinions of NGOs must be taken into account. Do you agree?

**DR. GA** • I don't want to overestimate our role as NGOs. We cannot claim that we represent the will of the people. We often present a view that is more progressive than the general will. Still, the next government will take into account opinions of the NGOs, if only because we have the support of the media. But surely, most of the time the business sector's view will be more prominent.
The sharp Philippines reaction to the latest harassment of National League for Democracy (NLD) activists in Myanmar and the concern expressed by Thailand, have placed in the spotlight like never before the role of ASEAN in Myanmar's political emancipation. It is premature, almost certainly wrong, to interpret that as a schism developing in the seven-nation organization over its Myanmar policy. ASEAN's operating watchword is consensus. But it would be foolish to pretend that ASEAN can, or should, continue to remain non-judgmental when the national reconciliation in Myanmar, which the grouping's benign hands-off policy is meant to encourage, remains elusive. Six years have passed since the result of a free election won by the NLD was rejected by the country's military rulers. Meantime, the stonewalling between the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD has become entrenched to the point where neither side can afford to yield, the arrest of some 800 NLD supporters preparing a rally to mark the party's eighth anniversary a fortnight ago is more of the same trial of strength. It would not be the last such disturbance in Yangon, with the risk growing that each succeeding incident could get less peaceful.

Two issues are at stake. First, Myanmar has applied to be a member of ASEAN by July next year. It already has observer status, granted only
FOR YIELD IN MYANMAR

this year. Second, ASEAN has, with its generous policy of constructive engagement, given the generals of SLORC ample leeway to open up the country to investment and diplomatic contact on the tacit understanding that this would ease the way towards political openness gradually. In the event, Philippine President Fidel Ramos's pointed remark last week that ASEAN might re-examine its policy at its next summit because of SLORC's high-handed conduct is the clearest indication so far that patience is wearing thin. Thailand's Foreign Ministry, though more discreet, said ASEAN could not possibly overlook the latest crackdown. Not too much should be made of what Mr. Ramos said in so far as it touches on ASEAN unanimity on constructive engagement. All members agree to it, some more enthusiastic than others. It remains the most sensible approach to extracting from Myanmar compliance with civil norms in governance while granting it the courtesy of ASEAN not interfering in its political choices or imposing alien values on the people. By stimulating economic benefits to trickle down to the population, this is preferable to the punitive Western approach of sanctions and diplomatic isolation. Sanctions are made to be circumvented, whereas Myanmar has endured for decades in isolation without facing economic collapse.

But it was never intended for constructive engagement to be an infinite process. That would be carte blanche for the generals to perpetuate their hold on power without reference to the people. As much as investments from ASEAN countries and the West have brought a noticeable change among the people from the poverty and the listlessness of old, the SLORC authorities have to reciprocate by moving more purposefully to engender political pluralism. This means heeding the popular will — nothing more, nothing less. A way has to be found for the SLORC to have the NLD brought back into the constitutional process; its huge 1990 election win demands that. Ms. Suu Kyi was wrong to have taken the NLD out of the national convention which has been meeting since 1993 to devise guidelines for a future constitution. On her part, refusing to acknowledge that the military can have a role in national life is being untutored and inflexible. There is room for compromise. But for sure, SLORC has to show results in its constitutional maneuvers. Otherwise, ASEAN will feel under increasing pressure — apart from the danger of internal dissension — to reassess its policy of constructive engagement, to say nothing of deferring membership for Myanmar. It should be plain to the generals that neither course will be helpful to their country.
Frequent changes in government have had adverse effects on how foreign policy is conducted. Gone are the days when Thailand was an active member of the United Nations. Bangkok is well remembered for its efforts to obtain the support of UN members for a resolution sponsored by ASEAN to address the conflict in Cambodia. For more than a decade after 1978, Thailand and other ASEAN members worked feverishly to win a diplomatic tussle at the UN over Cambodia. Their efforts eventually paid off and led to the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991.

Since joining the world body in 1946, Thailand has had the privilege of being elected twice to serve as president of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). The country was ably guided by Prince Wan and former Foreign Minister Siddhi Savetsila. From 1950 to 1953, Thailand also joined UN-backed troops in the Korean War. Although Thailand has generally been pro-West, as manifested in its voting records in the past 50 years, Bangkok has not hesitated to take an independent course. Thailand voted with "a heavy heart" in 1986 to condemn the Reagan administration's decision to bomb Libya. While the move stunned Washington that was the only time in Thai diplomatic history that the country did not side with the U.S.
MORE INDEPENDENT

After becoming a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, (NAM) in 1992, Thailand adhered to the group's voting stance in the UN. And from then on, Thailand has portrayed more independence in conducting its foreign policy doing away with "Washington's weather-vane". For instance, Thailand and other ASEAN members have more or less embraced the Nam's position on the current UN reform drive, which calls for more transparency in the UN Security Council's (UNSC) deliberations and changes in the veto system. The NAM has also called for the effective use of the UN's peace-keeping powers. Thailand is a strong supporter of the UN peace agenda and preventive diplomacy. Bangkok has been instrumental in organizing a series of high-powered seminars on preventive diplomacy from 1992 to 1993 and their recommendations were subsequently contained in the ASEAN concept paper on the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994. When Siddhi was president of the UNGA in 1985, he was the first to propose an early warning system to alert the world body on potential conflicts and where they could possibly occur. This has now become an important and timely component of preventive diplomacy.

The post Cold War era, the deprivation of "life and death" issues, like in the 1980s, and the frequent changes of governments and foreign ministers back home has seen Thailand's role in the UN being greatly marginalized. Against these persistent oddities, the Thai UN mission and staff have been trying to maintain the country's role as best they can in various issues, particularly on Burma and reform in the UN. For instance, Asda Jayanama, Thailand's permanent representative at the UN, works with Malaysia's UN envoy, Tan Sri Datuk Razali Ismail, president of the UNGA, as vice chairman of the High Level Working Group on the Reform of the Security Council. Ismail and Asda are in close consultation over the future shape of the UNSC and the scope of its activities. Topping the agenda are issues that affect the size and composition of the UNSC, proposed changes in the veto system and the call for more transparency in the UNSC's functions. Ismail also oversees four other working groups tackling various aspects to reform in finance, the UN's role in development activities, the UN's peacekeeping missions and revitalization of the General Assembly and Secretariat.

MEANINGFUL REFORM

Acting Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Amnuay Virawan said in his recent speech at the UN in New York that he supports the posts of deputy secretaries-general who would have the power to act on behalf of the secretary-general. He added that there should be reform at the inter-governmental, organizational and managerial levels in order to assume leadership in tackling the challenges of the 21st century. He also called on UN members to render political, material and financial support to attain meaningful reform in the UN.

Together with ASEAN, Thailand is working behind the scenes to ensure that the 185 members of the UN comprehend the situation in Burma and ASEAN's ongoing effort to do something about it. While Bangkok and Manila have made strong statements on the situation in Burma in the past few weeks, ASEAN, in general, continues to oppose vehemently any attempt by other UN members, particularly those from the West, to vote for a resolution condemning the ruling military regime in Rangoon. But certainly, given the reality of what is happening in Burma plus the recent crackdown on the pro-democracy movement by the junta, the tone of the resolution, which has been rescheduled for debate in late November, will be harsher than those made in previous years.

Not surprisingly, the leaders of Burma's military government have stood firm in their decision not to allow a special envoy of the UN Secretary-General to visit Burma to complete a report on the situation there for the current members of the UNGA.

With the new government taking office only after Nov 17, the Thai mission at the UN has seemingly assumed the important responsibility of looking after the country's diplomatic policies. What the mission has accomplished, and is contemplating to do during the current session, is of paramount importance since it will fulfill its duties and responsibilities and lay the groundwork for the incoming government to move on with the rest of the world.
While Cambodia and Laos are fully expected to become ASEAN members in July 1997, such is not the case for Myanmar. Although most people in the region, and supporters outside the region, adhere to the long-term ideal of a united Southeast Asia under ASEAN, questions remain about the appropriateness of Myanmar's immediate entry into the association. The political and human rights situations in Myanmar are detrimental to the grouping's interests, particularly in terms of dealing with its Western dialogue partners. ASEAN's opposition to Western criticisms of the constructive engagement of Myanmar is understandable and defensible. Given the grouping's ultimate aim to bring all 10 Southeast Asian countries within its fold, the gradual inclusion of Myanmar in various regional activities is clearly important.

Myanmar's self-imposed isolation had led to economic stagnation which does not promote greater political openness and better respect for human rights. In this light, it is hard to justify how further sanctions, as most Western countries propose, would speed up political progress in Myanmar and improve the living standard of its people. Moreover, it is consistent with ASEAN's objective to establish an autonomous regional order free from external interference that the association refuses to bow to outside pressure about which nations are eligible for membership.

Nevertheless, while fully acknowledging the importance of continuing ASEAN's constructive engagement of Myanmar, there are at least four compelling reasons for delaying Yangon's full entry into grouping for a few years. These are:

• The more immediate need of facilitating entry of Cambodia and Laos into ASEAN.
• The lack of unanimity within and among member countries regarding Myanmar's membership.
• Myanmar's attitudes towards the grouping.

The Jakarta Post
October 25, 1996
The possible implications of precipitating Myanmar's membership on ASEAN's extra-regional relations.

The most important consideration for delaying Myanmar's full membership into ASEAN is clearly the immediate need to devote its attention and resources to facilitate Cambodia's and Laos' entry into the association and to integrate them fully into its activities. There is no doubt that these two countries are now fully committed to joining the grouping next year, and ASEAN has long awaited the participation of Cambodia and Laos. But, the challenges will be enormous. ASEAN did not have to do too much to integrate Brunei which though tiny is very rich. Once the political obstacle was overcome, the integration of Vietnam was relatively easy because of its relatively trained manpower and economic potential. However, incorporating Cambodia and Laos, two of the world's least developed countries, into a vibrant regional body with a relatively affluent membership, is clearly another matter. Within the space of 10 months, these two countries have to overcome such basic problems as the lack of English-speaking officials who can take part in the groupings activities, the lack of relevant institutions and a severe shortage of financial capabilities and other technical facilities necessary to carry out intensive regional cooperation. It is to be expected that both Laos and Cambodia will look to the grouping for help in overcoming these basic problems. In the next two to three years, it will have its hands full trying to mobilize resources, from within the region as well as from friends outside the region, to assist in the regional integration of Cambodia and Laos. Without active help from ASEAN, the new members may feel marginalized and soon disillusioned. If Myanmar, a country that is also categorized as one of the world's least developed, and also carries a political stigma, is to be included in the membership package at the same time, the grouping's resources will be stretched very thin. It is also possible that including Myanmar may make it more difficult for ASEAN to mobilize international assistance for its efforts to ease the new members into the association.

The second important consideration is the lack of agreement among the ASEAN countries themselves, as well as within the various member countries, concerning Myanmar's immediate entry. On important issues, the grouping has always based its decisions on consensus, and one leader, Philippine President Fidel Ramos, has gone on record that he prefers to postpone Myanmar's full membership. That important groups of people with in the member countries are opposed to Myanmar's membership should also be considered, particularly since ASEAN wishes to make itself into a more popular organization that is no longer the monopoly of bureaucrats.

Myanmar's attitude towards the grouping also raises questions. The opposition under Aung San Suu Kyi is vehemently opposed to Myanmar's membership in ASEAN, fearing that such a membership would only legitimize SLORC. The SLORC leaders' commitment to the idea of regional cooperation in general and ASEAN in particular is not unequivocal. Only one and a half years ago, SLORC still considered ASEAN a Western colonial tool, membership in which would compromise Myanmar's long-held neutrality. There is clearly a need for Myanmar to spell out its commitment to the ideals of ASEAN more definitively. Without such a declaration, one might wonder whether the Myanmar government is trying to use the grouping as a public relations vehicle to improve its international image. In such a case, ASEAN is open to vilification from a substantial part of Myanmar population, a situation that would be detrimental to its image as the harbinger of peace and prosperity in the region.

Finally, while recognizing that its strength depends on its internal cohesiveness, the association's effectiveness in the international arena owes much to its support from other countries, particularly from its dialogue partners. Without bowing to external pressure, the grouping nevertheless needs to be sensitive to the views of its dialogue partners. Its ability to play an important role in the wider regional and international forums will depend a great deal on how it manages its relations with the world's major political and economic powers.

Given these four main considerations, it would clearly be wiser for ASEAN to wait another two or three years to complete the unification of Southeast Asia. Once Cambodia and Laos are fully integrated into the association, it will be in a much better position to receive the full membership of Myanmar. Perhaps by that time, Myanmar's own commitment to ASEAN will become more unified and unequivocally clear, signifying a reconciliation or at least a compromise between SLORC and the opposition group.

The writer is head of the Regional and International Affairs Division at the Center for Political and Regional Studies of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences.
WASHINGTON, DC — The Washington Burma Roundtable hosted Ms. Donna Guest, the London-based Burma researcher for Amnesty International at its September 26 meeting. Ms. Guest discussed the current conditions in Burma and along its borders.

The October 17 Roundtable featured Edith Bowles, Burma Project Officer for the Jesuit Refugee Service (IRS) in Bangkok. Ms. Bowles provided an update on the refugee situation along the Thai-Burma border where she served as the coordinator of relief, development and information work of IRS.

On October 28, Thet Thet Lwin of the Burmese Women’s Union briefed the group on the activities of the Union, which was founded in 1995 on the Thai-Burma border by women students who fled the 1988 crackdown.


NEW YORK — A Roundtable was held in New York on October 11 with Ms. Thet Thet Lwin of the Burmese Women’s Union based in Thailand and Ms. Ohmar Khin, a Burmese student activist currently in exile in the United States.

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

MASSACHUSETTS — The Massachusetts Burma Roundtable met on October 15, 1996 to discuss upcoming activities.

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) 482-6655 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: (408) 995-0403 or e-mail: jjerome@igc.apc.org.

SEATTLE — The Burma Interest Group, on October 16, featured Ms. Nance Cunningham of the University of Washington. Ms. Cunningham spoke of her recent eight month study and travel in Burma.

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 — A Burma Briefing was held on October 22 featuring Lyndal Barry, human rights coordinator of Images Asia, an NGO based in Thailand, and Jeanne Hallacy, a television journalist who recently returned from Burma.

The Burma Briefing is a periodic meeting of NGOs working on Burma. For information contact Edmond McGovern by phone: (44-392) 876-849 or fax: (44-392) 876-525

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

BRUSSELS/PARIS — The NGO communities in France and Belgium host periodic roundtables in Paris and Brussels. For more information on this European forum contact Lotte Leicht of Human Rights Watch by phone: (32-2) 732-2009 or fax: (32-2) 732-0471.

BRIEFINGS AND DEVELOPMENTS

SLORC INTENSIFIES CRACKDOWN ON DEMOCRACY SUPPORTERS

Reacting to an announcement that the National League for Democracy planned to hold a Party Congress September 27-29 to commemorate the eighth anniversary of its founding, Burmese authorities set up checkpoints manned by armed police, blocking entrance to the compound of Aung San Suu Kyi, the site of the proposed meeting. Over the course of a few days, nearly 600 NLD members and supporters were arrested and Suu Kyi was confined to her home, without access to the public, journalists or diplomats. Telephone lines to her house were cut off. The majority of those arrested have been released, however, blockades remain around the compound area and people continue to be prevented from attending Suu Kyi’s “weekend talks,” which previously drew up to 4000 people each week.
EU IMPOSES POLITICAL SANCTIONS

The European Union, during its October 28 meeting in Luxembourg, imposed sanctions on Burma's military regime, responding to growing repression in that country. The EU foreign ministers agreed to refuse entry visas to senior members of Burma's government and their families and to senior members of its armed forces and security services. They also moved to suspend all high-level EU visits to Burma. The ministers warned that, "...Further measures may need to be considered."

SLORC VISITS IMF/WORLD BANK ANNUAL MEETINGS

An eleven-person delegation from the Burmese government attended the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank held in Washington, D.C. from October 1-3, 1996. Headed by Brigadier General Win Tin, Minister of Finance and Revenue, the group included U Kyi Aye, Governor of the Central Bank of Myanmar, U Soe Lin, Deputy Director General of the Foreign Economic Relations Department, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Ms. Ommar Sein, Deputy Director of Research and Training, Central Bank of Myanmar, and U Tin Winn, Ambassador of Myanmar to the United States.

INSIDE WASHINGTON

US PASSES SANCTION LEGISLATION

On September 30, President Clinton signed into law the FY '97 Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill contained in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill, which included an amendment to impose economic sanctions on Burma. The Cohen-Feinstein amendment, calls for the imposition of sanctions on new investment if "the Government of Burma has physically harmed, rearrested for political acts, or exiled Daw Aung San Suu Kyi or has committed large-scale repression of or violence against the Democratic opposition." Although many members of Congress have expressed their concern that sanctions are warranted following the September crackdown on Aung San Suu Kyi and supporters of the National League for Democracy, the Administration is reviewing whether or not to implement the law at this time.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS HOLD PRESS CONFERENCE ON BURMA

The Congressional Human Rights Caucus held a press conference on September 24 outside the Capitol Building as a show of solidarity with the democracy movement in Burma. Speakers at the event included Dr. Sein Win, exiled Prime Minister of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, a Member of the House Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee.

Congresswoman Pelosi stated: "...I am proud and honored to stand here today on the grounds of the United States Capitol...to speak out for and with those people whose governments seek to silence their voices. We will stand by the freedom-seeking people of Burma and their just cause will be won."

STUDENTS FAST TO RAISE BURMA AWARENESS

Students from high school, college and university campuses throughout the United States and other countries joined in a three-day fast October 7-9 to draw attention to the struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma. The fast was sponsored by the Free Burma Coalition, a grassroots network of over 400 groups internationally that communicate and organize primarily through the internet.

SLORC RESTRICTS TRAVEL OF U.S. CITIZENS

At a special briefing attended by foreign and local journalists on October 4, U Khin Maung Win, Director General of the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, announced a visa ban on "certain categories of U.S. citizens." Coming on the heels of a visa ban on Burmese officials the United States had issued a day earlier, SLORC's restrictions apply to: "Persons who formulate or implement policies that impede the process of smooth transition to a multi-party democratic State in the Union of Myanmar..." and would include those "...interfering in the internal affairs of Myanmar and/or inciting political agitations and disturbances."

EMBASSY OF MYANMAR STEPS UP PR CAMPAIGN

Myanmar's Embassy in Washington D.C. issued a press release on September 30, in what it described as an attempt to clarify news about the country that had appeared in the international media and could "mislead the readership." According to the press statement entitled "News of Myanmar," the Embassy hopes to "...pass on the true information of what is happening in our country." The five-page release included articles by the Myanmar News Agency (the government news service) justifying SLORC's crackdown on democracy supporters and accusing the NLD of collusion with "foreign elements." It also contained an announcement of a heroin seizure in Lashio township of northern Burma. The press release was distributed to U.S. officials, diplomats and expatriate Burmese.

WHITE HOUSE IMPOSES VISA BAN ON SLORC

In a Presidential Proclamation released October 3, the United States suspended entry into the U.S. of any persons "who formulate, implement, or benefit from policies that impede Burma's transition to democracy, and the immediate family members of such persons." Reacting to the arrest and detention of hundreds of NLD supporters the White House stated that, "The Proclamation reflects the strong concern of both the Administration and the Congress about ongoing repression... In flagrant defiance of international norms, the SLORC has disregarded both the human rights and the will of the people of Burma." The ban does not apply to officials assigned to Burmese missions in the United States or their families.
"ALL BURMA CONGRESS OF NLD" PLOT TO BRING WESTERN PRESSURE, SANCTIONS ON THE COUNTRY
FOREIGN ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN ACTS TO INCITE RIOTS, UPEAVAL

Yangon, 28 September

The State Law and Order Restoration Council banned the 'All Burma Congress' which was to have been held by the National League for Democracy from 27 to 29 September 1996. To hold such a ceremony with a gathering of people or to use public address system in the township, permission has to be sought from the respective Township Administrative Authorities and Police Force in accordance with procedures...

...It was found that the NLD adhered to above-mentioned procedures while Daw Suu Kyi was under the restraining order. Following its lifting, it was found that it had done what it thought fit, with the pretext of democracy, without adhering to the procedures concerning convening of meetings. Especially, permission had not been asked from the respective administrative bodies for the meetings and ceremonies held with large gatherings in Daw Suu Kyi's residential compound. Furthermore, roadside talks were held. In the leadership of the NLD, it was found that while Chairman U Aung Shwe and some others have conciliatory ideas and beliefs, a wish to stand and proceed within the bounds of law in accordance with existing laws and regulations and a tendency toward making efforts to be on good terms with the Government, the trio — Daw Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo and U Kyi Maung — have an attitude of opposition toward the State Law and Order Restoration Council and do not abide by the existing laws and regulations. Especially, they were found to have made many contacts with some West bloc embassies and ignored orders and directives of the Government with the belief that they could do whatever they wished, relying on external organizations and media, releasing incorrect news.

Following the news briefing of the Information Committee on 1 August, they are found to have made more contacts with some West bloc embassies. Subsequent to the news briefing on 1 August, Daw Suu Kyi went to the residence of the Ambassador of France, where she met the Ambassadors of France, Britain, Germany, and Italy for three hours. It was found during the two-month period beginning 1 August that Daw Suu Kyi went to the United States Embassy and the charge d'affaires twice, the Embassy of Britain and the ambassador's residence four times, the Embassy of Australia and the ambassador's residence twice and the Embassy of France and the ambassador's residence twice. Officials of the British Embassy went to Daw Suu Kyi's house thrice, the ambassador of Australia, once, charge d'affaires of the U.S. Embassy twice... During August and September, Daw Suu Kyi met foreign mediamen 52 times and held a news conference...

...It was also found that the NLD's meeting was not an annual one held in an ordinary course to mark the founding of the party and as it was named "Congress," it was a political movement intended to incite riots and upheaval in the entire country... the NLD was found to have intended to create exertion of pressure on the Government by the international community by holding the congress to coincide with the UN General Assembly session. Their repeated contacts with some West bloc embassies gave away their true intention. It was specially obvious that coordinations and meetings had taken place with officials of the US Embassy.

If the entire chain of events and circumstances and the movement to hold the NLD congress are pieced together, it will be found that theirs was a massive plot to create a political movement under the cover "All Burma Congress of the National League for Democracy" which was to have been held to cause difficulties to the Government internally and to create difficult conditions to the Myanmar Government both at the United Nations and in the international community with pressures and sanctions imposed by Western nations...[Source: Myanmar News Agency]
BUSINESS WATCH

COMPUTER COMPANY STOPS BUSINESS WITH BURMA

U.S.-based Apple computer announced on October 4 that it will terminate its relationship with its distributor in Burma. Apple had previously sold thousands of units to the Burmese government, for use in the school system. Reports coming out of the country indicate, however, that students were not given access to the machines in spite of the fact that computer fees had often been paid by them. According to a company spokesperson, Apple's decision was influenced by the Massachusetts state selective purchasing law, which bars state contracts with companies doing business in Burma.

ASIAN WEEKLY ”OFFICIALLY” DEVALUES KYAT

ASIAWEEK became the first major magazine to "officially" devalue the Burmese kyat in its publication. Beginning with its October 18 issue, ASIAWEEK will give the black market, rather the Burmese government, rate for the kyat in its weekly statistics of currencies. The official exchange rate in the country is 6 kyats to the dollar, while the black market rate currently stands at 160 kyats to the dollar. A source at ASIAWEEK stated that the black market rate will be used as it is the best indicator of the economic situation in Burma.

CAMBODIA-BURMA TOURISM LINKS TO OPEN

Cambodian Secretary of State for Civil Aviation, Pak Samel, has signed an agreement with Burmese Minister of Transport, Thein Win, to establish direct flights from Rangoon to Phnom Penh. A five-year tourism pact between the two countries also provides for representative tourism offices in each nation and cooperative efforts in arranging for individual and group tours and cultural exchanges. These agreements were reached during a mid-October State visit to Cambodia by General Than Shwe and more that 40 Burmese officials.

TWO MORE U.S. CITIES BAN BUSINESS WITH BURMA

Takoma Park, Maryland and Carrboro, North Carolina have joined the growing list of cities that have adopted "selective purchasing" legislation in the United States. These laws bar city contracts with companies investing or doing business in Burma. Carrboro unanimously adopted its resolution on October 8 and the Takoma Park ordinance was passed on October 28.

SLORC SIGNS TV DEAL WITH CHINA

Myanmar Television and Radio Department (MTRD) and China Central Television (CCTV) signed an agreement on October 24 to expand cooperation in the area of television broadcasting. The agreement allows the trading of documentaries and satellite transmission of news programs from each country. MTRD will also establish a subsidiary company to serve as the agent for distributing home videos of Chinese TV programs in Burma.

NOTABLES & QUOTABLES

ON WHETHER BURMA SHOULD GET INTO ASEAN

"That's a very sensitive question. Thailand took the initiative of inviting in the CLM [Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar] countries to ASEAN. At first Myanmar was a bit reluctant and said maybe they will come in toward the end of the century, maybe early in the next century. Now they've changed their mind. ... They'd like to come in next year. But to join ASEAN is not joining a social club. There are commitments, there are obligations — both economic and to some extent political. ASEAN is under a lot of pressure too. ASEAN has adopted a "constructive engagement policy." People are beginning to question what we have constructed, whether we are constructive enough. ASEAN would never isolate Myanmar. Well, ASEAN will have to make our policy more constructive... This is the first time that ASEAN leaders are beginning to wonder out loud what they have to do, what should be done that they haven't done. So I think that between now and the end of the year you will see more gestures perhaps from both Myanmar and ASEAN. We believe in quiet diplomacy."

Dr. Annuay Viravan, deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, Thailand, from an October 11, 1996 interview with Fortune magazine.

VOICES OF BURMA

PRESS STATEMENT BY U AUNG SHWE

Chairman of the National League for Democracy
28 September 1996

There is no foundation to the accusations made by the State authorities that arrangements for the All Burma Congress of the National League for Democracy were made in collusion with the United States and other foreign powers. It is the policy of the NLD, as a party which has received the mandate of the people of Burma through free and fair elections, to maintain friendly relations with as many diplomats as possible in the interest of international understanding.

It should not be necessary for a political party to seek permission from the authorities to carry out its legitimate activities. It is the legitimate work of a political party to hold party conferences at regular intervals. It should be noted that the NLD has in the past held conferences without seeking permission from the government. The State Law and Order Restoration Council, which claims that it is seeking to promote multi-party democracy, should do everything it can to encourage the movements of political parties. Steps to prevent normal party work from proceeding belies such a claim.

It is only appropriate that the NLD should choose to hold its party congress on the eighth anniversary of its founding. The assertion of the authorities that the NLD intended to adopt resolutions and to make demands aimed at creating confusion and undermining the stability of the state is entirely untrue. The NLD is a responsible political party which is constantly striving to achieve conditions that will ensure peace and progress within the nation.

The SLORC and the USDA [Union Solidarity and Development Association] have recently marked their respective anniversaries with great pomp and publicity. It is therefore hard to understand why the NLD should not be able to hold a party congress without interference from the authorities.

The authorities are once again, as they did when they detained elected representatives of the NLD last May, that representatives and members of the NLD arrested over the last few days are merely being held for questioning. Such arrests are irresponsible and, in view of past experience, the explanation is unacceptable. It is typical of the present military regime that they should try to resolve political differences through draconian measures instead of finding a constructive course of action which would be of benefit to all concerned. The NLD calls upon the authorities for the immediate release of all those who have been arrested and for an end to the restrictions imposed on the legitimate activities of the party.

BURMA DEBATE
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Mary Pack, Editor

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

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

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