IN THEIR OWN WORDS:
Voices of the Movement

A DECADE LATER

REMEMBERING 1988
THE ISSUES....

REMEMBERING 1988

This year marks the ten-year anniversary of the pro-democracy uprising in Burma. In his article Burton Levin, former U.S. Ambassador to Burma, shares his memories of those turbulent months when thousands of people took to the streets and hope for political change appeared to be most promising. An eyewitness to the events, he reflects upon the circumstances leading up to the mass demonstrations, the strength and popularity of the opposition movement and the brutal response by the military regime.

VOICES OF THE MOVEMENT

During a brief period between late August and early September of 1988 the Burmese people enjoyed a glimpse at political and press freedom rarely experienced in a country where censorship has been in place for decades and little deviation from the constraints of the state-controlled media is allowed. A traveling exhibit entitled, Voices of '88, features poems, cartoons and photographs chronicling the events of this critical point in Burma's struggle for democracy.

A DECADE LATER

A decade following the events of 1988, two visitors to Burma share their impressions of a country at a political crossroads. Polish journalist David Warszawski examines the current impasse between the ruling junta and the democratic opposition, while Ong Ju Lynn, a Malaysian journalist who was one of 18 activists recently arrested in Burma for distributing pro-democracy materials, describes her incarceration and her feelings toward her military "captors." What do the authors' observations say about the Burma of today and its prospects for the future?
THE DEBATE

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REMEMBERING 1988

Reminiscences

[Image: Crowd of people gathered, possibly during a protest or demonstration.]
In reflecting on the events of ten years ago, I am reminded how unforeseen they were. When I arrived in Burma in May 1987, Ne Win's rule seemed as firm and as unchallenged as ever. It was a rule that rested on the gun and was buttressed by an extensive network of agents, spies and informers. Ostensibly dedicated to an indigenous form of socialism, the regime had long lost whatever ideological motivation it once may have had. Its sole objective was to maintain itself in power. Toward that end, the military completely dominated the nation's political and economic life. Unlike neighboring Thailand or Indonesia, for example, where the

Mass rally outside Rangoon General Hospital, 1988
politically powerful military recognized its limitations and relied on civilian technocrats to deal with the complex task of economic management. Burma’s leaders kept everything under tight, personal control. They did so because they believed that only military officers were sufficiently patriotic, courageous and virtuous to be entrusted with the nation’s fate. They viewed intellectuals as less than manly and tainted by western influences and businessmen as parasites seeking enrichment at the expense of the nation.

The baneful effects of the military’s monopolistic control were compounded by the educational and intellectual shortcomings of its ranking members. Through a succession of purges and arrests over the years, Ne Win had cleansed the military of those with courage and intelligence to question his idiosyncratic rule and disastrous policies. Those who remained to advance and prosper were the staunch loyalists, their loyalty cemented by a varying combination of ignorance, fear and a regimen of special privileges which provided the officer corps and their families with a level of material comfort which, though modest by American standards, was far beyond the reach of the overwhelming majority of the Burmese people.

The ravages of governance by swaggering incompetents were readily apparent. A once abundant agrarian economy was reduced to a subsistence level by policies which destroyed the freedoms and incentives that had formerly sustained it. The nation’s once huge exports of rice dwindled to almost nothing and living standards spiraled downward. The regime’s stubborn unwillingness to explore compromise solutions perpetuated smoldering ethnic conflicts and provided the military a rationale for devouring a large share of dwindling resources. Health, educational and other services were starved of funds. A scarcity of medicines contributed to rising mortality rates, particularly among infants and children.

Burma’s suffering went beyond the material. Perhaps even more grievous was the damage inflicted on the human spirit. Though spared ideologically driven efforts to remold society and behavior, the populace lived in a climate of fear. The regime demanded acquiescence and obedience. Utilizing legions of agents and informers, it engaged in unceasing efforts to ferret out the disaffected and imposed harsh punishments on those considered...
suspect with scant regard for rules of evidence. In this chilling atmosphere, trust was minimal and silence the best course. As a sign of how far this had gone, few Burmese would dare to utter Ne Win's name even in innocent or carefully guarded conversation lest this somehow get back to the authorities as evidence of lese majesté.

he showed up unannounced in the summer of 1987, seeking assistance for an undergraduate paper on the geology of Burma.

The pathetic state of the government monopolized media added to the gloom. The content of the press and television consisted largely of paean of praise to the military and mind-numbing accounts of Ne Win's inspection tours which invariably ended by noting that Ne Win had provided "proper instructions" to deal with whatever the task at hand. Though the inanities daily encountered in the media provided unintended amusement, they also provided wonderment about a leadership capable of viewing such insults to the intelligence of the Burmese people as beneficial to its interests.

Unlike many third world countries, Burma was blessed with a sizable pool of trained and educated people, the legacy of pre-Ne Win years when higher education standards prevailed, sizable numbers of students had done advanced work abroad and foreign aid donors had supported educational and training programs within Burma. But under Ne Win, this group was shunted aside and rigidly controlled by military officers poorly equipped to deal with civilian responsibilities. Further demoralized by low pay, inadequate program resources, and their own and the nation's bleak prospects, growing
numbers of this educated elite sought relief through emigration.

The first cracks in Ne Win’s seemingly impregnable position appeared in the wake of the regime’s demonetization move in early September, 1987. In keeping with its crude approach to economics, the regime sought to combat inflation and black marketeering by suddenly declaring most of the money in circulation worthless. Notes of small denomination were included and the poor and humble, their meager holdings wiped out, suffered far more grievously than the intended targets. University students, many far from home, found themselves without funds just in the midst of the stressful final exam period. They took to the streets around the University of Rangoon chanting anti-regime slogans and turning over the occasional car. But within a day or so calm returned in what appeared to be yet another demonstration of the Burmese people’s considerable capacity for malevolent government.

The tremors which came near to destroying the Ne Win regime in August, 1988, had their origins in a teahouse altercation in the suburbs of Rangoon between college students and local youths over a selection of taped music. Brutal police intervention against the students provoked student demonstrations which in turn were met with further police brutality, resulting in one instance in the death by suffocation of over forty students crammed into a police van.

The courageous determination of the students coupled with the outrageous behavior of the police transformed the public’s initial passivity toward the student protests into growing and active support. With memories of the demonetization probably serving as a catalyst, within a few weeks the bottled-up anger of the populace exploded into massive,
nation-wide demonstrations against a suddenly vulnerable regime.

Rather than detailing the widely chronicled events that summer, let me recount a few entrenched memories. There was the rise of Aung San Suu Kyi. Coincidentally in Burma to look after a failing mother, her status as the daughter of the nation's founding father provided the initial opening. But it was her courage, charisma and the force and eloquence of her message that earned her the adulation, bordering on worship, of virtually the entire population and elevated her to the leadership of the anti-regime movement. The Burmese people felt that at long last someone was standing up for their rights.

I met Aung San Suu Kyi a number of times. We had a tacit agreement that it wouldn't be wise to get together too frequently as that would provide fodder for the regime's desperate accusations that she was an American stooge. What came across loudest and clearest in our conversations was her pride in being Burmese and her identification with the nation and the people. Her public references to her father as the founder of Burma's army were made in the course of avowing her affection and respect for that institution. It saddened her that the once popular and respected military was now feared and hated by the people. She harbored the hope that she could work out an arrangement with the leadership that would serve both the interest of the military and the people. As a patriot and as a sensitive human being, she was dedicated to avoiding bloodshed and bringing about change peacefully.

Aung San Suu Kyi gave voice and provided organization to what might have otherwise been an inchoate eruption. She stood and continues to stand as a symbol of the resistance and aspirations of the Burmese people: it is no wonder that the regime so fears her.

Then there was the massive scale of the anti-regime demonstrations and the crowds that gathered to hear Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches. It would not be an exaggeration to speak of the number participating in these activities as cumulatively totaling several times the combined population of Rangoon and Burma's other major urban centers. In tribute to the American government's early expressions of support for the Burmese people's struggle for democracy, the Rangoon demonstrators chose the American Embassy as the focal point for their activities. Processions wound their way past our building and speakers

Political activity intensified and demonstrations grew throughout August and into September as the people made their desire for democracy apparent.
declared near the entrance. For veterans of the Foreign Service, it was a rare and comforting experience to witness admiring, rather than hostile, crowds gathered before an American Embassy.

As the demonstrations grew and continued, they attracted more and more components of the regime. Large and organized detachments of the civil service, police, air force and navy, some complete with bands, joined in the anti-regime processions. With its props beginning to crumble, the regime's days appeared to be numbered. Most ominous for the beleaguered leadership was the growing trickle of army personnel into the ranks of the protesters.

The police, navy and air force were regime adjuncts. The army was its core. The dissolution of the army would spell the end of the regime. For the leadership more was involved than an abdication of power. Their lives may very well have been at stake. By this time the popular mood had turned bitter over the regime's tenacious attempts to cling to undiminished power and the dark efforts of its intelligence organs to discredit and disrupt the opposition movement by a wide range of dirty tricks, including acts of murder. Fear of the vengeance of the people and worry about the steadfastness of their uniformed protectors combined to produced the leadership's decision to resort to massive and lethal force to suppress the uprising. The leadership cited conditions approaching anarchy and the break-down of essential services, including food distribution, as the rationale for this decision. It neither acknowledged, nor probably even recognized, that its mishandling of the situation from start to finish was responsible for bringing the nation to the breaking point.

There was also the horrific casualness with which army units killed their demonstrating compatriots. From the Embassy we could see troops on roofs picking off students ineffectively hiding behind trees, and chasing down and shooting fleeing students as if hunting rabbits. At no time did these unarmed students present a threat. When confronted by the menacing troops they only sought flight. The story subsequently made the rounds that troops involved in the shooting were brought in from outside Rangoon and told they were fighting communist insurgents. Whether true or not, the acts witnessed from the Embassy were little short of murder.

Finally, there was the regime's surprisingly kept promise of fair and free elections and its subsequent tortured rhetoric and actions in weaseling out of accepting the overwhelming electoral victory of the National League for Democracy. I remember the great sense of popular excitement when it became apparent that the NLD had won. Then over the
course of the next few weeks the "games" began. Delayed vote counts were followed by a series of arcane procedures which soon made it evident that the regime had no intention of abiding by the results. One strongly suspects that the regime's original willingness to go ahead with elections was predicated on the belief that its puppet party would garner enough support from the countryside to emerge victorious. That the regime misread the situation so badly offered further evidence of its political insensitivity.

The Embassy had been so repelled by the mass killing of early September that for the next several months we avoided contact with the regime at any level. By about February or March of 1988, with Washington's concurrence, I thought that we ought to make an effort to see whether the leadership had learned any lessons from recent events and whether we could exert any influence on the situation. I called on one of the regime's highest ranking officials. Our meeting was set against a backdrop of constant regime propaganda about the "criminals, communists and imperialist agents" who were responsible for the recent uprising.

In this meeting, I spoke of the difficulties and challenges facing Burma. Noting the military's lack of expertise in dealing with the country's problems, particularly those relating to the faltering economy, I suggested that the regime abandon its counterproductive propaganda about the uprising, and instead work to foster a spirit of reconciliation. I urged it to enlist the services of talented Burmese living both in the country and abroad through appeals to patriotism and through concrete measures which would provide evidence of a new, cooperative approach to reconstructing the nation.

I was treated to a 45-minute response which consisted of the same drivel about communists and imperialist agents appearing in the government controlled press. This presentation was the work of someone who reputedly possessed one of the better minds among the leadership. The meeting brought home to me the realization that dialogue with this regime was simply a waste of time.

I will not attempt to predict Burma's future. Fortune telling is a risky business and made more so by my prolonged absence from the country and by the paucity of reliable information on the
As for the role of the United States, we lack leverage to influence developments in any meaningful way. Absent changed circumstances, it would be best for us to remain aloof from the regime as a means of offering encouragement to those within Burma courageously struggling for change and in recognition of the imperviousness of Ne Win and his legatees to outside influence. The argument advanced by some that our interest would be served by working with the regime on the anti-narcotic front is not persuasive. At best this would produce a few more seizures and arrests more impressive for show than for substance. As Thailand demonstrates, the key to large scale reduction of opium cultivation is the tying of remote areas into the modernizing state by the expansion of a wide range of facilities and services accompanied by more respectful treatment of minority peoples. This scenario is impossible under a regime which has presided over retrogression rather than modernization and which treats even its own ethnic brethren, the Burman majority, so shabbily. There will be no easing of the drug problem for so long as the present regime holds sway.

The case for economic engagement is also not strong, although it would be naive to think that unilateral or limited sanctions would have a significant impact on Burma's subsistence economy.

Burton Levin served as the U.S. Ambassador to Burma from May 1987 to September 1990. Trained as a Chinese language and area officer, his other foreign service postings included Taiwan, Indonesia, Thailand and Hong Kong. He is currently a visiting professor at Carleton College in Minnesota and also holds the positions of Director of the Mansfield Foundation, member of the Council for the John Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies, and Director of the China Fund.
Voices of the Movement

Voices of '88 commemorates the thousands of Burmese citizens who became victims of the military government's ruthless suppression of mass pro-democracy demonstrations. It portrays the events of that fateful year, reproducing pictures, cartoons and poems from Burma's brief period of press freedom in late August and early September 1988. This material - now banned in Burma - reveals a clear desire for freedom of expression, human rights and an end to one-party rule. In May 1990 Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide electoral victory, but to date the military has refused to relinquish power and continues to persecute all dissenting voices.
The following pages feature selections from Voices of '88, a travelling exhibit compiled under the sponsorship of the Open Society Institute. The exhibit will debut in London on October 23, and in New York City on November 20, 1998. See Media Resources (p. 34) for more information.

THE PEACE THAT WILL ENTER HISTORY

The bird of peace
Soars up to the sky and
Descends to earth — unafraid.
The bird of peace
Glides earthwards and
Flies up again — unafraid.
The bird of peace
From the heavens
Down to earth
Brings compassion, loving kindness,
Loyalty.
The bird of peace flies on.
The loss of life
Will be recorded in history
8-8-88 is our testimony.

FROM ONE STEP

From one step,
Many steps
From one drop of blood,
A river of blood.
From one voice,
Many voices.
That is the sound of the call to battle.
The sound of clapping is growing,
National spirit feeds our courage.
Our movement is succeeding.
Our hands are joined forever,
We're on our way to the victory post.
So understand this!
Students and the people are united, their hearts leaping
And the battle will never stop.
WE CHALLENGE YOU

There I am, a virgin, pretty,
A student at university
Fair and full of youth
With nothing artificial on my body,
All natural curves.

My age,
Counted on tender leaves of *thabye*
At the time of the eighty-eight uprising,
A shapely eighteen.

Here at our university
What is there to fear?
I'll fight, fight
And be unafraid,
With no thought of surrender.
Let's form a student's union!

It was in March, 1988.
One night in one of our fascist state prisons
I was robbed of my virginity,
Unable to defend myself
I was pinioned,
Powerless to move or struggle.
I couldn't, I couldn't.
It was like drowning in shallow water.

My lips were kissed by those fascists,
My breasts were in their mouths,
And inside me ... those fascists....
I was raped by a fascist 'security' force,
Possessed alive by some evil nat inside
As the guns of the moment with endless lust
Tore away my virginity —
One, two, three, four and more.
I all but died.

Nevertheless
I did not die. Nor did I cry
Though my womb had been defiled.
I still love our resistance movement
And love democracy.
So hey,
You fascist government!
For gnawing away at my flesh and blood
I can never ever forgive you, never.
Never till the end of time.
And hey!
Successors of that government,
You lackeys, you security force dogs!
Come on, if you've got the guts,
Come with your guns out down the path of bloodshed.
There's a young woman here who's working for peace,
A Burmese flower that has been ravished.
You government lot, I'll fight to bring you down.
We'll never be brought to our knees.
We'll never surrender.
AT RIGHT:
Behind the smiling face of State television.

AT LEFT:
1) "The students have been on a hunger strike for 36 hours." 2) "Aunty, aren't the rest of you going to join in?" 3) "Young man, we've been on a hunger strike for 26 years already!"

AT RIGHT:
Ne Win [left] pulls strings of San Yu, Sein Lwin and Dr. Maung Maung at rostrum of BSPP People's Assembly.
Law Number 5/96 prohibits individuals or organizations from "disturbing, destroying, obstructing, inciting, delivering speeches, making oral or written statements and disseminating in order to undermine, belittle and make people misunderstand the functions being carried out by the National Convention for the emergence of a firm and enduring Constitution." Any violation of this Law can result in a penalty of 5 to 20 years in prison. It is this article to which the government press of Burma referred in order to justify the threats, most
GHOST SIGHTING IN MYEINIGONE

Besides the ghost, there is nothing interesting in this Rangoon borough of sloppily built, ugly modern buildings, with here-and-there traditional straw huts, a few market places, a few stores, and unpaved side streets. The ghost has so thrown objects around that the tenants of the haunted house have had to move out. There are crowds of curious people even though this place is a good few miles away from downtown Rangoon. They can't be dispersed by the police and government spooks. "I won't leave here until I see the ghost" — stated a middle aged woman, who arrived on a bike, to a police officer — "I came a long way." There are a lot of police. They fear that the ghost is of a political nature.

Ten years ago, on a nearby crossing, the police were firing at protesters. Dozens of people were killed. According to Buddhist beliefs, ghosts of those killed often reside in the place where they met death, but this is not something one can talk about. So the police do not explain why they want the people out of the area. Nor do the people explain why they won't leave.

NO TALKING. NO WRITING.

In 1989 San San Nweh published a short story entitled "Children Who Play in the Back Alleyways." In it she describes how she tried to persuade children to stop playing in the dirty side streets and move to a new playground. But the children did not want to go there, for they were afraid of the ghost. Recently, a man had died suddenly in a tea-room around that area. The children argue whether he was wearing a white or a red shirt. This short story was supposed to have been printed in that month's Eit-met-hpu, but it was censored. Pages had to be torn out from the whole monthly edition. The author was jailed for 10 months and was blacklisted. It's hard not to wonder how she dared to be so brave. After all, everyone in Rangoon remembers a young man in a tea-room killed by a stray bullet when the police was firing at students on the streets. And even a child would understand that an argument over the color of the man's shirt is but a allusion to bloodshed. The message of the novel is didactic: regardless of how many playgrounds the junta will build, the phantoms of the past will prevent the nation from using them.

Equally didactic is the fate of the author. Lesson for lesson, as in tit for tat. But San San Nweh kept writing, so in 1995 she ended up back in prison, this time sentenced for 10 years, not months. The sentence turned out to be mild: in April this year another San San, a leading opposition figure, was sentenced to 25 years in prison for a radio interview in which she criticized the junta.

The few tourists who visit Burma have no idea about all this. They are attracted by the exotic and touristically unexplored reputation of the country. But before they land in Rangoon, they can find out a few things about what is going on. In the airplane from Bangkok, the stewardesses collect the newspapers before landing. They explain that these will be needed by the passengers on the return trip to Bangkok. Next to me a surprised Englishman does not want to surrender his Bangkok Post, an English-language Thai daily. He explains that he hasn't finished yet. The stewardess replies that he won't have enough time since we were about to land. But he would finish in his hotel. She instructs him to be considerate of other passengers. Finally, resigned, he gives up the paper. And I think about Burmese cleaning ladies, who in Rangoon will enter aboard the Thai aircraft, and might leave with the plague: an uncensored newspaper. A few days later, on the same flight back to Bangkok, we receive neatly folded newspapers. They did not seem to have been touched by anyone.
Humidity crushes you like a hot and damp eiderdown. It sticks to the skin, glues to the hair, and putties up the lungs. In midair, a fine mist changes into steam before it reaches the ground. Mud on the street splashes and fumes with vapor. Monsoon season. Pages of The New Light of Myanmar nearly dissolve between sweaty fingers. The front page has a picture of someone in a uniform speaking to a focused audience. His identity is irrelevant. A similar picture will appear tomorrow and the next day, and forever. The Uniform speaks. You listen.

The news items let one know the Uniform's whereabouts. "Yangon, 20 June. Chairman of Yangon Division Peace and Development Council Commander of Yangon Command Maj-Gen Khin Maung Than today inspected No 1 Livestock Breeding Farm of Yangon Command and monsoon paddy fields being ploughed by farmers in Mingaladon Township and Tatmadaw-men [soldiers] of battalions and units. This morning he first inspected poultry farms of No 1 Livestock Breeding Farm and gave instructions on meeting the set target and minimizing loss and wastage." This text will suffice. All others come under the same stamp: The Uniform conducted an inspection, visited or received. He then explained, suggested, ordered. Sometimes in the latter part of the articles, there is a mention of others who were there or what they said. This is all.

Normally the Uniform is not fully cited. That would be superfluous. Everyday the front page of The New Light of Myanmar, right under the masthead, a frame lists the Four Political Goals, Four Economic Goals and Four Social Goals. They carry no signature. There is no need. It is enough to look at the front page pictures. Sports and weather are missing from the last page, they have been shoved into the central sections. The last page also has Uniforms. Instead of the Four Goals, we have the framed People's Desire: "Oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views. Oppose those trying to jeopardize stability of the State and progress of the nation. Oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the State. Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy."

The Goals and Desires are printed on the first and last page every Burmese newspaper and journal. In every issue. They are repeated by TV and radio after every news program. They appear on billboards in key areas of the city, in English and Burmese. From the ones in English, the world learns what the Burmese people desire. From those in Burmese, the people themselves learn what their desires are. George Orwell, as I recall, started as a colonial functionary here, in Burma.

The billboard next to Aung San Suu Kyi's house is in English. It is placed near a bus stop, at which no bus has stopped for years. The entire lane next to her house has been closed to traffic. A few civilians and a Uniform sit at the bus stop. Checkpoint. Aung San Suu Kyi was two when in 1947 her father Gen. Aung San, creator of independent Burma, was killed in a still unexplained attack. His widow continued to be politically active, so Aung San Suu Kyi grew up in a house full of politics, guests and foreigners visiting Burma. Everything ended in 1962 when the Uniforms, under general Ne Win, her father's former comrade-in-arms, took over. Ne Win — the name, which he assumed as a partisan, means "bright as the sun" — led the nation on the "Burmese Road to Socialism."

The Constitution was abolished, the opposition jailed, the economy nationalized. Student protests were crushed with force. The authorities deflected
social discontent toward the foreigners as sources of all evil. Guerrilla movements of the national minorities, especially the Karen and the Shan, took to the jungle once again, fighting for the autonomy promised them at independence. In the cities, anti-Chinese and anti-Hindu riots killed dozens of people. By the end of the 60's, over a quarter million "foreigners" had left Burma. Only the authorities benefited from their plight. But the authorities tried hard. They nationalized trade and introduced People's Stores, in which everyone could get a little bit of rice for food-stamps. They canceled 50 and 100 kyat bills to strike at "profiteers and blood-suckers," and introduced 45 and 90 kyat bills, because Ne Win's astrologers told him that 9 was his lucky number.

The army's iron fist crushed student demonstrations and peasant revolts. But astrologers forecasted that "on the day of the four eights" Burma will once again be free. Student protests and strikes went on since the spring of 1988. In June, Ne Win resigned. On August 8, 1988, (the four eights), hundreds of thousands of people flooded the streets. Students of Rangoon's universities were the most active participants of the democracy movement, and suffered the most casualties when finally the army opened fire. More than three thousand people were killed that summer, thousands of others fled to the jungle, took up weapons. But public meetings organized by the newly formed National League for Democracy still drew crowds. Half a million people gathered around the capital's Shwedagon pagoda, to hear Aung San Suu Kyi, the secretary-general of the League. Unable to control the situation, the military carried out another coup d'état.

The new State Law and Order Restoration Council announced that free elections would be held. Proving its patriotic and national roots, it changed the name of the country from Burma to the supposedly more linguistically correct Myanmar, and that of the capital from Rangoon to Yangon. Signs of fighting were removed and the restoration of a free-market economy announced. The opposition was once again jailed, so that it would not interfere in "the work of national reconsolidation." In 1989 Aung San Suu Kyi was put under house arrest. It was to last six years.

Free elections, however, took place as announced. The military was certain of victory. Had they not, after all, given people the opportunity to make money, built new roads, paved the old ones? They could not understand why, in May 1990, the League got 392 of 485 seats in Parliament, and representatives of national minorities hostile to the junta - another 65. They could not accept such a parliament, so they announced that parliament could not meet until a new constitution was adopted. The constitution was to be drafted by a SLORC-appointed National Convention. It is still working at it.

Aung San Suu Kyi and the League keep on repeating that the country should be run by the Parliament, duly elected in 1990. They endlessly reiterate they are against violence and renounce revenge. In 1991 the leader of the League received the Noble...
The authorities have rejected the League's demand. They demanded instead that, as "a measure of riot prevention," provincial NLD activists of the party report daily to police precincts. Rumors soon had it that the capital's Insein prison had already prepared a solitary cell for a "certain lady." The hate campaign against the daughter of the architect of Burmese independence — avenues, parks and plazas across the country are named after him — has been going on for years. Government media condemned her for "having, in disregard of her bloodline, given her body to a foreigner." Her husband is English. For many years, he and his sons have been banned from entering Burma. The authorities hope that this way they will force the leader of the League to leave the country.

"There are five virtues of women which include the virtue of fair complexion, that of hair and that of prime of life" writes Kaythayi (Burmese often have only one name) in The New Light of Myanmar on June 17. We have kept the author's original wording, spelling and punctuation. "Myanmar traditional cosmetic, Thanakha, has proved that she does not have Myanmar complexion any longer."

I'm approaching the house of the woman who "does not have Myanmar complexion any more." The entire checkpoint blocks my way. They check and write down my ID, make photos of me, and then the Uniform instructs me to leave "for security reasons." "State policy" he adds. He genially suggests I should try again some time later. Next day. Or next week.

I explain that I have an appointment and that it would be rude of me not to show up. I ask for the legal basis of their blocking my way. I remind them that Aung San Suu Kyi is no longer under house arrest. I demand to talk to their superior officer. They stand firm. Suddenly one of the civilians gets a fresh idea. "Curfew!" — he shouts out. Now all, very contented, repeat "Curfew! Curfew!" Around us, the city is vibrant with life. The curfew obviously applies to this checkpoint only. I will have to meet the woman "who no longer has Myanmar complexion" at another, fallback address.

Peace Prize, and was released from her house arrest four years later. Meanwhile, one-third of the League's MPs were killed, arrested, or forced to emigrate or resign. Punitive expeditions of the army finally broke down the guerrilla, both of the minorities and of the Students Army, set up after the massacres of 1988.

The League stubbornly reminds, that the will of the voters has to be recognized first, and only then can negotiations start. The Army replies — if it ever does — that there is nothing to negotiate about. The tenth anniversary of the bloody suppression of the "day of four eights" demonstrations is near. The League demands that the authorities convene Parliament no later than August 21.

**CURFEW IN FRONT OF THE "VETOLADY'S" HOUSE**

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"There are five virtues of women which include the virtue of fair complexion, that of hair and that of prime of life" writes Kaythayi (Burmese often have only one name) in The New Light of Myanmar on June 17. We have kept the author's original wording, spelling and punctuation. "Myanmar traditional cosmetic, Thanakha, has proved that she does not have Myanmar complexion any longer."

I'm approaching the house of the woman who "does not have Myanmar complexion any more." The entire checkpoint blocks my way. They check and write down my ID, make photos of me, and then the Uniform instructs me to leave "for security reasons." "State policy" he adds. He genially suggests I should try again some time later. Next day. Or next week.

I explain that I have an appointment and that it would be rude of me not to show up. I ask for the legal basis of their blocking my way. I remind them that Aung San Suu Kyi is no longer under house arrest. I demand to talk to their superior officer. They stand firm. Suddenly one of the civilians gets a fresh idea. "Curfew!" — he shouts out. Now all, very contented, repeat "Curfew! Curfew!" Around us, the city is vibrant with life. The curfew obviously applies to this checkpoint only. I will have to meet the woman "who no longer has Myanmar complexion" at another, fallback address.

**EVERY SUCCESS, EVERY FAILURE**

"How much longer will the West delay intervention in Kosovo?" Aung San Suu Kyi asks almost immediately after entering the house. "As long as in Bosnia? Don't they realize what a threat Serb militiamen is? Not an armed threat, mind you, but a political one, to the very principles of democracy. Pacifism is the only intellectually rationalized position, don't you agree?"

I am at a loss for words. This woman has been a prisoner for years, she can't leave the country, and sometimes even her house. She is a leader of a persecuted political party, and wages a risky game with a military dictatorship, and still has time to worry about Kosovo?

"When I was under house arrest I would listen all day to the radio. I followed the struggle of democratic movements world-wide. I felt that every success of democracy is our success as well, and every failure is also our failure. I intensely observed what was hap-
pening in Poland, the first presidential elections, the split in "Solidarity." It's a pity it ended that way."

Splits occur also in the League. The military successfully takes advantage of fears, ambitions, and jealousies. So far, no one has seriously questioned the authority of the party leadership, or the validity of basic political demands. Nor does anyone know how to convince the military to negotiate. Aung San Suu Kyi talks about the similarities between the military government of Burma and Communism in Eastern Europe. She is incredibly well read, she cites Ludvik Vaculik and Timothy Garten-Ash. Then the conversation becomes more nuts-and-bolts: how did we manage to print the underground press, how did we organize independent education.

"I find the Serb fascination with the uniform, with military honor, fascinating. The military all around the world are very sensitive about their honor. This military honor is obviously something extremely fragile. At the same time, killing is the only thing that counts in war, and there is no honor in that."

Maybe the fact that the opposition leader is a woman is one of the reasons it is so difficult for the military to sit down and negotiate. Negotiate with a woman? That would be an insult to the Uniform. The military tried talks with the League without her, unsuccessfully. The executive committee of the League voted that its secretary general must be present at all political talks.

"But we have to admit that we are all sensitive to the magic of the uniform. We in the League also have a sort of dress code: homespun beige jackets. When in May this year the military unexpectedly allowed the League to hold a congress, the delegates said that on sight of their jackets, the bystanders showed them thumbs up for support and smiled."
have people showing off their expensive cars, throwing money away in fancy restaurants. Their greed causes envy. It will be difficult to control the growing fury."

The Burmese economic boom fueled by cheap, mainly Japanese credits, is clearly breaking down. Only a few have made fortunes, mainly on smuggling precious stones and wood to neighboring Thailand. The army does not interfere, they have their fingers in the pie, as well as in the mass production of drugs in the "Golden Triangle." In 1996, the main figure behind the drug production, former guerrilla leader Khun Sa, sold out to the military and now peacefully lives in his house in Rangoon, undisturbed by anyone. The junta has denied a request for his extradition to the US, where he is wanted on drug charges. The rich got richer, the poor got poorer. Prisoners and peasants still have to do forced labor, under the threat of guns. The mass use of forced labor, the persecution, torture and murder of oppositionists has been confirmed by UN special rapporteur on human rights in Burma, Rajsoomer Lallah, in a report of January this year. The Burmese government, outraged by the report, stated that it was biased, because the rapporteur had worked from afar, failing to visit Burma. Because of that, the government continued, its refusal to allow the rapporteur to visit Burma still holds.

"Even when a lot of noise is being made through concocted complaints regarding forced labor" — wrote The New Light of Myanmar on June 20 — "what Myanmar can offer is a ready labor force which has always been underemployed [and this] should carefully be taken into consideration." This is an invitation to get rich at the expense of Burmese workers, but such measures will not stimulate internal consumption, without which the boom will remain a sham. But how can it be stimulated, if the military consumes 42% of the budget, and the official commercial rate of exchange is 6 kyats to the dollar, while the official tourist rate of exchange is 320 kyats? Every visitor has to purchase $300 in "Foreign Exchange Certificates" upon crossing the border anyway. But let us be fair: these are much more nicely printed than the "dollar equivalents" issued by the State bank in Poland under Communism.

WHO POURED THE TEA?

"M any women had to enter the labor market due to the bad economic situation, and this has changed the traditional image of the woman's role in society," Aung San Suu Kyi continued. "In the beginning I was not at all aware of that image, as my mother held important State positions and had men reporting to her. Now people accept women's economic independence, so they also will accept their political independence, and equal rights in general."

Could be. But in Burma, male and female clothing is still washed and dried separately, in order not to soil men's things. When in Chiang-Mai I described my meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, which took place in a private house, someone asked right away, "Who poured the tea?" I answered it was the gentleman whose home it was. All faces lit up. "See!" said someone. "See how liberal he is!" Aung San Suu Kyi could be an opposition leader, a Nobel Prize winner, but as a woman pouring the tea remained part of her duties. These, however, are but cultural subtleties. Burmese deserters and victims alike confirm that soldiers often rape women assigned to do forced labor. These rapes remain unpunished.
"The worst thing — one of the guerrillas in Chiang Mai vehemently exclaimed — is that now the military want to marry our sisters!" To marry an adversary's sister is a blow to his manhood. "The authorities hold it against me that I am a woman and that I married a foreigner. But they themselves send their children to study abroad, and dress for-

eign. They wear designer jeans most of the time, and only put on *longyi* on holidays. The people see that. That's why I think the nationalist propaganda of the authorities does not have any effect on the people. But the issue of the minorities has to be resolved. The minorities trusted my father and the League inherited some of the trust. The generals fear that and do not allow any meetings between the League and the minorities. Despite that, at the beginning of June, representatives of the four main minority organizations appealed to authorities with demands similar to those made by the League a few days earlier. Not all minorities we have managed, despite government hindrance, to establish contacts with, will cooperate with us when the talks start, to be sure. But others may join us. I am certain we can work out a common position."

TO CRITICIZE THE HOLY SPIRIT AFTER A THOROUGH STUDY OF THE MATTER

Other than the Uniforms, you won't see any men wearing pants out on the streets. Everyone wears *longyi*, Burmese sarongs, much more comfortable in this climate. Government officials sign an obligation to wear *longyi*, and also forswear participation in political activity of any kind. Much of the economy is still State-owned, and those who work in private companies don't want to stick out of the crowd. Formally the authorities recognize 135 "national races" but in reality their role comes down to ethnographic ornaments. In a country where the Burmese only constitute about two thirds of the population — and next to Buddhism there is also Islam, Christianity, Animism, and even a small Jewish community — only the Buddhist Burmese are considered full-fledged citizens. People of "foreign extraction" receive associate membership only, which involves some limitations.

Christian children are often taken by ruse to Buddhist temples to study. Pamphlets for agitators instruct them to argue with Christians.... "Criticize God as an egostic entity with narrow horizons, because he himself said, 'There is no god but God.' Point out the weaknesses of Christianity and overcome it through Buddhism. Criticize the Holy Spirit after thorough study of the matter" instructs a brochure entitled "Facts to Attack Christians."

The Muslim Rohingya refugees, who escaped from persecution to Bangladesh, are allowed back into Burma only if they convert to Buddhism on the border.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL & SANITATION DEPARTMENT OF YANGON CITY DEVELOPMENT

The Committee sent a letter to city officials on December 18 last year to inform them, that "in accordance with the principles of Environmental Control & Sanitation Department of Yangon City Development Committee, [...] multi-religious graveyards inside the respective Townships are inconsistent with the Town's Characteristics [and are] being closed and transferred to other places." This means the eviction of all Christian, Muslim, Farsi and Jewish cemeteries. The religious groups protested. In response, the authorities banned all burials at these cemeteries. The stalemate remains. But at the same time, the hated foreignness has struck at the regime's most tender spot. On 25th February, the Chief of military intelligence and one of the four ruling generals, General Khin Nyunt and his wife placed an ad in *The New Light of Myanmar* publicly renouncing their son Ye Naing Win. Ads of this type are normally
placed by parents of children who had joined the guerrilla, or fled abroad, to avoid retaliation against other family members. But Ye Naing Win had not join the enemies of the regime. He had only married a foreigner, a citizen of Singapore. That was enough.

WILL THE GENERALS HAVE A CHOICE?

The army is bound to be divided. But under conditions of a full blockade on information, I don't want to repeat unconfirmed rumors. Military intelligence knows what's going on, maybe they will be the ones to initiate change? The worst thing is that there is no third force in Burma, like the Church in Poland, which could serve as a mediator between the army and the opposition. Buddhism is much more decentralized and too politically divided. Some of the bonzes support the opposition, get arrested, killed. The regime tries to seduce the others by making large donations to temples, and ostentatious participation in religious holidays. But the people see their opulence and know this has nothing in common with the Buddhist imperative of poverty."

"Regardless of all of this, I'm sure we'll be able to convince the people to forswear revenge in the decisive moment. The League's hands are clean, we never had anything to do with the Generals. It can't be said about us that by protecting them, we protect our own interests. I think that now it's months rather than years before the Generals will have to sit down and talk to us. It will be hard on them, because they understand that after this is all over they will have to give up power. But the recent events in Indonesia showed once again that they will have no other choice."

"I think my TV is broken: all I see is green and yellow" a Burmese joke goes. Green is the color of military uniforms, and yellow — that of monks' robes. But the monks killed during the demonstrations and those who later died in the prison, like abbot Sayadaw U Tiloka of the Shwephonepwint pagoda, are also being remembered. Government spokesmen refer to Buddhism to justify, in the international arena, their rejection of universal human rights. But as the Buddhist scholar Thaung Htun said in April at the Burma session of the UN Human Rights Commission: "It is shameful to claim cultural values in order to justify autocracy and the denial of basic rights and freedoms. To say that freedom is something Western or un-Burmese is a deep insult to our tradition and to the memory of our parents, who gave their lives in the struggle for independence."

The generals know that — but they also know that they've hit a dead end from which there is no escape. They can only accept the reality, hand over the command, and — trust. Will they be able to? Aung San Suu Kyi does not represent the entire opposition. The last ten years in Burma's history were so bloody that it's hard to believe that everyone would give up retaliation. And a brutal, government-supported faction of Burmese Buddhism — the Democratic Buddhist Karen Army — which has struck a deal with the government and now specializes in persecuting Christian Karens, may yet have the upper hand to win over Buddhism tout court.

The national minorities did trust Aung San half a century ago, but will that trust will be carried over to a government which — if all goes well and the army steps down — will be formed by his daughter? Will the years of hate propaganda leave no trace?

How are the guerrillas supposed to blend back into peaceful life? What about narcobusiness?

"It's only after victory that the troubles will begin," the guerrillas told me in Chiang Mai. "But those will be our troubles. At least we won't be suffering from the cruelty and stupidity of the authorities. And we'll be able to start our lives all over again."

They want to be doctors, teachers, engineers, all the things they would have been if history had not swept them out of lecture halls into the streets, right under the Army's fire, and then into the jungles, emigration, underground. But will it be possible to return to a life interrupted ten years after?

And will the army want to talk, or as they did in 1988, 1974, 1964 — drown all protests in seas of blood? Aung San Suu Kyi is at ease. Bidding me farewell, she wishes that we meet again soon.

At the airport I am thoroughly searched. My undeveloped films disappear. "You met with the leader of our opposition," explains the customs guard. But I think that in his voice I hear not reproach, but jealousy and pride.

This article first appeared in Poland's largest daily newspaper, Gazeta Wyborcza. The author is a well-known foreign correspondent who has written for numerous publications internationally. The article was translated from Polish for Burma Debate.
A DECADE LATER

One Week in Ran
was one of the 18 detained in Rangoon for six days. The six Americans have become national and international heroes. The other 12 — three Thais, three Indonesians, two Filipinos and one Australian are lesser (known) heroes.

The incident has also been given wide media coverage in Burma by the Myanmar (Burmese) government. In *The Mirror,* a government propaganda news daily (as with all media coverage in Burma), the editorial writes that the people of Myanmar (Burma) can no longer bear the nefarious actions of the 18 alien instigators. The citizens of Myanmar (Burma) see them, not as doves of peace, but crows of chaos. Because of that, they had helped the government arrest the 18.

Now with all the international attention on us, many may think that the action was very well planned, a commando team of democracy fighters sent forth on a mission, almost a conspiracy. Even the military was shaken. Eighteen people from six countries. Were they hand-picked? Who was the mastermind? Who was the leader of the group?

In reality, nothing can be further from the truth. We come from all walks of life. A 19-year old American college kid. A 51-year old seasoned human rights activist. A journalist who knows more about writing than direct activism and facing 12 hours of interrogation. We fumbled and drifted, not knowing what was coming next. Not knowing whether lying or telling the truth would get us out or further incriminate us.

When our Malaysian Embassy officials came to see us, we thought we could seek some assurance from them. How wrong we were. All the first secretary could tell us was, "Do you realise the consequences of your actions on bilateral ties?"
Sometimes we kept mum despite the shouts and threats from our interrogators. Your story is different from the rest. It is up to you, we were told. Sometimes we cooperated. We spilled information because we were scared. (In my mind, this is a rogue government with no care of what the world thinks.) For three days, my two Malaysian colleagues and I were kept in the police headquarters before we were sent to a "guesthouse" to join the 15 others. We lived in an office, sharing it with a police officer of high rank, who came in at 9 am and left at 6 pm. Civil servant. He does his own things. People come in to see him, take orders, leave. On the second day he smiled at us. On the third day, he changed his longhi (sarong) into his military uniform in front of us. We became natural inhabitants of his office, like the ginkyoks (lizards) on the wall.

In the beginning we were defiant, cocky. We held on to our own. They too. Hard, indifferent looks. After all, they are in power, our captors. But as the days passed, they could neither feign power anymore than we could feign disdain. We lived together 24 hours a day in an office six by eight metres. They brought us food and cigarettes. They accompanied us to the toilet, our only excursions.

Once in a while they came in to interrogate us. We fear interrogations. The uncertainties, the lies we have to keep up. The disbelief in their eyes. The continuous questions.

At night, they drape themselves on chairs and tables, while we sleep on mattresses under mosquito nets. I wrote my letters inside. On the third day, we got braver: will you get us bryiani rice from this shop at Sule Pagoda Road? We'll pay. To our delight, they did.

The hard looks and indifference melted. Our smiles became genuine. Even our "Thank you" (je-zu-tin-bateh). They smiled at seeing us enjoy our meal, they could not hide.

Our captors, they become people in my eyes. They fear us, and hate us, but came to like us. Me too, though to admit it is as if to imply that the junta, with their human rights abuses and atrocities, is okay.

We have a constant attendant, a spy you could say, who watched our every move, and was present at every interrogation, who would not tell us what was going on, or would only tell us lies.

"How long will we be kept here?"
"Very long."
"How long? Forever?"
"Yes."

Once I said, "Don't ask him anything. He only tells lies." I notice a sting of hurt in his eyes. He doesn't hide very well. Neither do the others.

Neither do I.

I came home with a knot in my chest that wouldn't go away. We came home jubilant and triumphant. Heroes. But I did not feel jubilant and triumphant. I was ashamed. Not for what I did (leafletting, small matter), but because I really didn't want to see my captors as people, so I can come home and condemn the junta with authoritative vigour.
is responsible for more than 10,000 of its people fighting for democracy in exile; which is responsible for arbitrary arrests, tortures and deaths of elected representatives and activists; which is responsible for the butchery and rapes of ethnic minorities; who is responsible for the 120,000 refugees languishing on the borders of Thailand.

But I come home and I still think of them. Is he responsible? Richard, our interrogator with a big pot belly? Who shouted at me for not cooperating? He, whom we taught how to play cards; who patiently listened and translated into Burmese for his other colleagues; who passed his cards to his friend while he ran to answer a phone call. He who promised to teach us a Burmese card game before we left.

Richard who looked like the mamak who pulls my teh tarik in my favorite stall.

Or how about the woman attendant who insisted on standing and watching me bathe? When I look into her eyes, she is as naked to me as I am to her.

Or is it the guard we affectionately call the flower boy, who would go outdoors to pick flowers for our hair?

Which do you want?" "The yellow ones." We made our choice peering out from the windows of our prison.

Or was Khin Maung, the judge, responsible? His dedication to his job was admirable. Eight hours of sitting in his big, hard chair wearing a yellow scarf with a wing-like-thing on the right side of his head. Listening patiently to statements from police officers and witnesses.

His sentencing, he delivered with utmost seriousness, five years in Insein Prison, only to be negated moments later by the auspiciousness of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. We were to be pardoned and deported. But he played his role well.

And so we came back as heroes. Freedom fighters. We joked about the ridiculousness of the whole experience. The trial, the interrogation, the investigations of us. We mocked them and their antics. We condemned the junta. We talked about human rights and democracy, as if our experience has anything to do with the violent realities of Burma.

In our roles of heroes, we are as much actors in a play — a shadow play — as Richard, the judge, or the 'Flower Boy'. We play into what is expected of us by following a director's orders. In our case the director is the world, the media. Who then is the master puppeteer in Burma? Again I ask, who is responsible while people are tortured and killed? Those who direct, those who participate, those who stand and watch, or those who try to lead a 9-to-5 job, concentrating hard on their work so they won't hear cries of pain, loss and death.

If those in the last group, the 9-to-5 people in Burma are to be condemned, so should anyone around the world who has ignored the suffering in Burma. Or in East Timor. Or Turkey. Or Mexico.

As there are different degrees of blame and responsibility, then there are also degrees of heroism. On one extreme, the Americans see us as gallant heroes, taking on a military regime. I feel I do not fit there. Neither do I deserve the Malaysian government's condemnation of our actions and labeling us as trouble-makers and law-breakers. We went there to do a good thing for a forgotten people, and that we took risks to our best.

During those six days, I discovered humanity behind the villain's mask which they cannot hide despite the fact that in Burma, the actors carry guns. Total evil is a clear target, a defined red bull's-eye in the centre of a white circle. In Burma, I found that the paint was mixed to a solid pink, bad inseparable from good. Humans. Like me.

I will continue to do what I do, to fight for the rights of the oppressed under the military rule of Burma. I will write articles, compile updates, research, lobby, not so much of conviction, but for a lack of wisdom to do something different.

(I wish to thank Amy deKanter who has helped me throughout the process, of writing this article. Thank you for giving me a safe space to allow me to remove my mask.)

Ong Ju Lynn is a Malaysian journalist who was one of the 18 activists detained recently by the Burmese military regime.

This article first appeared in the August 23, 1998 issue of The Nation, an English-language newspaper published in Bangkok, Thailand.
WASHINGTON, DC — A Burma Roundtable was held on August 26, featuring David Steinberg, Director of Asian Studies at Georgetown University and Senior Consultant for the Asia Foundation, and John Brandon, Assistant Director for Asia Foundation's Washington Office. Mr. Steinberg and Mr. Brandon had visited Burma in May and they shared their views on recent developments inside the country.

The Roundtable of September 22 featured a presentation and discussion of the recently-released World Resources Institute report, "Logging Burma's Frontier Forests: Sources and the Regime." The authors, Jake Brunner, Kirk Talbott, and Chanel Elkin, discussed the report's findings which establish a link between logging policy, deforestation and the political violence that has plagued the country since independence in 1948.


NEW YORK — 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: (202) 692-9748.

NEW ENGLAND — The New England 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 Billeness of Franklin Research & Development Corporation by phone: (617) 482-6655 or fax: (617) 482-6179.

PHILADELPHIA — The Philadelphia Roundtable co-sponsored an August 7 dinner at the University of Pennsylvania's Asian Pacific Center to commemorate the anniversary of the August 8, 1988 democracy uprising. Presenters at the dinner included Sunda Khin, who spoke on the role of women in Burmese culture and Aung Saw Oo discussing the events which led to the student demonstrations of 1988.

The Philadelphia Burma Roundtable hosts a monthly activity. For more information contact Dan Orzech by e-mail: Orzech@well.com.

SAN FRANCISCO — The Bay Area Burma Roundtable is held the third Wednesday of every month. For more information contact lane Jerome at (408) 995-0403 or e-mail: jjerome@igc.apc.org.

SEATTLE — 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 — An October 15 meeting hosted by the European Christian Aid organization and the London-based Burma Action Group (BAG) brought together representatives from non-governmental organizations, churches and donor agencies to discuss the current situation inside Burma, the status of refugees along Burma's borders and the growing number of internally displaced persons in the country.

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.

NETHERLANDS — The Netherlands Burma Roundtable is held once every two months with the goal of updating organizations and individuals on current events and activities surrounding Burma. For more information contact: Burma Centrum Nederlands (BNC), by phone: (31-020) 671-6952 or fax: (31-020) 761-3513.
THE NEW MON STATE PARTY'S VIEW ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

18 September 1998

1. Currently the National League for Democracy (NLD) is externally politically active.
   • The whole country greatly desires democracy.
   • Every ethnic minority greatly wishes for and would like to enjoy human rights.

These wishes are the present major political problems of our country. As long as these problems are not solved or settled, it is natural that there are going to be disturbances in the country any moment. Therefore, the increase in NLD's current political movements is only due to political problems. It's a repercussion of today's political problems.

2. NLD is the party that won the 1990 election with the greatest number of parliament members. A few other parties also got some seats in the parliament. That election was general election legally held by the government and internationally recognized as a fair election. Therefore, the results of the election should be acknowledged with dignity.

Quite a few of the arms bearing ethnic groups have also accepted the cease-fire agreement for the peace and development of the country. However, there has been not any dignified, significant, and systematic solution to the political problem. This problem also deserves a solution.

Unless the above mentioned problem is solved, there can be all kinds of conflicts and problems any moment.

3. It is best to solve the political problem through political means. Therefore, it is best to peacefully solve the problem of restoration of democracy, which was deterred, and the problems of the indigenous people by means of discussion and negotiation. Therefore, discussion is undeniably the sole method of solving the political problem. Since the government wishes for our country to have democracy with discipline, the New Mon State Party would like to urge with good will that such a political meeting takes place.

Central Executive Committee
The New Mon State Party

KNU STATEMENT REGARDING THE FORMATION OF REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE FOR PARLIAMENT

September 24, 1998

1. Formation of a Representative Committee for Parliament on 16-9-98, on the basis of the mandate given by members of Parliament, after the meeting of representatives of 4 ethnic nationality organizations and the NLD, was consonant with the will of the people and in compliance with the Election Law.

2. After the formation, the Committee performed necessary and appropriate tasks on behalf of the Parliament. The action the Committee is a suitable move and we, the KNU, fully support the decision that the 'Committee shall act on behalf of the Parliament' as long as the Parliament be convened.

3. As the move to convene Parliament was obstructed by the SPDC, the NLD has to form the Committee to act on its behalf. This is not something conventional. Therefore, we demand the SPDC to withdraw its obstructions, and earnestly urge members of the armed forces to help support the NLD, the Representative Committee for Parliament and the members of Parliament, in order that the members of Parliament may perform their duties, normally.

(The KNU is the political wing of the Karen's people's resistance for freedom and democracy. It has been leading the struggle since 1949, a year after the independence of Burma from the British. The resistance began in response to atrocities against the Karen populations in the Irrawaddy Delta and Tanessarim Division, perpetrated by troops of the pocket army of Gen. Ne Win. In January 1999, the KNU will celebrate half a century of resistance.)

JOINT STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE 10-MEMBER REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE

20 September 1998

We, of the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF), Wa National Organization (WNO), and Lahu Democratic Front (LDF) support the National League for Democracy's (NLD) and in particular, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's efforts to convene parliament.

We fully support the establishment of the 10-member Representative Committee to represent Members of Parliament elected in the 1990 election. We also call on the people of Burma and the international community to support the 10-member Committee. We fully back the appointment of the Committee and whatever actions the Committee deems necessary.

We ask that the SPDC engage in a dialogue with that Parliamentary Representative Committee.

We demand the release of all political prisoners especially the detained MPs.

Central Committee
PSLF, WNO, and LDF

DAB FULLY SUPPORTS 10-MEMBER REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE

September 28, 1998

The Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) heartily welcomes and fully supports the recent formation of a 10-member Representative Committee by the National League for Democracy (NLD). Further, the DAB calls on the Burmese military regime to begin a process of dialogue with the Committee if it wishes to avoid confrontation.

The DAB also fully supports the plans of the Committee to carry out functions on behalf of Burma's detained MPs and the people of Burma until a "People's Parliament" can be convened.

The Burmese military has ignored the results of the 1990 election for the past eight years. Despite this, calls for the implementation of the election results has been renewed repeatedly.

As the winning party of the 1990 election, the National League for Democracy (NLD) has a mandate from the people of Burma. The NLD has steadfastly called for the convening of parliament. The continued repudiation of the election results by the military has led the NLD finally to initiate actions to convene parliament itself.

The success of the convening of the People's Parliament rests entirely with the people of Burma. The DAB calls on the people to support the plans, functions and actions of the 10-member Representative Committee in its endeavor to successfully convene parliament.

[The DAB is a coalition of ethnic nationality groups and democratic forces founded in 1990 and based in Burma. It is the first alliance between ethnic nationalities and Burman pro-democracy groups.]

Central Committee
Democratic Alliance of Burma

ETHNIC VIEWS

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Central Executive Committee
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We ask that the SPDC engage in a dialogue with that Parliamentary Representative Committee.

We demand the release of all political prisoners especially the detained MPs.

Central Committee
PSLF, WNO, and LDF

DAB FULLY SUPPORTS 10-MEMBER REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE

September 28, 1998

The Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) heartily welcomes and fully supports the recent formation of a 10-member Representative Committee by the National League for Democracy (NLD). Further, the DAB calls on the Burmese military regime to begin a process of dialogue with the Committee if it wishes to avoid confrontation.

The DAB also fully supports the plans of the Committee to carry out functions on behalf of Burma's detained MPs and the people of Burma until a "People's Parliament" can be convened.

The Burmese military has ignored the results of the 1990 election for the past eight years. Despite this, calls for the implementation of the election results has been renewed repeatedly.

As the winning party of the 1990 election, the National League for Democracy (NLD) has a mandate from the people of Burma. The NLD has steadfastly called for the convening of parliament. The continued repudiation of the election results by the military has led the NLD finally to initiate actions to convene parliament itself.

The success of the convening of the People's Parliament rests entirely with the people of Burma. The DAB calls on the people to support the plans, functions and actions of the 10-member Representative Committee in its endeavor to successfully convene parliament.

[The DAB is a coalition of ethnic nationality groups and democratic forces founded in 1990 and based in Burma. It is the first alliance between ethnic nationalities and Burman pro-democracy groups.]

Central Committee
Democratic Alliance of Burma
8. The law relating to arrests in Burma is set out in the Criminal Procedure Code part III, chapter 5 and 6.

9. Chapter 5 contains the general procedure for arrests. Section 46 sets out the manner and Sections 47, 48 and 49 lays down how to proceed step by step from once place to the next. Section 50 prescribes that undue cramping and crowding of person arrested be avoided. Section 51 and 52 refer to body search of the person arrested and Section 53 provides for confiscation of weapons carried by the person arrested.

10. Section 51 makes the following provisions for arrests without warrants:
   (1) A person accused of involvement in the commission of an offense, or against whom information has been given, or who is suspected of committing an offense;
   (2) A person who without any reasonable cause is found with an implement for committing a break-in or burglary;
   (3) A fugitive from justice;
   (4) A person found in possession of suspected stolen property in respect of which there is reason to believe that an offense has been committed;
   (5) A person obstructing the police in the performance of their duties; and escapee from lawful imprisonment;
   (6) A military absconder;
   (7) A person to be extradited;
   (8) Released prisoners who have violated the provisions of Section 565 (3) of the Criminal Procedure Code and
   (9) When written authority is given by a police officer to arrest without a warrant as permitted by law.

11. There is no provision of law that authorities the present arrests of parliamentarians-elect, NLD organising committee members and other members with out warrants of arrest.

12. Chapter 6 contains provisions for warrants of arrest of persons. Section 75 requires that a warrant of arrest of a person must be issued in writing by a court of law and must bear the signature of the issuing magistrate and bear the seal of the court. Section 80 requires the police officer or any other person executing the warrant to explain the contents of the warrant and to show the document to the person to be arrested. These provisions are clear.

13. In arresting the NLD parliamentarian-elect and members, these provisions of law have been transparently contravened. Reference can be made to our Statement 63 (9/98), 65 (9/98), 68 (9/98), 72 (9/98).

14. When the authorities assumed state power their declared Number 1 claim was to maintain law and order and territorial peace and tranquility. This is to place before the people the violations of the provisions of law which the authorities themselves are now committing.
EMBASSY OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR
Washington, DC

PRESS RELEASE 15/98 24 September 1998

National Races of Myanmar Do Not Support the NLD's Call To Convene "People's Parliament"

NLD's Claim of Support Spurious

The National League for Democracy (NLD) in a statement issued on 17 September 1998 claimed that it had secured support for its decision to convene a "People's Parliament" from 4 national groups that had concluded peace agreements with the government. The NLD named the following groups:

• The Shan National people's Liberation Organization
• The Karenni All People's Liberation Army
• The New Mon State Party
• The Kayan Newland Party

However, the leaders of all 4 groups have addressed official letters to the Chairman of the SPDC clarifying their stand regarding the NLD's call to convene a parliament. They reiterated their commitment to cooperate with the government to achieve peace and development and confirmed that they have withdrawn all statements that might be misconstrued as supporting the NLD's illegal move.

The local populace in the areas concerned fully appreciate the dawn of a new era of peace and are wary of any move that will upset peace and tranquillity.

Since the NLD's claim that it has the support of the nationalities for its efforts to convene the parliament this month could give rise to speculation, the authorities have decided to make public the declarations received from the leaders of the national groups. In their declarations the leaders underline their support for the government's effort for peace and stability and reject the decision to the NLD to convene the parliament.

The following declarations have been published:

1. Letter dated 5 September 1998 from Za Khun Ting Ring, Chairman, Kayin Special Region (1), New Democratic Army-NDA
2. Letter dated 18 September 1998 from U Mahtu Naw, Chairman, Central Military Commission, Shan/North Special Region No. 5, Kachin Defence Army-KDA
3. Letter dated 18 September 1998 from the Central Committee, Shan/North Special Region No. 1, Mon Koo Region Defence Army
4. Letter dated 18 September 1998 from U Eik Hmon, Chairman, P.S.L.A Peace Group
5. Letter dated 19 September 1998 from the Chairman, Central Executive Committee, Shan/North Special Region No. 3, Shan State Army (S.S.A)
6. Letter dated 19 September 1998 from U Phon Kya Sin, Chairman, Shan/North Special Zone No. 1, Kokang
7. Letter dated 19 September 1998 from U Sai Lin, Shan/East Special Region No. 4
8. Letter dated 19 September 1998 from Pha Do Aung San, Leader, Kayin Peace Group
11. Letter dated 20 September 1998 from the Chairman, Special Region, Thandaung (KNU)
12. Letter dated 20 September 1998 from U Saw Thamu Heh, Commander, Kayin Peace Group, Haung Tharaw Special Region (KNU)
13. Letter dated 21 September 1998 from General-Secretary, S.S.N.A
14. Letter from Pao National Organization, Shan/South Special Region No. 6


BUSINESS WATCH

ERICSSON DISCONNECTS BURMA LINE

The Swedish telecommunications company, Ericsson, announced on September 1 that it was suspending all business ties with Burma, to be effective immediately. According to a statement released by the firm employing over 100,000 people in more than 130 countries: "The decision is taken in light of concerns expressed in the United States which potentially could damage Ericsson." The corporation has been hit hard by U.S. "selective purchasing" laws, which bar government contracts with companies that do business in Burma and has been a target of American and European consumer boycott campaigns.

COURT STRIKES DOWN BURMA LAW

A U.S. federal court has struck down the Massachusetts state law which barred state contracts to those companies doing business in Burma. The Massachusetts "selective purchasing" bill, was found to be unconstitutional because it "impermissibly infringes on the federal government's power to regulate foreign affairs" according to Chief U.S. District Judge Joseph L. Tauro's November 4 decision. The 1996 law was the rallying point for a much heated debate around the issue of federal vs. state power to impose economic sanctions against a regime guilty of widespread human rights abuses and had become the target of a major lobbying effort on the part of U.S. corporations. The suit was brought against the State of Massachusetts by the National Foreign Trade Council, representing 580 businesses, 30 of which reportedly have been affected by the law. An appeal has been filed.

CHINA AND BURMA SIGN BIGGEST DEAL TO DATE

China's Yunnan province will be exporting over $250 million in mechanical and electrical products to Burma over the next five years in what sources say is the largest-ever deal between the two countries. As reported in Xinhua newspaper, the agreement will provide equipment and technology for building the Banglang Power Station, Burma's biggest hydropower plant. The Banglang Power Station, which is located near Mandalay, is a $600 million project and will be used primarily for generating electricity, but also for irrigation and flood-prevention.
LABOR DEPARTMENT RELEASES BURMA REPORT

The U.S. Department of Labor has completed its study into human rights abuses and the use of forced labor in Burma. According to a report provided to Congress on September 25: the use of child labor in the country is on the increase and remains a "serious and widespread problem"; forced labor continues to be used to develop infrastructure projects and support military operations; there are no labor unions and workers are denied the right of association; and there has been no improvement in labor practices or in the observance of international labor standards.

U.S. DEPLORES ARRESTS OF OPPOSITION MEMBERS

In a September 8 statement, the U.S. Department of State condemned the arrests of over a hundred opposition figures following the tense confrontations between the regime and democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi during the two previous months. The regime, fearing unrest as the anniversary of its September 18, 1988 military coup approached, tightened its grip over democracy activists in the country. The move brought expressions of concern from the United States and other governments. According to spokesman James Rubin: "The U.S. deplores in the strongest of terms the September 6 detention of well over a hundred opposition figures, both elected Members of Parliament and party rank and file. Resolution of the political impasse in Burma will require real, substantive dialogue with the democratic opposition, including Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of the ethnic groups."

CONGRESS HOLDS BURMA HEARING

The Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific together with the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights of the House Committee on International Relations held a September 28 hearing on "Human Rights in Burma" to examine the effectiveness of current U.S. policy. Panelists included Mr. Gare Smith and Mr. Ralph Boyce of the U.S. Department of State; U Bo Hla-Tint of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma; Ms. Maureen Aung-Thwin, Director of the Open Society Institute's Burma Project; Mr. Thomas Valley of the Harvard Institute for International Development; Ms. Mary Pack, Burma Project Director for Refugees International, and Ms. Michele Keegan, a student at American University who was one of 18 democracy activists recently arrested and tried in Burma for expressing their support of the political opposition.

U.S. OFFICIALS JOIN EUROPEAN MEETING ON BURMA

Senior-level representatives of the U.S. Department of State joined their European and Asian counterparts in a closed-door conference held at Chilston Park, in Great Britain on October 23 and 24. The aim of the meeting was to enhance coordination between countries concerned with the lack of progress in negotiations between Burma's military leaders and the democratic opposition. As one of the outcomes of the two-day conference, Rangoon-based ambassadors from five countries, Australia, Japan, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, and the United States were tasked with delivering messages to both the regime rulers and party of UN special envoy, UN Assistant Secretary General Alvaro de Soto, a visit previously blocked by the junta's leaders. De Soto was to carry a plan to be presented to both sides which might help break the political impasse.

MEDIA RESOURCES

VOICES OF '88
Burma's Struggle for Democracy
Burma Project
Open Society Institute (OSI)
400 West 59th Street
New York, NY 10019
USA
Tel: 212-548-0632
Fax: 212-548-4655
email: burma@sorosny.org

This 19-page booklet produced in commemoration of the thousands of Burmese citizens who became victims of the military government's ruthless suppression of the 1988 mass pro-democracy demonstrations, Voices of '88 contains pictures, cartoons and poems from Burma's brief period of press freedom in late August and early September 1988. Suggested donation of US$5 a copy are appreciated in aid of the Burmese Student's Education Fund.

The portable exhibit described in the booklet can be made available to interested parties. For information on the exhibit and future venues contact the Burma Project.

THE BURMA ROAD TO CAPITALISM: ECONOMIC GROWTH VERSUS DEMOCRACY
by Dr. Mya Maung
Greenwood Publishing Group
88 Post Road West
P.O. Box 5007
Westport, CT 06881-5007
Tel: (203) 226-3571
Fax: (203) 222-1502

This book evaluates Burma's economic performance under military management and considers the relationship between democracy and economic growth. Dr. Mya Maung's research argues that neither the regime's rejection of democracy nor its ostentatious economic "reforms" have promoted real economic growth or human development in Burma. Instead, they have depressed the country's social capability for past, present, and future economic development.

FACING THE FIRE
Effects of the 1997 Offensives in Karen State, Burma
by Borderline News and Video
Bangkok Office:
P.O. Box 21
Srinakharinwirot Post Office
Bangkok 10117
Thailand
cfisher@mozart.inet.co.th

Border Office:
P.O. Box 44
Mae Sot
Tak63110
Thailand
win6@loxinfo.co.th

This 25-minute documentary filmed by Karen and Burman refugees, depicts the effects of last year's offensives by the Burmese military against the rural populations in Karen State and in camps along the Thai-Burma border. Containing scenes from Democratic Karen Buddhist Army attacks on refugee camps and the forced repatriation of new arrivals, the film presents attempts by civilians...
and the armed resistance to survive in the face of the Burmese army's increasing control in these areas. It is available in PAL format in English and Karen.

Borderline News also provides fortnightly Burma-related news clippings. This service is offered to concerned groups and individuals who do not have ready access to the Internet and other media. Containing the most relevant articles from the BurmaNet News and other publications, this English-language newsletter provides readers with a bi-monthly summary of recent events in and around Burma. A subscription costs 800 Baht a year in Thailand and US$70.00 a year internationally.

LINES FROM A SHINING LAND
Edited by Derek Brooke-Wavell
The Britain-Burma Society
40 Kidmore Road
Caversham Heights
Reading RG4 7LU
Berk's UK

A snapshot history narrated by 33 individuals who had spent part of their lives in Burma, this book draws from the experiences of former diplomats, administrators, soldiers, academics, writers, broadcasters and schoolchildren. Their stories cover aspects of the country ranging from intriguing vignettes of colonial society from early 1900, to the assassination of General Aung San, followed by Independence in 1948 and the years of rebuilding, under civilian and military governments.

LOGGING BURMA'S FRONTIER FORESTS: RESOURCES AND THE REGIME
World Resources Institute (WRI)
World Resources Institute
1709 New York Ave. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006
http://www.wri.org/wri

This report by the World Resources Institute (WRI) presents evidence of how Burma's extensive deforestation has resulted in severe environmental consequences such as soil erosion, catastrophic floods and acute water shortages. The report finds that Burma's successive military regimes have used border logging trade with neighboring China and Thailand mainly to expand its army and support massive offensives against ethnic opposition groups. Most importantly, the report establishes a link between logging policy, deforestation, and the political violence that has plagued the country since independence in 1948. The report can be ordered by calling 1-800-822-0504. Cost: $20 plus shipping and handling.

THE BURMA ARCHIVES PROJECT
The International Institute of Social History (IISH)
Amsterdam

Established by a group of Burma-related librarians, scholars, journalists and activists, the Burma Archives Project supports and encourages the compilation, collection and safe preservation of documents and materials on Burma deriving from the 1980s onwards. It also publishes the Burma Archives Newsletter which is designed to be a forum for the exchange of ideas and report on the Project's progress.

For more information, please see http://www.iisg.nl/asia or contact the Asia Department of IISH at: asia.department@iisg.nl

INTERNATIONAL LABOR BODY RELEASES DAMNING REPORT

A report issued by a special Commission of Inquiry appointed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) documents a multitude of human rights abuses inflicted upon the Burmese people by the ruling junta, which include not only forced labor, but killings, torture, rape, and forced relocations. The 392-page report was made public on August 20 following an extensive investigation by the Commission, which was appointed in March 1997 under Article 26 of the ILO Constitution. During the course of their inquiry, members of the Commission received over 6000 pages of written information and heard testimony by more than 250 eyewitnesses with recent experience of forced labor practices. According to the report "...there is abundant evidence before the Commission showing the pervasive use of forced labor imposed on the civilian population throughout Myanmar by the authorities and the military..." The ILO, of which Burma is a member, is a tri-partite body within the United Nations system, made up of representatives of governments, business and labor.
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.

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE
George Soros, Chairman
Aryeh Neier, President
Maureen Aung-Thwin, Director, The Burma Project

website: http://www.soros.org/burma.html