PLAYING THE ETHNIC CARD

The international community may focus on the struggle between the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the military regime governing the country, and the democratic opposition symbolized by Aung San Suu Kyi, but the third piece of the equation — the role of Burma's ethnic minorities — may warrant the most attention. Since Burma's independence from the British in 1948, promises and alliances have been made and broken on all sides. After decades of armed resistance against the central government, seventeen of the twenty-one largest ethnic groups have negotiated ceasefire agreements with SLORC. But what do these agreements really mean? Conflict continues in many of the states and ethnic leaders express growing dissatisfaction as conditions outlined in the agreements fail to be met. Would an alliance with the Burman-dominated democratic opposition in Rangoon hold greater hope for guaranteeing the rights of the minorities within the Union or would disappointments of past experiments with democracy be repeated?

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

In March 1995, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) agreed to a ceasefire with the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), a culmination of more than two years of negotiations. According to the Karenni leadership, however, less than three months later, SLORC had violated key conditions of the ceasefire. As a result, armed conflict in Karenni state has resumed, with tens of thousands of villagers being forced to relocate or flee over the border into Thailand. Abel Tweed, foreign minister for the KNPP and Teddy Buri, former permanent secretary to Mr. Tweed and current Bangkok representative of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), discuss the aspirations of the Karenni people.

THE ISSUE OF NATIONHOOD

The ethnic nationalities of Burma possess rich and noble individual histories that long precede that of the country as we currently know it. Several of these groups look at their past and their future, posing critical questions that need to be addressed as former notions of nationhood are reexamined: What do these groups want for themselves and their people at this critical juncture? What are the chances of forming a true union of Burma that will guarantee the rights of the minorities and insure that their cultures and languages will be preserved? Can earlier divisions, both among the various ethnic groups and with the central governments, be overcome in order to rebuild the nation?
THE DEBATE

BURMA AT THE CROSSROADS
By Martin Smith

THE KARENNI SPEAK OUT
Interview with Abel Tweed and Teddy Buri

IN BRIEF

THE NATION STATE OF BURMA AND THE VICTIMIZATION OF ITS CO-FOUNDEERS
By Maran La Raw, Ph.D.

THE KAREN: PROSPECTS FOR A DURABLE PEACE
By The Karen National Union

THE CHIN NATIONAL FRONT AND CHIN NATIONHOOD
By Rollin Van Bik

THE MON PEOPLE: A NOBLE PAST, AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE
By The Mon Unity League
Ethnic politics in Burma today stand at perhaps their most critical cross-roads since independence in 1948. Over the past five decades, the country has been riven by political and ethnic conflict in a cycle of alternating confrontation and deadlock which, until recently, has shown little chance of reaching a peaceful solution.

Out of these long struggles, which have seen Burma collapse to one of the poorest countries in Asia, three main groups have emerged claiming to represent the key aspirations or forces within Burmese society: the Burmese armed forces or "Tatmadaw," which have dominated the political stage since Gen. Ne Win first seized power in 1962; the resurgent democracy movement, symbolized by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; and the country's diverse ethnic nationality parties, some of which first took up arms against the central government at independence.

Over the years, there have been few moments of lasting reconciliation or compromise. Until the recent ceasefire movement, peace talks had been notably intermittent on the battlefields — largely in 1949, 1963-64 and 1980-81. Nevertheless, despite the apparent depths of hostility, the inter-relationships between the key actors have constantly been changing. Major protagonists have even swapped sides. For example, the long-running insurgency of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), which did not collapse until 1989, was fuelled in its early years...
by mass Tatmadaw defections, while in the late 1960s the deposed prime minister, U Nu, himself briefly went underground to join forces with his erstwhile enemies in the Karen National Union (KNU), until they fell out over the contentious issue of "federalism".

In government-controlled areas, a number of very different political philosophies have also been tried. Memory of the parliamentary era of the 1950s was virtually obliterated by a quarter century of Ne Win's idiosyncratic "Burmese Way to Socialism," while the shortlived democracy uprising of 1988 was crushed by the ruling generals of the present State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) who, without any obvious ideology other than "unity" and "patriotism," now claim sole right to lead Burma on the very uncertain road towards the 21st century.
If nothing else, however, history has repeatedly shown that no single group is able to solve Burma's deep ethnic and political problems on its own. Moreover, while the authoritarian nature of government in Rangoon can lend — to the casual observer — a semblance of normality to the situation, the reality is that Burma has long since stumbled from crisis to crisis. Burma's political troubles, many of which were inherited from the colonial days of British rule, did not begin in 1988. Indeed, fifty years after independence, Burma in many ways still displays all the characteristics of "strong societies" but a "weak state", where the central authorities have been unable to achieve — or countenance — effective action across all social and ethnic sectors.

The question, then, is whether the present generation of young peoples in Burma will be the first to, at last, find peace. Certainly, if the day-to-day twists and turns in Burmese politics are followed, many of the most recent signs have not been good if all sides are to be brought together in dialogue. Since 1988, the relationships between the key forces and actors have, once again, free-fallen into one of the complex re-alignments, which make Burmese politics such a dangerous world to enter.

Tantalizing hopes of "national reconciliation" have been raised several times — notably by the ceasefire movement in the ethnic war-zones and Suu Kyi's 1994 meetings (prior to her release from house arrest) with the SLORC chairman, Gen. Than Shwe, and secretary-one, Lt-Gen. Khin Nyunt. These were briefly reported on state television. Many Burmese citizens, however, would argue that any immediate advances have been swiftly negated by the continuing climate of political repression, human rights' abuses and what the Shan academic and former political leader, Chao Tzang Yawngwhe, has described as self-interested "warlordism" by military commanders on all sides in the field.

Indeed, in many respects, Burmese politics have gone full circle since 1988. During much of 1988-89, for example, Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) was a legally-registered party which successfully went on to win the 1990 general election (Burma's first in three decades), whereas ethnic insurgent forces, such as the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), were being denounced by the SLORC as "bandits" or "terrorists." Now, by contrast, the situation is almost reversed, and it is the NLD which the state-controlled media is describing as "treasonous," and armed opposition leaders, such as the NMSP president, Nai Shwe Kyin, or much-derided "opium kingpin," Khun Sa, who are being feted by government officials in Rangoon.

Given such contradictions, it would appear that few real bridges are being built to bring the three main groups of protagonists together. For the moment, representatives of the different sides and factions continue to work alone to draw up what each claims should be Burma's third constitution since independence. While the SLORC continues with its hand-picked National Convention in Rangoon, the NLD announced in May that it would...
begin drafting its own constitution. This, in turn, prompted a vitriolic response from the SLORC, which promulgated new legislation to ban the party altogether and imprison members for up to 20 years if the NLD proceeds with this process.

Meanwhile, in ethnic minority areas a number of different discussions are taking place. For example, in territory where ceasefires are yet to be agreed, remnant members of the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) — which consists of armed ethnic forces and democracy activists who fled from the cities after the SLORC takeover in 1988 — continue working on a "federal" version of their own. By contrast, in northeast Burma the United Wa State Party (UWSP) and three other ceasefire forces in 1994 formed a new "Peace and Democratic Front" and have instituted their own constitutional discussions, which take some inspiration from the ethnic "autonomous region" model of China.

The irony is that, at this pivotal moment in Burma's history, all sides publicly claim to be working towards essentially the same goals: a new democratic era of "multi-party", "market-oriented" reform. Tragically, the reality is very different. Decades of bloodshed and conflict have clearly inflicted a heavy toll. A paralyzing admixture of animosity, fear, distrust, opportunism and sheer self-survival mean that many key actors are unwilling — or simply do not know how — to give up long-entrenched positions. For the present, the brief optimism induced by the collapse of Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism" in 1988 has been forced to retreat. Instead, political events are being dictated by the more basic struggle for control of the transitional process.

This leads, then, to the complex political situation amongst Burma's ethnic minority peoples, who make up an estimated third of the country's 46 million population. For as international concern continues to focus on the titanic battle of wills between Aung San Suu Kyi and the SLORC in Rangoon, it is in ethnic minority regions that many of the most dramatic events have been taking place. As so often in Burma's troubled past, however, many ethnic nationality parties feel that, once again, they are being overlooked. In particular, little noticed in the world outside, the ethnic ceasefire movement, which was instigated by Lt-Gen. Khin Nyunt in 1989 following the ethnic break-up of the CPB's 15,000-
Democratic Front, a 11-party alliance formed in 1976 to seek the formation of a federal union of Burma: "The issue of democracy is often put before ethnic nationality questions, but in our view it needs to come first. When several hundred NLD supporters were recently arrested, there was much international concern but, fortunately, most have since been released. In ethnic minority areas, however, our people are still being killed everyday, and thousands of people are being forced from their homes. It is in ethnic minority areas that you can see the real suffering and volatility in Burma, but it does not attract anything like the same degree of attention."

Despite such widely-expressed doubts, the actual mechanics of the ceasefire agreements are gradually becoming clear. Although individual truces differ, all are purely military and, in essence, delineate territories between government troops and ethnic opposition forces, which will be allowed to keep their arms until Burma's new constitution is introduced. In the meantime, though some parties are publicly unwilling to participate, all the ceasefire groups have been invited or encouraged to attend the SLORC-convened National Convention in Rangoon. Here representatives of several legally-elected parties, which won the largest bloc of seats after the NLD in the 1990 election, have also been attending sessions. (Like the NLD, however, it should be stressed that the majority of these victorious parties have been banned from the Convention, on various grounds, over the past three and a half years.)

Discussions and pronouncements at the National Convention, which finally got underway in January 1993, have been markedly slow, and ethnic nationality delegates say that many of the more substantive issues on ethnic minority rights are yet to be discussed. Nevertheless, if the SLORC continues to have its sole way, a number of constitutional details will have already been pushed through. With 25 per cent of the seats in the future parliament — as well as the Presidency — reserved for military candidates, the continued predominance of the "leading role" of the Tatmadaw in "national political life" will be assured. In political territories, Burma will maintain its seven divisions (to be renamed regions), where the Burman majority mostly live, and seven ethnic minority states. But, in one innovation, new "self-administered zones" will be created for the Naga in the Sagaing Division and the Pao, Palaung, Kokang, Danu minorities in the Shan State as well as a larger "self-administered area" for the Wa, all of whom, until now, have been unrepresented on Burma's political map.

By contrast, other large minorities, such as the over one million Karen in the Irrawaddy and Rangoon Divisions or the many Chin who live outside the present Chin State borders, will receive no distinctive political recognition or ethnic rights of their own — on the somewhat spurious basis that such rights are already guaranteed by the minority states. As a result, many of the complex anomalies that existed in the days of British rule and in both the constitutions of 1947 and 1974 are not only being repeated but augmented.

In many ethnic minority regions, nevertheless, the SLORC is well on the way to preparing the basic groundwork for such an administration to be imposed. It would not be difficult, for example, to envisage a Shan State which is, in theory, administered by a "multi-party" local governing council, but which is, in fact, dominated by military appointees, even though it might also include representatives of such ceasefire organizations as the UWSP and Shan State Army (SSA) as well as legally-elected members of the NLD and Shan Nationalities League for Democracy. Such a system of administration, which would run parallel to the Tatmadaw command, could also be appointed down to the district, township and even village tract levels, just as under the present SLORC government or former Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) of Gen. Ne Win. Furthermore, lurking in the background is the specter of the SLORC-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association, which is now established in towns across the country and many observers believe could be transformed into a full political party at some stage in the near future, if the model of Indonesia and its ruling Golkar party continues to be developed by the SLORC's planners.

Such a hand-picked selection would also throw a further spotlight on the political legality of many of the ethnic nationality forces — and, indeed, the entire ceasefire process. For while larger armed opposition forces, such as the KNU, NMSP and KIO, are amongst the oldest surviving political parties in Burma today, many critics of the SLORC — as well
as many ethnic minority peoples themselves — would question the validity of others.

In particular, a lingering suspicion has remained since the ceasefire process first began in 1989 that it was a calculated "divide-and-rule" ploy by the Tatmadaw's Military Intelligence Service with a simple dual purpose: to internally weaken the armed ethnic opposition, which had begun to effectively coalesce around the NDF in the mid-1980s, and to prevent the fast-closing ties between ethnic forces and pro-democracy activists following the dramatic events of 1988. Certainly, NDF unity has been badly shaken, and the SLORC's strategists correctly calculated that, against the endless backdrop of war, day-to-day survival and economic opportunity are often a more powerful inducement to insurgent commanders at the front than the political rhetoric of their leaders.

As a result, many parallels have been drawn with the discredited "Ka Kwe Ye" (KKY) militia program of the 1960-70s. Indeed, some of the most notable names in the ceasefire movement, such as Khun Sa, head of the Mong Tai Army (MTA), Hso Ten of the SSA [Shan State Army] and Lo Hsing-han in Kokang, are former KKY leaders. Under this controversial program, which did much to undermine the Shan nationalist movement at that time, several armed ethnic groups involved in the opium trade were allowed to tax and control territory as long as they did not help the Tatmadaw's rivals. These are charges, however, Maj-Gen. Aye Kyaw, the SLORC'S Minister of Information and former head of the Northeast Command in Lashio, absolutely denies in the present political times: "It is up to them. We have already given them the freedom to speak. I am just a soldier. So they must speak for themselves. It is not for me to tell them politics."

Such protestations, however, would appear contradicted by the alacrity with which the SLORC helped the renegade Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization after its mutiny from the KNU in late 1994 or the outright and unfettered involvement of several ceasefire groups, including Khun Sa's MTA, in the narcotics trade. In some areas, many long-suffering villagers are already questioning the value of peace if the ceasefire movement means in case coercion not only by the Tatmadaw but also by armed opposition forces that operate at the more maverick end of the nationalist scale. Corruption and internal wrangling has already seen one group in the Kokang region, the 1,500-strong Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, disintegrate into different warring factions, and human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings have afflicted several other
groups, including the Pao National Organization whose veteran chief-of-staff and vice-president, Tun Gye, was reportedly shot and killed by his own troops in 1993.

Aung San Suu Kyi, too, has questioned the stability or relevance of the ceasefire process. "There were reports in the Thai papers a couple of weeks ago that there is a constant flow of arms across the border, which indicates that the insurgents are continuing to accumulate arms," she commented in an August issue of the New Yorker. "That does not sound very much as though they were preparing for a permanent peace."

Such sentiments, however, which have been echoed by many Burmese expatriates and international campaigners abroad, deeply frustrate ethnic nationality leaders and parties that are most closely involved in the peace process. If Burma's long-running insurrections have been some of the least under-reported conflicts in the world, there can be little doubt that the recent ceasefire movement is now also escaping international scrutiny. Indeed, there is a danger that, as worldwide concern over Burma continues to mount, the international community — whether Asian neighbors, Western businesses or foreign aid groups — will come to reflect the deep polarizations in Burmese politics rather than act as independent and supportive catalysts for change. Suu Kyi undoubtedly enjoys popular support in ethnic minority communities, but as one ceasefire spokesperson put it: "Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace, and we greatly respect her work for human rights. But what have she or her party ever done for the ethnic nationalities or the peace movement?"

Not for the first time in Burma's history, underlining the conviction of such statements is disappointment at the performance of various Burman-majority parties and united fronts that have been formed since 1988. In the view of veteran ethnic nationalist leaders, they simply repeat the previous failures of groups such as Aung San's Anti-fascist People's Freedom League at independence, Ne Win's BSPP, U Nu's Parliamentary Democracy Party in the early 1970s, and the CPB during four decades of armed conflict.

It is not a picture of total disillusionment and, certainly, a degree of greater understanding has been fostered between armed ethnic minority forces and the Burman majority since 1988, including through the students who remain in armed opposition territory today. But, after so many years of bloodshed, ethnic minority forces are reluctant to entrust their political fate to any Burman-majority party or group in Rangoon. Indeed, as many ethnic nationalist leaders point out, it was during the democracy era of 1948-62 that ethnic minority forces, such as the KNU and KIO, first took up arms against the central government. "You have to remember that, even if Aung San Suu Kyi was prime minister, we would still have the Burmese army in the Kachin State," commented one Kachin official in Myitkyina.

Ethnic nationality parties are greatly frustrated, too, that, whereas the NLD continues to reject the use of armed struggle, many of its supporters have been quick to accuse ethnic minority parties of "sell-out" or "surrender" when they engage in dialogue with the SLORC which, after all, is a prime objective of the NLD. As an example of the ambiguities they feel they face, many minority leaders have commented that, in her public appearances, Suu Kyi is often flanked by some of their former Tatmadaw
opponents from the battle-fields, including ex-
Colonel Kyi Maung, who was in Ne Win’s Revolu-
tionary Council when he seized power in 1962, and
the party’s chairman, ex-General Tin Oo, who was
chief-of-staff and minister of defense when the insur-
gencies were at one of their peaks in the mid-1970s.
In the labyrinthine maze of Burmese politics, the
NLD may be attempting to send the subliminal mes-
sure that it can talk to the Tatmadaw but, until real
trust is established, ethnic minority parties will draw
their own conclusions.

Given, then, a background of such political dead-
lock and confusion, are there really any "peace div-
indents" to the benefit of all the different ethnic
nationalities in Burma? For their part, ceasefire lead-
ers believe that there are several, some of which are
only slowly being achieved.

First of all, it needs to be recognized that behind
the ceasefire movement, which has been supported
and, in some areas, instigated by community or reli-
gious-based groups in the towns, was a growing
war-weariness and conviction that not only can no
side win (many Tatmadaw officers believe this too),
but it is the ethnic minority peoples, who have paid
the greatest human price during nearly five decades
of constant warfare. New tactics have to be tried. In
many areas, the communities of such nationality
groups as the Karen, Kachin and Wa have been dev-
astated. Explained a 1989 statement by the UWSP
which was one of the first to agree a ceasefire with
the SLORC: "Every year the burden on the people
has become heavier. The streams, rivers and creeks
have dried up, while the forests are being depleted.
At such a time, what can the people of all national-
ities do?"

The first objective, therefore, was simple: a halt
to the fighting and respite for the people. Experience
the world over, from Palestine to Northern Ireland,
has shown that there can be no real political discus-
sion or progress while armed conflict still continues.
Moreover, even then, social reconstruction and
ensuring the stable conditions for peace or reform
can still take years. Therefore, seen from this per-
spective, ethnic nationality leaders are keen that the
casefires should be viewed as a historic contribu-
tion by their peoples to try to achieve national
peace and reconciliation during the present period of
political upheavals. According to this scenario, it is
the spirit of peace in the war-zones which will help
unlock the state of military siege across the country
and, eventually, foster the much-needed dialogue at
the political center in Rangoon.

Closely allied to the establishment of peace is the
issue of political recognition. Amongst ethnic nation-
ality leaders, there is a deep conviction that succes-
sive administrations in Burma have used the armed
conflicts of the past 48 years to marginalize ethnic
minority parties even further from participation in
government. As a result, political and economic
power has remained concentrated in the Burman-
majority heartlands of central Burma, while Ne Win’s
Tatmadaw, consciously or otherwise, has built up an
ethnocratic, post-colonial state in which minority
peoples are very much second class citizens. At inde-
pendence in 1948, there were ethnic minority cabi-
net members and even Karen officers as heads of
both the army and air force. Today this is just a fast-
fading memory. Instead, in vast ethnic areas, insur-
ergy has long become a virtual way of life, and minority peoples have been pushed to the very fringes of Burmese society.

In the present period of political transition, this is a relationship and experience ethnic minority leaders are unwilling to continue, Explained the late KIO leader, Brang Seng, who was one of the original architects of the ceasefire movement and, indeed, may even have been unwittingly responsible for giving rise to the idea of the SLORC's National Convention! "For the KIO, the most important thing is that we become a legal party during this period of constitutional change, We have already lived through three different periods of government since 1961, so we know what it is like to be forgotten, For over thirty years, we have been described as terrorists and opium smugglers, and we have never been recognized."

Thus, building now on these twin platforms of ceasefires and political recognition, attention is being paid by ethnic minority parties to the third element in the peace process: that of social, economic and development schemes. Widespread caution, however, remains, and for every step of progress, it is not difficult to find evidence of the reverse. The SLORC, for example, is still determined to monopolize all regional, health, educational and economic projects under its controversial Border Areas Development Programme. Indeed, it even limits the size of hydroelectric power stations that the ceasefire forces are allowed to build and, instead, has insisted that all power is bought from the state sector, which is notoriously unreliable.

Even more disturbing, human rights abuses, including forced labor and — in non-ceasefire areas — forced relocations still continue. Many ceasefire forces nevertheless accept, albeit reluctantly, that ending these problems, which have long been endemic, will take time. According to Dr Tu Ja, joint general-secretary of the KIO: "In the past, every issue was settled by fighting, but now we try to solve our differences by dialogue and, to date, every serious problem that has come up in our territory has been resolved." In confirmation of such claims, in those districts of northeast Burma where the ceasefires have held up, large war-torn areas are at their first peace in decades, and many long-divided communities are trying to reconstruct their lives.

This, however, is as far as it goes, and the ball is now firmly in the SLORC's court. As the KNU ceasefire talks reach a "make-or-break" point in southeast Burma after nearly 50 years of armed struggle, the ethnic opposition feels that it has made every peaceful gesture it can make.

At best, the SLORC has won itself a breathing space. On the surface many of the ethnic nationalist and democracy forces appear divided, but in an act of political solidarity the KIO, NMSP, KNU and most other key nationalist parties have continued to call for the announcement of a "nation-
wide ceasefire" and the creation of "tripartite dialogue" which will include both the Tatmadaw and NLD. The central government's accusations of "separatism" can no longer be made. In Rangoon, too, Aung San Suu Kyi continues to speak the language of reconciliation and dialogue, in the face of every official provocation and harassment. By contrast, it is the state-controlled media that still speaks of treason, external threats and subversive plots, as if the ethnic ceasefires or NLD's democratic victory had never taken place.

The challenge is to find a forum, which allows representatives from all three groups to exchange ideas and find common ground. The ceasefires are one important process — in the same manner as economic development or social reform — which can help provide the building blocks for stability and peace. But one day, all sides must sit as equals at the same table if just or lasting solutions are ever to be found. Once this happens, the reality, as many Burmese citizens have long recognized, is that there is considerable overlap in the make-up and views of all three groups. In a self-perpetuating legacy, decades of conflict have created deep polarizations and enmities, but such issues as democracy, human rights, economic progress and patriotism can never be exclusive. No side has a monopoly on righteousness.

And this is where the dilemma lies. No group or faction is less understood in Burmese politics than the Tatmadaw and its present leadership in the SLORC. But against many predictions, not only has the Tatmadaw remained the only united force in the deeply factionalized world of Burmese politics over the past decade, but the ruling generals of the SLORC have continued to entrench themselves even further. It would be quite wrong, therefore, to underestimate the viewpoints or personal ambitions of Burma's latest generation of military rulers, spearheaded by Generals Than Shwe, Maung Aye and Khin Nyunt, all of whom are ethnic Burmans loyal to the country's ageing military strongman, Gen. Ne Win. After over four decades of warfare in the frontline, senior military officers say that they perceive Burma as the "Yugoslavia of Asia" and they have a deep-seated belief that politicians — of any ethnic or political persuasion — can not be trusted.

The "Bosnia" parallel, too, is one that some of Burma's Asian neighbors have recently repeated. However, appealing as it may seem, there are clearly limits to this analogy. Indeed, far from preventing the ethnic break-up of Burma, there is a danger that Tatmadaw strategists are drawing the wrong conclusions. For if there is not reconciliation and reform at this critical historic moment, when all sides say they are willing and able, then one day the social volcano that Burma will surely become will erupt in directions that, indeed, may well be impossible to contain. At that moment, comparisons between the overshadowing figures of Tito and Ne Win, who is now in his 86th year, will not look so far-fetched.

The warnings are clear. Failure to find peace now could well mean another four decades of political deadlock and conflict. In a voraciously developing region, future struggles will, no doubt, take on a different form. The days of jungle "liberated zones" and protracted warfare already have an outdated look, but future conflicts will, in the long-term, be just as debilitating. Now is the time for peace, but until all sides — including the Tatmadaw — are ready to really listen and compromise, then the cycle of conflict and stagnation in Burmese politics is far from broken.

NOTES
3. By 1996, of the 19 ethnic minority parties which won seats in the election, only five were still believed to be legal and attending the National Convention: the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, the Union Pao National Organization, the Shan State Kokang Democratic Party, the Mro (or Khami) Unity Organization, and Lahu National Development Party.
4. The first time this writer heard mention of a "National Convention" in Burma was in July 1990 when Brang Seng privately said that he had conveyed the suggestion of a National Convention to the SLORC, which he believed could perform a dual purpose by helping the spread of the ethnic ceasefire movement as well as national reconciliation in the aftermath of the NLD's election victory. While the NLD and other legally-elected parties got on with their legitimate task of drawing up Burma's new constitution, the National Convention, he believed, could act as an additional forum where representatives of the Tatmadaw, armed opposition, community groups and other unelected bodies would have a chance to add their views and, thereby, enter the political process. Brang Seng later said, however, that the National Convention, as set up by the SLORC, fell some way short of what he envisaged.
Despite a ceasefire agreement that was reached between the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in March 1995, armed conflict in Karenni State continues. Tens of thousands of villagers have been displaced, forced to either flee across the border to Thailand or to enter SLORC-designated "relocation sites."

Abel Tweed, Foreign Minister for the KNPP and Teddy Buri, the former Permanent Secretary to the KNPP Foreign Minister and current Bangkok representative for the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, talk about the Karenni experience.
CHRISSE GITTENS • There have been relocations of 96 villages in the Sha Daw area of Karenni State. Why did people not want to move from their villages?

ABEL TWEED • The Karenni villagers don’t want to go to the relocation site as SLORC was forcing them to do because the site is really like a concentration camp, and once the villagers arrive it is very, very difficult for them to go out. At the relocation site people don’t have enough shelter, they don’t have enough food and they don’t have medicine. People are sick and starving and some die. That’s the experience of the people, so the villagers don’t want to go.

TEDDY BURI • You know, Karennis are... how shall I put it... they are very, very attached to their land, their homes. As a matter of fact a lot of these villages have been in existence for decades. Some have been there for over a hundred years. As a result, people find it really very hard to move from their places, from their ancestral land.

CG • I understand that some people were allowed to go back to their villages from the relocation site to get more supplies and that from there they escaped to Thailand. Is this true?

AT • Of course this is true. Because SLORC cannot provide food, shelter... so they allow some of the people, the villagers to go back to their old villages... and to collect some food... something like that. But instead they just flee to the border, the Thai border.

TB • It’s not that Slorc is generous, you know, by allowing these people to escape. The reason they allow it is that they don’t have enough food at the relocation site. As a matter of fact, they are not provided with food. The food that the villagers do have is actually provided by the Roman Catholic church. Some of it the people have brought from their villages. But food is so scarce, medical care is non-existent, so there’s no alternative, you know, but for SLORC to allow them to go back to their villages to collect food.

CG • Do you think it is possible for the Karenni to maintain their national identity in the relocation centers and in the refugee camps?

AT • Of course, for our Karenni people it is their duty to maintain their identity and culture, but when they arrive in the relocation camps they have no chance to practice it. For example, every three or four months we have traditional festivals but they cannot practice them in the camp. This was strictly stated in the treaty provided by the SLORC.

CG • You gained independence from Britain in 1948. Would you say that since independence that things have got much worse for the Karenni?

AT • Only before 1940 did the Karenni people enjoy freedom. They lived peacefully. After the British left Burma, in 1948, the Burmese tried to organize the Karenni leaders and people to join the Union of Burma. The Karenni refused. Then the Burmans had to send the troops into Karenni land... fighting against the Karenni people. Since 1948, up to now, we have tried to survive. So the war started in 1940 and continues today.

TB • When you talk about gaining independence from Britain in 1948, you really talk about the Burmans. If you refer to the Karenni, the Karenni actually have always been free, the Karenni always were independent, or at least semi-independent. So you know, with independence the Karenni were actually invaded by the Burmese troops and because of that the situation for Karenni has gotten worse and worse. Now we have so many Burmese troops, with actually more than 27 battalion troops stationed in Karenni State, the situation is getting a lot worse. Karenni identity has eroded.
The culture, the languages, their land has been encroached upon. You have robbery, you have rapes, you have forced relocation. We have religious discrimination, educational discrimination, everything... you name it. So to put in a nutshell, ever since Burma gained independence the situation for the Karenni people has gone from bad to worse.

CG • And how has this generally affected the Karenni people?

AT • It has really affected the Karenni people because we have not had the chance to enjoy peace. There's no stability and there's no development either culturally or economically. We lost this chance. People are living in miserable conditions. People are sick, starving and dying and their property has been destroyed.

CG • You've been fighting for five decades now and the ethnic minorities have paid a very high price. Are you war-weary?

TB • Well, in a way we are war-weary. That's why we entered into a ceasefire, you know. It doesn't matter that we have decided to give up arms. It's because, as you mentioned, our people have paid a very, very, high price. There have been hundreds killed, thousands disabled. The national loss in terms of money has been so high. And because of this war, Karenni state has never been developed. We think that it is time to have peace, to develop our people, to develop our land. That's why we entered into a ceasefire, but unfortunately, the ceasefire did not produce the results that we expected.

CG • When did the Karenni first begin to think about a ceasefire agreement?

TB • It actually took almost two years to reach a ceasefire between the Karenni leadership and the SLORC. Representatives had to meet several times before they could reach an agreement. So even though that ceasefire came into existence in March 1995, talks began in 1992.

CG • Why did you feel a ceasefire with SLORC was necessary?

AT • We've been fighting against the Burmese since 1940, that is about five decades. We're really fed up with the war and we want peace, and if possible, we want to solve the problem in a peaceful way. So SLORC offered to try a ceasefire, we agreed and then we gave some conditions to the SLORC. They supposedly were willing to agree to the conditions. So, we thought it is maybe a good chance for us, for our people if we can stop the war. Maybe our people can get a chance to live better economically and peacefully. This is the reason that we want a ceasefire. We thought SLORC would be honest enough to keep the promises, but in reality, SLORC didn't keep the promises. They say one thing and are doing another. So that's why our ceasefire agreement lasted only three months. It was violated by the SLORC.

TB • The Karenni people took up arms not because they love war or not because they don't want to live in peace. They took up arms to defend their national identity, to defend sovereignty. But you know, the war has been going on for about five decades and nobody has emerged a winner, neither the Burmans nor the Karenni have won. After so many years of fighting and thousands of lives lost on both sides, the Karenni believe that there's only one way to solve the problem, and that is through political dialogue. And political dialogue can be achieved the Karenni leadership believes, only through a ceasefire. So after the ceasefire, the Karenni leadership believed that political dialogue would follow and that it would have to be initiated by SLORC. That was why the Karenni leadership chose to enter into ceasefire with SLORC.

CG • In what way was the ceasefire violated?

AT • You know, before we reached this final agreement we gave about sixty points —
Nonviolence in Burma, it doesn't work. For our Karenni it is impossible. We cannot use it because SLORC is the military, they have the arms, the weapons. What has happened to those in Burma who use nonviolence? For example, they held demonstrations in Rangoon... more than three times, and whenever conditions to the SLORC. For example, we requested SLORC not to collect any porter fees from the civilians, or force civilians to be porters. Other conditions were that SLORC troops would not be sent into the Karenni-control areas and that civilians would be allowed to carry out their business and economy.... SLORC said they agreed with these kinds of points, and after that we reached a final agreement. About three months later SLORC started to collect more porter fees from the civilians and they rounded up more people, thousands of people to be porters. They sent troops into the Karenni-control area. So it means SLORC violated the points. That's why the war started again.

The Karenni Progressive Party wanted a solution between the Karenni and the Burmans. And after the ceasefire, of course, the Karenni would like to believe that the SLORC would keep its promises, or rather abide by the ceasefire agreements. But unfortunately, SLORC did not abide by the ceasefire, let alone enter into a political dialogue... In spite of all the protests from the Karenni leadership, SLORC continued to violate the ceasefire and the Karenni had no alternative but to declare the ceasefire null and void, and took up arms to resume fighting. That was in June 1996 and fighting has been going on ever since.

If someone's asked to be a porter, what are they being asked to do?

SLORC uses the porters for transportation. They used the porters to carry ammunition. They force them to carry some of the wounded soldiers. They use the porters to do those sorts of things.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) promotes nonviolence. Can you be nonviolent against SLORC? Is that possible?

In spite of all the protests from the Karenni leadership, SLORC continued to violate the ceasefire and the Karenni had no alternative but to declare the ceasefire null and void, and took up arms to resume fighting.

The situation is different between the NLD and the Karenni. The NLD is a Burman-dominated party and Burma is predominately Burman. The NLD has very, very solid support from the Burmese population. So you can say it is possible for the NLD to engage in nonviolent confrontation. And another thing is, the NLD has no alternative but to engage nonviolently because within the country you simply can't take up arms. It is very hard to acquire arms. Another thing is that the NLD is a well-known party. It is recognized as an
opposition party all over the world and hence can afford to engage in nonviolent confrontation against SLORC. On the other hand the Karennis are a small nation. We can't simply withstand the Burmese invasion in a nonviolent way. As a matter of fact, SLORC really knows no other language than the gun and that's why Karenni had to take up arms. In

**The NLD has always recognized the need to iron out ethnic issues and then build a real federal nation. Although the NLD has never used the word "federal," we think that they are really for a federal state.**

1988, when SLORC came to power there were only two Burmese battalions in Karenni state, but now we have more than twenty-seven battalions. SLORC is using force to subjugate the Karenni people, armed troops to neutralize the Karenni opposition. So the Karenni will have to take up arms to defend themselves.

**CG • What is the chance of the Karenni being reconciled with Burma and of being treated equally?**

**AT • Historically, we are not a part of Burma and our policy is to maintain our independence. We want all Burmese to recognize that the Karenni are supposed to be a nation... as the Karenni recognize Burma as a nation. So we are equal status. This is for the Karenni. But for other ethnic nationalities who joined the Union of Burma like the Kachin, Karen, Mon, Arakan, you have to be treated equal with people in the Union of Burma, according to the constitution, according to the law. But you know, most of the Burmese people, they thought they were more of a superior class of people. They are the rulers and they don't want to recognize the rights of other people. And this is still the problem. That's why since Burma gained independence, up to now, the others try to ask for their rights.**

**TB • Well, I think there's a good chance of being reconciled with Burma because although SLORC is militarily very strong, it has pressure not only from within, but also from outside. So with adequate pressure from within**
and without, in spite of its large armed forces, SLORC will have to wake up to reality and engage in peace talks with the opposition. When you talk about opposition, we have two main groups — one is dominated by the Burmans and is led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD; the other group is a composition of the ethnic nationalities who have armed forces. Reconciling with only one will mean having the Burmese problem just half-solved. The SLORC will have to talk to all parties. In other words, there's got to be a tripartite dialogue; meaning the SLORC, the Burmese opposition groups led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the ethnic nationalities made up of both armed and non-armed groups. So we think after the peace talks, after the political dialogue, there will be room for national reconciliation and then there'll be room for democracy. And under democracy we believe all the ethnic groups will have equality, will have autonomy. All the ethnic nationalities, no matter how small or big, will have self-determination. And with that, it will be possible for the Karenni to reconcile with the Burmese, how shall I put it, with Burma.

**CG** • What are the aspirations of the Karenni people?

**TB** • The Karenni are a peace-loving people. They are a freedom-loving people. So that is why they have taken up arms to fight and to defend their freedom. The Karenni have always declared themselves free from Burma because when Burma and India were under the British, and when most of Indochina was under the French, Karenni State was free. Or rather, it was at least semi-free. The Karenni believe that it is worth fighting for freedom. On the other hand, in the Karenni manifesto, the political manifesto, it is made very clear that the Karenni are willing to be a part of Burma, if Burma were to be a genuine federal system. But then it will have to be sure that there is equality, there is autonomy, there is self-determination, or the Karenni will go on fighting, go on defending themselves no matter what the odds are.

**CG** • Can you see yourself living in peace again under SLORC or under a Burman-dominated civilian government?

**AT** • If the SLORC gives us the power, if they'll turn over political power to a civilian government, if they allow more of the people and the political parties to participate in a democratic system in Burma it will be peaceful again in Burma. But for other ethnic nationalities they really have to decide on the system to be sure that it is a system that guarantees the rights of their people.

**CG** • Is there anything else that you want to say?

**AT** • Yes. For us, we want the international community to realize that the biggest problem in Burma is the relationship between the Burmese society and the ethnic nationalities. Now people don't really know the whole situation. They generally know only the opposition — specifically the NLD, and the SLORC. For me and for the Karenni and other ethnic nationalities, we want the international community to put more emphasis on the relationship between Burmese society and ethnic nationalities. We want to find a way to establish equality between the Burmese society and ethnic nationalities. Now when people mention reconciliation it means only for the Burmese group. It excludes all other ethnic nationalities. If there is national reconciliation only between the Burmese like the NLD and SLORC, the problem is not finished. The problem between Burmese society and the other ethnicities will continue, will lead to more fighting. We don't know for how long. So we want for the world to understand the larger problem and to look for solutions to that as well.
THE ISSUE OF NATIONHOOD

The Nation-State of Burma and the Victimization of Its Co-founders

BY MARAN LA RAW, PH.D.

Maran La Raw is director of Kachinland Projects U.S.A.

This paper was adapted from a report prepared for the Central Committee of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO).

In 1948, a collection of ethnic nations with very dissimilar backgrounds and political experiences co-founded the Union of Burma. Each group began with expectations and ambitions that were unique products of their political culture and history. The era that began that year was to have initiated a nurturing interlude when the new nation-state would cultivate unity, common purpose and a national identity amicable to all co-founders. It did not happen. Instead, the experiment with democracy floundered, and political division became more strident. Into this seriously anemic state of affairs, the military slithered.

The questions that need to be asked today are what were the obstacles to national unity prior to 1962, why they were there, and what measures would now be necessary to overcome them? These issues will determine whether there can be better prospects for the future or not. The difference between 1947 and 1996 is this: we can take up these questions in order to prepare for the next era.

Today, the junta policy persistently ignores the existence of minority co-founding nationals. The junta's actions proclaim, without apology, Burman hegemony. There is neither ambiguity nor subtlety here. The current government has set out to eradicate minorities in order to exclude them from the national milieu. Age-old cultural groups and alliances are disallowed today because they contradict hegemony by one group.

What realistic chance is there that non-Burman co-founders will accept the legitimacy of this version of the nation-state? The answer is obvious, and so is the prognostication of what would likely occur. As in the past, political division must be remedied by inclusion and equality, and by rights to self-
determination to maintain ethnic distinctness. Exclusion at gunpoint is contrary to problem solving. Clearly, the problem will simmer and increase in magnitude.

Given this scenario, it is fundamentally important to have more than faith in Burma's future. It is crucial to try to come to terms with past problems and move ahead, to prepare a blueprint for the future. By itself, the future will not produce a plan; it is up to those who want a future to do the preparation.

**THE DAWNING OF MODERNITY**

The year 1945 concluded with victory celebrations, manau, held at numerous locations in Kachinland. At long last, the Japanese occupation forces had been driven out of the hallowed Kachin homeland. Opposing the Japanese to the bitter end had been costly for the Kachin. Jubilant voices now rang out, but from amidst twisted and hollow remnants of catastrophic destruction of property and disruption of life. Hopes for progress for an entire generation of youth had been stripped away.

For the leaders, it was time for making momentous decisions. The challenge of envisioning a post-British Burma was at hand. Questions as to how and where the Kachin would cast their lot, also what options existed for them were before them. The year 1946 was more hectic as preparations got underway for the historic Panglong conference with Bogyoke Aung San.

Early in 1946, consensus was reached that the Kachin as a nation would join the other peoples of British Burma as one of the equal co-founders of the Union of Burma. A strong sense of national unity, equality, and self-determination was imparted by Bogyoke Aung San in consultations that led to the historic Panglong Agreement of 1947. To implement the visions embodied in that Agreement had become the central objective of the Kachin.

Kachin expectations were clear-cut, that when the Union of Burma came into being, the process would begin from which a suitable and appropriate nation-state model would evolve. And they believed that this nation-state would be based upon the principles of democracy. All the ethnic national groups were unequivocal in their conviction that the Union of Burma was being co-founded by free and equal partners; that the Union wasn't emerging fortuitously or haphazardly out of the exigency of postwar realignments. They were repeatedly reassured that the Union would never be a platform for hegemony by the majority. Assurances alone were never sufficient to dispel lingering suspicions and fears; but the vision of this Union generated enthusiasm and optimism. It was a fateful moment for the Kachin.

The years 1948-1962, to the Kachin, were the years of involvement in actively crafting a nation-state system that would be more equitable and agreeable. The conviction was strong that reform was the key. This interim had been foreseen. The effort, though demanding, was clearly mitigated by the hope that they had in the future of the nation. Although the nation did not yet have a nation-state organization agreeable to all co-founders, confidence came from knowing that democratic processes and mechanisms were already in place to provide the framework of reform. The system was being given a chance.

The coup d'état by Ne Win's army ended that reform process. After 1962, Burma's political experience was to undergo tempestuous changes; nation-state models would now be arbitrarily and capriciously imposed by the ruling junta. Under the current version, imposed by the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council), totally bizarre concepts of state are coupled with repressive policies with unprecedented ferocity. Today's reality is the effect produced by peremptory orders intended to benefit the rulers, instead of the country and the people.

Is the Burmese experience today still a political reform process? How can nationhood, the nation-state and the rights and responsibilities of all citizens be characterized at this time?

**THE TRAUMA OF WITNESSING**

The years under the junta rule have witnessed worsening conditions, rampant abuses of human rights, totally destructive exploitation of resources to support an army of outrageous size, relentless persecution of political dissent, and actions purposely designed to obliterate the cul-
tures, languages and homelands of ethnic minorities, the erstwhile "equal co-founders" of the Union. The world has reacted and passed judgement on the junta. Its transgressions are strongly disapproved. With minor exceptions, the SLORC is viewed as a pariah in the international community today.

And yet, the world is clearly also traumatized by the magnitude of brutality and vindictiveness. The junta's modes of operation — intimidation, suppression and subjugation, isolation — have not been effectively challenged. Outside response has for the most part, been via the news media, or threats of governments to impose sanctions, without the substance necessary to initiate change and reform.

Political reform prospects appear daunting today. Activist movements appear to concede the struggle for the present, presumably in order to concentrate better on the struggle for the future. The inevitable result is that prospects for change have become less focused, less certain, and less immediate.

**SLORC's opponents**

It is frequently remarked that the opponents of the junta are many unrelated elements pursuing political goals without any coordination of efforts, and that they cannot mount a viable opposition. As opposition has remained ineffectual, the importance of the democratic experience of 1948-1962 has become more remote, less meaningful, and less effective in its grip on the national psyche. A potential weapon of change is being lost through the sheer passage of time because the opposition has not effectively been organized.

Political division among the co-founding peoples of the Union of Burma has been the cause of this incapacitation, that much is clear. Why is this problem so pervasive and tenacious? Understanding this question, and beginning to work through it are paramount objectives today. It is the challenge that planners for Burma's future must confront.

**A question of history?**

A number of important questions lurk behind the visible aspects of the struggle today. We ask not only why political division hindered post-independence political integration in Burma, but how pre-independence political experiences produced what have become serious hindrances. The point is not lost that these obstacles created much of the chaos that led to dictatorship by the military.

**Dictatorships and the judgement of history**

Does history treat dictatorships with kindness and understanding? Will the future hold sympathy' garlands and accolades for the SLORC? A military dictatorship is best viewed as a transitional phenomenon, in the manner that certain weeds flourish briefly when the topsoil is freshly disturbed. But there is a limit to how long topsoil is freshly disturbed, as against being cultivated. Sturdy plants inevitably displace the transient species. This order of succession of plant communities is immutable in nature.

Ecosystem analogies are appropriate to understand the phenomenon of the SLORC, as its fate is also tied to the fortunes of disturbed conditions. The SLORC is ruthlessly repressive on people and exploitative on resources. It has uncontrolled growth. If the SLORC machine were compared to the thermodynamic phenomena, the primary char-
acteristic would be that it is extremely energy-intensive. The general rule is that the more energy-intensive an occurrence is, the greater the problems of sustaining it will become, and the shorter the expected life-span will tend to be. The SLORC phenomenon is a turbulence or conflagration that is doomed to burn out and to completely collapse on itself. This is absolutely inevitable.

The inviolable laws of nature remind us that the SLORC will implode and it is certain to leave behind unspeakable destruction and debris. That will be the challenge for nation-builders. The country will need to be rebuilt upon a new foundation. The pressing question is whether this new blueprint will be better than the one of 1948.

The problem of learning to avoid past mistakes that obstructed national unity and common purpose, looms large today. Will history attest some day, that in the winter of 1996, this problem was actually far more difficult and ominous than that of the SLORC? It's a thought we must not fear or resist.

**POST-SLORC RECONSTRUCTION**

Without national unity and common purpose, there can be no hope for success in reconstruction; and without understanding the nature of past impediments, unity and consensus cannot be built. This is the dilemma and the challenge. We also need to overcome the weight of fifty years of mistakes, blundering, hurt feelings and grievances. National unity and common purpose are on the other side of this barrier. This weight can again be an unbearable burden, but there is no choice, we must learn to transform past mistakes into a better future.

Political division has been the main obstacle to unity and common purpose in the past. In part, this division stemmed from the diversified and often unrelated pasts of the co-founders. The division has also been fueled and fanned by the mistakes of the post-independence era. And yet, we have again reached the threshold when these two components of our past must provide insights, as well as political courage to produce plans wherein unified nation-building can successfully occur.

The question is whether the role-players are willing. After being pushed by treacherous waters during the period between 1948 and 1996, can the once free and equal co-founders be prevailed upon to shoulder the burden of rebuilding this failed nation?

**A WIDESPREAD PHENOMENON**

The phenomenon of political division and partition is widespread, and recent histories of India, Pakistan, Korea, Germany, Vietnam, China, Ireland and the Middle East, attest to that. It is believed that political division and partition accounted for some of the greatest human tragedies in the post-Second World War era. These outbreaks have been studied case by case, and comparisons made. It has been said that if we do not learn from history, we are doomed to make the same mistakes again.

Many studies reveal that there are applicable analogies and comparisons from case to case, that the problem of political division in Burma is neither unique nor isolated. The possibility exists for a comparative analysis to consider the situation in Burma which may enable us to deal more rationally with the problems of the past.

**REFLECTIONS ON KACHIN POLITICAL EXPERIENCE**

It is with this hope that Kachin political history is now being analyzed. A study is being conducted that will examine Kachin political objectives, successes and failures, motivations and despair, since 1948. Our goal is to demystify our past problems. Kachinland Projects USA, the technical support program of the Kachin-Americans and Friends for Democracy and Human Rights in Burma, has begun an analysis of the
Kachin political experience leading to 1996. This study is invited by the Central Committee of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). The objective is to try to actually learn from history. While the effort will focus on the Kachin, it is hoped that the lessons learned will also benefit other role-players in the saga of post-war Burma.

M. Aran Brang Seng Memorial Essays

The Central Committee of the KIO saw the value that a study such as this would have, and expressed its desire to have one done. This body has been the political arm of the Kachin reform movement since 1963; it is also continuing the reform agenda that came out of the experience after 1948.

Kachinland Projects USA will distribute this report as the “Maran Brang Seng Memorial Essays on Kachin Political History and Analysis.”

Issues and Problems in Kachin Political History

The basic aspects of the study are the framework for analysis, and the objectives. The selection of a framework for analysis is important because, ideally, it must also be appropriate for other indigenous peoples to use, as well.

The specific objectives of the study are:

A. To present the Kachin political agenda, expectations and ambitions, as they were in 1947;

B. To explain why the Kachin came up with this political plan for the future, i.e., the post-British era in Burma, and why this was necessary.

C. To analyze what in the Kachin’s previous experience and history (i.e., before the World War) motivated and undergirded this gameplan.

D. To discuss if the Kachin were satisfied with their situation by 1958, and if they weren’t, whether this meant that there were unwanted departures from their plans of 1947. What are the details of this discontent, and which aspects of the plan were believed to be unfairly thwarted? How did this come about?

E. To point out that in 1947, the Kachin carefully took stock of their situation and came to the realization that there would have to be major reform at the nation-state level, which they pursued. Military dictatorship, however, aborted this effort.

F. To speculate and assess the fate of the Kachin people. Now, in 1996 what is the prognosis?

History and Its Lessons

Modern Kachin political history consists of four distinct eras: 1) The era before Kachinland became part of British-Burma, to 1886. 2) The era of British-Burma, 1886-1947. 3) The Union of Burma, 1948-1962. 4) Burma under the dictatorship of the military, 1962-1996.

The first era is important to understanding the Kachin as a highly organized people with their own political history and territorial homeland. The outlook and political desires of a people at a given point in history are based on the experience and achievements leading to that moment.

Era I illustrates characteristics of the Kachin; their emergence as a cultural nation (kulturnation, in German), their acknowledged status as one-people (einvolk); a distinctive language community, the vigor of the political and cultural organizations of their society; and a clearly defined territory or homeland (until the British challenged it). Technically, the Kachin had reached the nation-state (staatsnation) status prior to confronting the British, by virtue of their political behavior, by how they perceived themselves, and by how they were interacting with other nation-states (the British, King Bodawpaya, and Shan rulers).

The second era saw the Kachin in a position to nurture and consolidate the nationhood that emerged out of the previous era. Entry into an industrial age also occurred, with emphasis on edu-
cation and gradual de-emphasis on traditional institutions.

It also saw two significant developments: first, "Kachin Hills" became part of the geopolitical entity of British-Burma, and second, the Kachin did not become a "minority people" of Burma under the British. Their presence in British-Burma was without effective political integration. This is extremely important in understanding their post-independence experience.

Era I and Era II inspired, legitimized, and made necessary the political gameplan of 1947. The success or failure of the experience of 1948-1962 would be judged against this gameplan. To expect that they should have aimed for less than they already had would be wrong.

Era III saw the political agenda of 1947 severely tested. No successful implementation of their plans took place and the Kachin felt that they were denied the transition necessary to make adjusting to the new reality successful. Also, there was the emerging of the hegemony of the majority. Most critically, the Kachin were, for the first time in their modern experience, fast becoming a minority. Psychologically, this is most significant. Understanding the effects of Era III is critically important to understand what kind of future might be envisioned for the reconstruction of the Union of Burma.

It is clear that the 1947 gameplan is now perceived as allowing for a more highly structured interpretation of "basic rights".

A. Inalienable rights by virtue of the Kachin nationhood, as before.
B. Negotiable rights, mostly relating to territoriality, resources, etc.
C. Earlier rights that have become archaic, and need no longer be adhered to, or contended, such as civil administrative law replacing the Hilltribes Regulation Acts, codified by the British.

The final era is characterized by highly destructive turbulence; its most important effect will be the nullification of the Panglong Agreement as the platform vision, agenda and goals.

Era IV witnessed the total abrogation of the Kachin political agenda of 1947, and the gameplan in effect as late as 1965. In terms of political considerations, the Kachin are now back in the situation of 1945-1947. The investment of 1948-1962 is in total limbo, being taken captive by the military dictators. That investment may be reinstalled and political reform pursued. Or, the original free and equal co-founders may go their separate ways. These are the two options that lie ahead. Any effort to influence the course of history toward one or the other fate must be made today.

**RESURGENCE OF ETHNICITY**

There is enormous resurgence of ethnicity or nationalistic sentiment today and the battle cry is chillingly conflictive. There are Kachin in India (Assam) and there are even more in China, and they continue to be one-people, still a significant kultur nation with a dynamic social organization.

Lessons from history attest that this nation is unlikely to be stamped out. The odds are that the problem will outlive the military dictatorship. Comparative evidence from around the world suggest that political division cannot be eliminated by discrimination and persecution, and that the problem of nationhood does not go away just because the majority is unwilling to accommodate minority rights.

**WHAT NEXT?**

The fact that advances in transportation and communication technologies continue to make the world grow smaller, together with the fact that economic management of resources continues to become more global, add other potentially critical parameters to the equation of political division and minority resistance.

History possesses massive evidence that SLORC cannot win this struggle.

---

**BURMA DEBATE** 25 NOV/DEC 1996
by the Karen broke out in areas where the Karen population formed more or less a majority. Since the Karen are a minority vis-a-vis the Burmans, however, the Karen were forced to gradually give up ground. During those long years of resistance, which now has lasted nearly half a century, there is not a Karen village that has not suffered an attack, at one time or another. A conservative estimate is that more than half a million Karen have died as a direct or indirect consequence of the civil war.

The SLORC's pre-conditions for serious talks are, "to enter the legal fold; to renounce the so-called armed revolutionary line and to promise to lay down arms one day." The terms are, "when a ceasefire is in effect, the KNU, and its armed wing, the KNLA will have to live within areas having a three to five mile radius. The KNU cannot have any political dealings or freedom of movement."

The SLORC rejected the KNU's call for political dialogue once a ceasefire agreement is reached. The KNU, on the other hand rejected the SLORC's pre-conditions as irrelevant.

The KNU knows how the people "in the legal fold" are treated and it is not ready to submit to the same treatment. The KNU is not holding arms in order to gain political power, but for self-defence.

It is the position of the KNU that all parties must hold a dialogue for settling political problems through political means. Only then can a durable and genuine peace be achieved. The KNU is studying developments and relations between the SLORC and ceasefire groups. To all appearances, the SLORC is just buying time and using various means to weaken these groups. When the SLORC feels that it can crush the groups militarily, it will demand surrender from them or resume military actions.

Even following the initiation of talks with the KNU, SLORC troops continue to commit wide-
The Karen were among the troops used by the British to quell a number of rebellions following the complete annexation of Burma and during the era of the Great Depression. As a result the most extreme Burman nationalists branded the Karen as lackeys and spies of the British. This animosity towards the Karen people flared into an ethnic war launched by elements of the Burma Independence Army (BIA) against the Karen soon after the occupation of Burma by the Japanese Imperial Army in 1942. As in all ethnic wars, many atrocities took place. The British reoccupation of Burma in 1945 brought a great relief to the Karen.

When independence was approaching in 1947, rather than feelings of jubilation, the majority of the Karen population was wracked by fear, confusion and almost total despair. Aung San (or General Aung San as he was popularly known) was almost the only politician who rose above the racial animosity and hatred toward the ethnic minorities commonly harbored by the Burman politicians. The majority of the Burman leaders regarded the Karen as a foothold left by the British for a future reoccupation of Burma. The general perception among the Karen was that once the power was in the hands of the Burmans, they would start to eliminate the Karen racially, culturally and religiously.

The assassination of Aung San extinguished any flicker of hope that the Karen people had held for freedom and equal treatment in Burma. Rather than that of a reasoned, balanced approach regarding the question of ethnic nationalities, the period of independence was a time of 'hot headedness' on both sides.

As the Karen had suspected, troops of General Ne Win began to commit atrocities against Karen villagers in the Tenasserim, in December 1948. Soon the attacks spread to the Irrawaddy delta and to Karen quarters in Rangoon and Insein. Resistance
by the Karen broke out in areas where the Karen population formed more or less a majority. Since the Karen are a minority vis-à-vis the Burmans, however, the Karen were forced to gradually give up ground. During those long years of resistance, which now has lasted nearly half a century, there is not a Karen village that has not suffered an attack, at one time or another. A conservative estimate is that more than half a million Karen have died as a direct or indirect consequence of the civil war.

The SLORC's pre-conditions for serious talks are, "to enter the legal fold; to renounce the so-called armed revolutionary line and to promise to lay down arms one day." The terms are, "when a ceasefire is in effect, the KNU, and its armed wing, the KNLA will have to live within areas having a three to five mile radius. The KNU cannot have any political dealings or freedom of movement."

The KNU knows how the people "in the legal fold" are treated and it is not ready to submit to the same treatment. The KNU is not holding arms in order to gain political power, but for self-defence.

It is the position of the KNU that all parties must hold a dialogue for settling political problems through political means. Only then can a durable and genuine peace be achieved. The KNU is studying developments and relations between the SLORC and ceasefire groups. To all appearances, the SLORC is just buying time and using various means to weaken these groups. When the SLORC feels that it can crush the groups militarily, it will demand surrender from them or resume military actions.

Even following the initiation of talks with the KNU, SLORC troops continue to commit wide-
spread violations of human rights against villagers in Karen areas and encouraging religious fanatics to attack and harass the refugee camps. For these reasons it is hard for the KNU to feel confident about the SLORC.

Dialogue is the best solution for settling the underlying political problems of the civil war and freedom for political activities.

However, nonviolent means alone cannot bring peace and democracy, if SLORC does not change its hard-lined position of retaining power by any means, and crushing its opposition through brutal methods.

The aspirations of the Karen people are to have democratic freedom, equality and self-determination as a people within a genuine federal system of government. Judging by the pronouncements of Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy's (NLD) position regarding the ethnic peoples, the NLD would be able to correctly resolve the ethnic question to the satisfaction of most ethnic groups. It seems that the NLD is the only major political party that does not reek of racial chauvinism.

The chances of true reconciliation within Burma are good. With foreign pressure and the increasingly negative image of its pariah status, the SLORC is seen to be weakening, one small step at a time, in spite of all the defiance it has been demonstrating. It is our hope that SLORC's military leaders will sooner or later soften their stand and agree to "a tripartite dialogue" for solving the underlying political problems of the civil war. In a genuinely democratic and federal Burma, there is no doubt that the Karen, as well as other ethnic peoples, would enjoy fair and equal treatment.
The Chin National Front (CNF) does not claim to be the exclusive voice of the Chin people who live in Burma. However, the CNF is the largest organization of Chin opposed to the SLORC military dictatorship, and therefore, plays an important role when discussing the issue of Chin "Nationhood".

The leadership of the CNF is primarily composed of students of the "1988" generation. The ideas and viewpoints of these younger leaders were shaped by a different set of experiences than the experiences that shaped the attitudes of the previous generation of Chin leaders, and consequently, it should be no surprise that many CNF leaders hold a fundamentally different perspective on "nationhood" than that held by many in the older Chin leaders.

The approximately four million Chin-related people are united by a common language and a common hill-tribe culture. In the late 19th century, British colonial authorities drew the border between their colonies of India and Burma directly through traditional Chin territory. When both colonies later received their independence after WWII, the boundary originally drawn by the colonial British became the internationally recognized border between the newly independent countries of India and Burma. As an ethnic minority population living in larger countries, the Chin, quite predictably, in both India and Burma, encountered significant problems with discrimination and preservation of their culture. Both the governments of India and Burma in the decades after national independence had to deal with serious problems with their Chin populations.

In India, an armed Chin guerrilla movement (called the Mizo National Front) flared up and simmered for several decades. However, because India is a democracy, the Indian government resolved its problems with the Chin people through a negotiated settlement in the mid-1980s. This agreement gave the Chin-related people in India a semi-autonomous state called Mizoram, and further gave the Chin in Mizoram certain rights concerning
their language, culture, land, and limited rights to local self-government.

Meanwhile in Burma, after the Ne Win army toppled the democratically elected government in 1962, an armed Chin guerrilla uprising called the Anti-Communist and Freedom Organization (ACFO) erupted in 1964 against the Burmese regime. Unlike in India, the movement in Burma was brutally crushed by military power, leaving an imprint of resentment in the minds of the people towards the Ne Win military dictatorship. This resentment is clearly reflected in the receptive attitudes of the Chin people to the CNF movement from its inception.

With their own elected government, the Chin in Mizoram have not only flourished but have been given the freedom to preserve their cultural heritage. Unfortunately, the situation for the Chin in Burma has been very different. Since the Ne Win regime, Burma has been ruled by a military dictatorship which has launched unrelenting attacks which have been aimed at obliterating all significant minority cultures in Burma including the Chin. Knowing that most Chin are Christians and that Christianity is part of their identity, the SLORC, using military force, has destroyed or removed Christian crosses from locations on prominent hills and replaced them with Buddhist monuments.

SLORC maneuvers of this type have been so extreme that in 1994/95 they even lured Chin children away from their parents with promises of sending them to be educated in Rangoon. When the parents originally tried to find information about their children, they were denied access, only to later discover that instead of being put in schools, their children had actually been placed in Buddhist monasteries in an attempt to wipe out their "Chiness." These types of cultural assaults are typical of SLORC's campaign to suppress, discourage, and eventually obliterate ethnic cultures.

Given the nature of the SLORC assault on the Chin culture, it is useful to lay out some of the perspectives and attitudes of the CNF:

1. The CNF is anti-military dictatorship. For the CNF, the fundamental problem is the Burman generals. If the Burman dominated military dictatorship continues indefinitely, Chin culture will eventually perish under the weight of SLORC's assault. In contrast, if Burman democrats come to power in Burma, the long term viability of Chin culture in a united Burma will be bright, because tolerance for minorities and for minority cultures is an integral part of the very fabric and philosophy of a modern democratic government. Obviously, democracy will not solve all problems between a dominant population group like the Burmans and a minority culture like the Chin, but democracy solved the major problems between the Chin and the government in India, and it will solve the major problems between the Chin and a Burmese government. A democratic government, with its inherent philosophy of individual human rights and tolerance for differences, is the best long-term solution to the preservation of Chin culture.

Considering the bitter experiences they went through under the Burman military dictator-
ship, it would be unfair to blame the older generation of Chin leaders for holding grudges against the Burmans. The leaders of CNF on the other hand have had the opportunity to work directly and successfully with Burman democrats and consider them close brothers and sisters in the drive to overthrow the military dictatorship. (CNF ties are particularly strong with the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma and the All Burma Students' Democratic Front). The CNF believes that unity and close cooperation among all democracy-loving people, both ethnic minority democrats and Burman democrats, is the recipe for overthrowing the SLORC military dictatorship.

2. The CNF does not want independence. The CNF believes that, from any practical point of view, the Chin people are too few in number and their land area is too small and landlocked to be an economically viable independent "nation" in today's global economy. In addition, current international law and political practices lean heavily against changing established international boundaries. In short, economic and political realities preclude the viability of an independent Chin nation-state. Since its inception the CNF has therefore been urging the Chin people to concentrate on unity and close cooperation between both ethnic minority democrats and Burman democrats.

3. The CNF wants "federalism." As much as the CNF is committed to fighting for the restoration of democracy in Burma, it believes in and will stand firm for the establishment of a "federal democratic system" in which individual states have, to a certain extent, the right to self-determination.

Because of its many ethnic groups, Burma is the ideal country for emplacement of a federal democratic system. Although the exact power-sharing arrangement in each type of federal democratic government is different, federalism generally gives some significant amount of power to the individual states in the areas of education, taxing authority, language, and land and natural resources.

The exact details of how, in a future democratic Federal Union of Burma, power in these four areas should be divided between the central government and the individual states are issues that the CNF does not take a specific stand on. The CNF believes that all such questions should properly be resolved in a future Constituent Assembly composed of elected representatives of all the people who have been given a mandate to write a new constitution for Burma.

In summation, there is no such thing as a Chin nation — at least in the sense of some potential independent nation-state. There does, however, exist a Chin people divided into many tribes — from the Asho Chin of the plains of Burma, to the Chin in the hills of Chin State, from the Khumi Chin of the Arakan area of Burma, to the Chin called Mizo who live in India, to a small group of Chin in Bangladesh. The Chin people want to preserve their language and important aspects of their culture. Democracy is the only long term route for doing so. The Chin in democratic India have reached their accommodation with the government of India. Federal democracy is the type of democratic government needed to solve the ethnic reality of Burma. As for the Chin culture in Burma, the long-term future, while not problem-free, will nevertheless be brighter under a federal democratic government. In contrast, under the SLORC military dictatorship the long-term future for Chin culture is bleak indeed. Fighting the military dictatorship is fighting for the survival of the Chin culture, and at its
most recent conference in March, the CNF adopted four objectives:
1. To establish a functioning democratic government in a united Burma by working in close cooperation with other pro-democracy organizations.
2. To promote and preserve Chin culture and Chin language by establishing a Chin State inside the framework of a democratic federal Burma.
3. To teach and educate the Chin people about democracy and practical ways to resist the military dictatorship with all means available.
4. To provide essential governmental service to the people in any areas of Chinland that the Chin National Front liberates from the dictatorship.

At its March Conference the CNF also adopted a Code of Military Conduct based on the Geneva Convention to guide its military operations. The CNF considers a ceasefire inappropriate unless SLORC wishes to have a ceasefire in order to negotiate handing power over to an elected government. The CNF will continue to fight until there is a democratically elected government in Burma. As soon as such a government comes into being, the CNF will dissolve itself as an organization and urge its members to become involved in the democratic political process through the political party of their choice.

It should be clear to all, that the goal of the CNF is not to chase some impractical dream of a Chin nation-state, but rather to assure the long term survivability of Chin culture in Burma by helping establish a democratic federal government in Burma. Once that historic mission has been accomplished, the democratic resistance organization known as the Chin National Front will dissolve honorably into the proud history of the Chin people.
This article was prepared for Burma Debate by representatives of the Mon Unity League, an independent organization comprised of members of the Mon communities in Burma, Thailand and abroad. The views expressed here represent those of the Mon Unity League and not necessarily those of any other Mon organization.

Editor’s Note: At the time of writing, growing dissatisfaction with the ceasefire agreement negotiated between the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the SLORC has led to dissension within the NMSP. A faction in the Mergui region, known as the Mon Army, has split from the NMSP and is no longer abiding by the terms of the agreement. Fighting has resumed in that region.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MON PEOPLE

Of the present inhabitants of Burma, the Mon are the oldest. Their language, Austroasiatic, is distantly related to other languages that reach from Madagascar to Easter Island, and from Central India to New Zealand. The Mon are close cousins of the Khmer, with whom they originally travelled south from Mongolia. By at least the third century B.C, the Mon not only occupied the entire Me Nam Valley but had spread to the Sittang Valley of Thailand and Burma. Their port capital was Thaton, not far from the Isthmian portage routes and, through this window to the sea, they saw India in its full glory — a flourishing center of Theravada Buddhism, united peacefully under the King Asoka.

With the expansion of Indian commerce in Southeast Asia during the first century A.D., Thaton’s prosperity and importance increased. The expansion was sudden and revolutionary, but peaceful. The Indian merchants and seamen came to Thaton as friends rather than conquistadors. Their numbers were never great and their settlements were only temporary.
Until the 8th century, although there was a scramble for the new lands of the Irrawaddy Delta, no conflicts developed between the Indians and the Mon. As a result, Indian culture was found acceptable to the Mon people. They saw it to that their native culture was not abandoned or displaced, and they worked toward a harmonious blending of the old and new cultures. The Mon brought many of their native animistic beliefs into the fold of Theravada Buddhism. They enhanced the power and prestige of their king by adopting the Hindu ritual of coronation, and developed a new art of sculpture by blending the native traditional wood carving with the Greco-Indian conventions of making images of the Buddha. They built stupas along the Indian model and developed new forms of temple architecture with a mixture of native and Indian traditions. Within a few decades, the Mon became the most advanced people in Southeast Asia, and they assumed the role of teachers to their neighbors, spreading Theravada Buddhism and their new culture over the entire region. Their cousins, the Khmer, were the first to benefit, followed by the Burmans. Even in the 13th century when their glory had passed and they were a conquered people in the Me Nam Valley, the Mon freely shared their cultural heritage with the new arrivals, the Tai.

The Burmans of the Tibeto-Burman tribes founded their own city of Pagan in 849 AD. By that time the Mon dominated lower Burma, occupying the whole of the Irrawaddy Delta, building the port of Bassein in the west and founding the city of Pegu in 825 AD. They might have stepped into the vacuum caused by the destruction of the Pyu kingdom, but they were not politically ambitious and perhaps did not relish going up the river into arid country. This Mon reluctance allowed the infant Burman kingdom to survive and grow. In 1044 AD, Anawrahta came to the throne of Pagan. He challenged and subdued the Mahayanist kingdom of Nanchao, annexed the animistic Shan Plateau and conquered the Theravada Mon at Thaton in 1057. The conquest of Thaton was the foundation of both Pagan's economy and its culture. Mon craftsmen, artisans, architects, goldsmiths, and wood-carvers — captured at Thaton — were taken to Pagan to teach their skills and arts to the Burmans. The Burmans learned quickly and soon were able to stand shoulder to shoulder with Mon and Indian craftsmen. Mon monks and scholars taught the Burmans how to write their own and Pali languages and the Buddhist scriptures. The Burmans soon became scholars themselves, making Pagan the center of Theravada learning.

Pagan fell to the Mongol armies in 1287 and was occupied for seventeen years. After the fall of Pagan, the Mon in lower Burma consolidated and restored their own kingdom. King Warer [Wareru] established the Mon kingdom in 1287 with his capital at...
Martaban, near Moulmein. His successor, Byinnya Oo, transferred the capital to Pegu (Hongsawatoi) in 1365. The Mon once again were achieving another golden age under wise rulers. Pegu became the center of Theravadin scholarship and also entered into a close commercial relationship with Malacca, on the Malay Peninsula, an Islamic kingdom before 1511 and a Portuguese possession thereafter. This Mon "golden era" lasted for more than two and a half centuries, from approximately 1287 to 1533. The Mon Pegu (Hongsawatoi) dynasty produced rulers who are still loved by the people of Burma today, and who left behind many sacred monuments. They included King Razathirat [Razadarit] (1385-1425), Queen Chaobu [Shin Saw Bu] (1453-1472) and King Dhomazetoi [Dhammozedi] (1472-1492).

In 1531, Thabinshwehti became Burman king of Toungoo and within a few years he conquered upper Burma from the Shans and lower Burma from the Mon. He died in 1551 and was succeeded by his brother-in-law Bayinnaung. Bayinnaung marched on Ayutthaya and conquered the entire Me Nam Valley, thus founding the second Burman empire. After his death, however, the empire broke up. In 1605, his grand-son Anankpetlun, shifted the capital back to Ava. Eventually, the king became weak and power passed to the ministers. The Mon declared independence in 1740, encouraged by the French in India. The Burman capital of Ava fell to the Mon in 1752: and all of Burma passed under Mon rule.

U Aungzeya, a Burman leader who founded the last Burman kingdom, drove the Mon out of Upper Burma and regained the Shan States. By 1757 he defeated the Mon and annexed the Mon kingdom of Hongsavatoi. The Mon have ever since become a people without a country. The brutal Burman leader U Aungzeya, who is better known as King Alaungphaya, persecuted the Mon by massacring over 3,000 learned Mon monks at Thingankyun near Rangoon, by burning holy Mon Scriptures and by executing tens of thousands of Mon in several stockade-inferno holocausts. Racial discrimination was rife. Hundreds of thousands of the Mon fled to Siam (Thailand) for safe haven. [According to old Mon records written on palm leaves, but never mentioned in the Burmese history written to this day.] In modern human rights terminology, it was a drastic ethnic cleansing process.

Following three Anglo-Burmese wars, the entire territory of Burma was occupied and colonized by the British in 1885. That was also the end of the last Burman dynasty. However, through selfless sacrifices made by patriots of various ethnic nationalities, Burma gained independence from the British in 1948. And the Burman leadership returned to power. Dissensions amongst the Burman leadership, coupled with the resurgence of the ethnic nationalities including the Mon, brought the country into a full-fledged civil war. In 1962 General Ne Win staged a coup d'etat and since then the country has been under the rule of a military dictatorship. Now the generals are ruling the country under the name of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

This brief portrait of the history of Burma illustrates the inalienable rights of the Mon people to the whole of Lower Burma, known in history as Hongsawatoi or Rehmonnya or Pegu. Never in his-
tory did the Mon surrender their rights to the land, the water, or resources, to the Burmans. And as a result the Mon armed resistance movement has lasted for more than four decades since independence from the British in 1948.

THE MON IN TODAY'S WORLD

After Burma gained independence from the British, the Mon people felt that even though they were free from British colonization, they remained a Burman colony. Only their master had changed. In fact, during the British era, the Mon could exercise more rights such as promotion of literature and culture, and freedom of association and expression. After independence, when the state power was monopolized by Burman-dominated governments, including U Nu’s parliamentary democracy, all rights, even the promotion of literature and culture, were restricted. The Mon leaders claimed that the U Nu government ruled an ethnic population with a parliamentary dictatorship. During the 1948 general elections, Burman-dominated political parties even restricted the rights of the Mon to participate in the election. Some Mon leaders were killed and arrested by Burman leaders. Although General Aung San agreed to make Burma a federal nation, the later Burman leaders broke this promise and administered Burma as a country in which the Burman leaders took more power and restricted the rights of ethnic nationalities.

According to the 1974 constitution, General Ne Win’s Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) government created Mon State, but the government monopolized power by forming its own administrative bodies up to the village level. The BSPP and SLORC consistently restricted the activities of Mon people regarding promoting of literature, culture and political rights. Since 1948, successive governments have implemented a “Burmanization” policy toward ethnic nationalities. In fact, ten of thousands of Mon have been assimilated into Burman culture to the point that they cannot even speak the Mon language.

Because of the offensives against the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and its military faction, the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), by Burma’s rulers, and the accompanied human rights abuses by their troops, many thousands of Mon inhabitants have escaped to the border areas and have taken refuge there. While they were in the camps, they actually experienced greater freedom in maintaining their national and cultural identity. The refugee community created a Mon National School in the

Children at refugee camp school studying Mon language.
camps and taught the Mon language. Without the restrictions of the central government, the Mon were better able to maintain their cultural identity in the refugee camps.

Because of the global approach of solving political problems through negotiation, and the growing pressure from the Thai government, the NMSP entered into a ceasefire with SLORC. In fact, the Mon people have no desire to solve political problems through violent means. The Mon have always welcomed the opportunity to solve problems through negotiation. The change in Thai government policy — their decision to move the Southeast Asian region from a "battlefield" to a "market field" — meant that the Thai greatly increased investments in Burma once SLORC came to power. To protect these investments, the Thai government would like to see Burma become a peaceful country. Before the NMSP entered into a ceasefire with SLORC, the SLORC had consistently intensified its military offensives and forced the Mon population to ask the NMSP to enter a ceasefire. Because the Mon territory is small with several SLORC military bases there, in the end, the Mon had to agree to a ceasefire. However, at this moment, the Mon are still waiting to resolve the political problems of Burma through negotiations.

According to points agreed upon in the ceasefire, neither the SLORC nor the Mon would discuss political issues. The ceasefire was merely a means to stop the fighting. The SLORC did mention its National Convention as a place for discussing political issues, but the NMSP did not agree to attend the National Convention. In the ceasefire both sides have agreed not to conscript forced labor of local villagers or to take porters for use in military operations.

The SLORC imposed restrictions on tax collections by the NMSP and offered more economic opportunities to create self-sufficiency. In practice, however, the SLORC is still using forced labor and portering and the economic opportunities of the NMSP have not met with much success.

At the moment, we recognize Aung San Suu Kyi as a democratic leader. Because of the historical experience, however, the ethnic minorities are reluctant to trust the Burman leaders regarding ethnic rights. They have never met any Burman leader who would guarantee their rights. As a result, there is a "wait and see" attitude regarding Aung San Suu Kyi. Is she a leader who will ensure unity for all of Burma? Burman leaders promised before to create a Burma based on a democratic federal system, but when the country was functioning they changed their practices. That was why the ethnic nationalities have always felt it necessary to safe-guard their people. They have had no other way except to hold arms.

It is effective for the Burman population to use non-violence against the SLORC under the leadership of the NLD. As Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD have the support of the population, they could be successful in the near future through non-violent struggle. The ethnic nationalities still have to maintain arms while at the same time encouraging the parties which are active with non-violence means in opposing the military dictatorship.

The Mon kingdom exercised great autonomy for several centuries. If the Burman leaders agree to guarantee equal rights of the ethnic nationalities in a federalist Burma, the Mon people will enjoy their own rights. If the Burman leaders continue their suppression and restriction of those rights, the Mon have no choice but to struggle for an independent State.

The Mon warmly welcome the UN resolution on true national reconciliation within Burma. The ruling party in Burma should consider arranging for discussions, meetings and assemblies which support for the true national reconciliation. The National Convention of SLORC is not an appropriate forum. The international community must help in facilitating this national reconciliation process.
IN BRIEF


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

MASSACHUSETTS — A Massachusetts Roundtable was held on November 12 and December 4. The December meeting featured Marcia Poole, head of the Burmese Section of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service.

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 next meeting of the Burma Interest Group is scheduled for January 23, as part of "Seattle's Free Burma Fortnight" which runs from January 12-25. The "Fortnight" events will include screenings of the films, Beyond Rangoon and Inside Burma, Land of Fear, as well as talks by various Burma activists such as author, Edith Mirante and performance artist, Yuzana Khin.

On December 10, long-time participant of the Interest Group, Bill Gardner, was awarded one of six 1996 Human Rights Awards presented by the Seattle chapter of the United Nations Association for his work in providing medical supplies to Karen refugees along the Thai/Burma border.

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

LONDON — The December 4 Burma Briefing featured Amanda Zappia, Coordinator of the Australia Burma Council, and Sally Thompson of the Burma Border Consortium, which is based in Thailand. Ms. Zappia, who recently returned from an extended stay in New York, briefed the group on the circumstances surrounding the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly resolution on Burma. Ms. Thompson discussed the condition of the refugee groups along the Thai/Burma border and the increasing occurrence of forced repatriations. Ed McGovern, of the Burma Briefing, also provided an update on his visit to China and its border with 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.

LEITER TO THE EDITOR

OCTOBER 18, 1996

Reference Burma Debate, July/August 1996, page 17, "An Abel Response." If I may be allowed to comment. In the words of the inimitable Zargana, a dental surgeon cum comedian, jailed umpteen times: "A Bear Nya Be" (Abel is fibbing).

Pe Than Maung, M.D.
Miami, Florida

NOTABLES & QUOTABLES

"The role of drugs in Burma's economic and political life and the regime's refusal to honor its own pledge to move to multiparty democracy are really two sides of the same coin, for both represent the absence of the rule of law."

— U.S. President Bill Clinton, speaking at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, November 26, 1996.
Visit Myanmar Year Officially Began November 18

The government-sponsored "Visit Myanmar Year - 1996" officially began with pomp and ceremony throughout the country, including the November 1 opening of the Visit Myanmar Year Market Festival, which will be held at the Myoma Sports Grounds through December 31. The festival will include showcases provided by state-owned economic enterprises, joint ventures and cooperatives displaying products and tourism information from various parts of the country.

Companies Feel Pinch of Selective Purchasing

The first signs of the impact of local selective purchasing legislation passed by city, county and state governments are now being felt by U.S. companies doing business in Burma. Apple computer was the first firm to cite the recently passed Massachusetts law as a reason for them to cease operations in Burma. Motorola, Packard and Eastman Kodak have also credited the legislation as the reason for reevaluating their relationship with that country. A Kodak spokesperson stated that their company is "...in the process of taking actions that will allow us to be in compliance with the statute in question." Alameda County in California has joined the growing list of municipalities that have passed selective purchasing acts.

Malaysia Moves to Encourage Investment in Burma

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim of Malaysia announced that his country will streamline efforts to encourage more Malaysians to invest in Burma. The Deputy Prime Minister met with Burma's Finance Minister, Brigadier-General Win Tin, on November 14 to discuss ways to enhance trade between the two countries. General Win Tin was on a four day official visit during which agreements on exploration in the Andaman Sea. The companies include Unocal (USA), Total (France) and Texaco (USA), Nippon Oil (Japan), Premier Oil (UK) and Arco (US). The objective of the campaign is to heighten public attention and pressure on the firms so that they withdraw their operations until a democratic government is in place in Burma. Activists packets are available for the cost of $5.00 through: Free Burma: No Petro-dollars for Slorc, International Rivers Network, 1847 Berkeley Way, Berkeley California, 94703. Phone: (501) 946-7006. Fax: (501) 949-1816. E-mail: ibes@erols.com

No Petro-Dollars for SLORC" Campaign

An international grassroots campaign focusing solely on oil company investment in Burma was recently announced to target companies involved in two gas pipeline projects located in the southern Burma Tenasserim watershed, as well as oil exploration in the Andaman Sea. The companies include Unocal (USA), Total (France) and Texaco (USA), Nippon Oil (Japan), Premier Oil (UK) and Arco (US). The objective of the campaign is to heighten public attention and pressure on the firms so that they withdraw their operations until a democratic government is in place in Burma. Activists packets are available for the cost of $5.00 through: Free Burma: No Petro-dollars for Slorc, International Rivers Network, 1847 Berkeley Way, Berkeley California, 94703. Phone: (501) 848-1155. Fax: (501) 840-1008.

First Japanese Operated Hotel to Open in Rangoon

JAL Hotels Co., a subsidiary of Japan Airlines, announced on November 18 that it begin operating a hotel in Burma's capital as of May, 1997. According to the corporation, The Hotel Nikko Royal Lake will be the first Japanese-run hotel in the country.

European Commission Suspends GSP

The European Commission decided on December 18 to remove Burma's low tariff access to European markets formerly available through the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). The decision resulted from calls by trade unionists and human rights activists to investigate charges of the use of forced labor within the country. Burmese authorities, however, refused to allow Commission investigators inside the country. The EU grants GSP privileges to developing countries to help push economic growth, however, the privileges can be suspended if it is determined that those who benefit from them engage in the use of coerced, child or unpaid labor. This is the first time the Commission has blocked the trade privilege based upon worker rights violations.

Myanmar-English Dictionary

Dunwoody Press
P.O. Box 400
Kensington, MD 20895-0400
Tel: (301) 946-7006
Fax: (301) 949-1816
E-mail: HDQT@MRMINC.COM

This dictionary, first published in Burma in 1993, contains nearly 35,000 entries and includes words from not only the modern language vocabulary but from literature, the names of common flora and fauna, and archaic and obsolete words. A transcription system is used as an aid to pronunciation for English speakers. It is the first Burmese-English dictionary available outside of Burma. The hardbound 672 page edition is USD 94.00.

Shan Newspaper Reader

1996
by Irving Glick & Sao Tern Moeng

Dunwoody Press
P.O. Box 400
Kensington, MD 20895-0400
Tel: (301) 946-754
Fax: (301) 949-1816
E-mail: ibes@erols.com

The 276 page reader, intended for students who have mastered the basic elements of the Shan language, contains twenty-four articles taken from issues of the newspaper Independence, published from 1991-1994. Also included is a short explanation of the Shan writing system. The hardbound edition is available for USD 54.00, and a 90 min. cassette for USD 12.00 from the Dunwoody Press.

Institute for Burmese Ethnic Studies (IBES)

Webpage
IBES
P.O. Box 443
Rockville, MD 20848-0443
Tel: (301) 468-9672
Fax: (301) 949-1816
E-mail: ibes@erols.com

WWW URL: http://www.omnilex.com/bur/ibes.html
Currently under construction, IBES, a private volunteer organization, was formed to promote the study of Burma's ethnic peoples, their languages and their culture. The webpage is provided to encourage an open public debate of the current Burma situation within the context of the plight of the indigenous peoples. Burmese script fonts will also be available for downloading.
DIRTY CLOTHES-DIRTY SYSTEM: How Burma's Military Dictatorship Uses Profits from the Garment Industry to Bankroll Oppression

Canadian Friends of Burma
145 Spruce Street
Suite 206
Ottawa ON K1P 6P1
Canada
Tel: (613) 237-8056
Fax: (613) 563-0017

Revealing the financial links between earnings from Burma's garment industry and the military regime's arms procurement agency, this report discusses how foreign garment companies and shops become involved, often unwittingly, in a global system that supports Burma's military. It predicts that, with a 60% rise in the garment trade, the deplorable labor conditions of the Burmese garment workers will continue unless consumers exert pressure for garment companies to impose strictly monitored codes of conduct and governments take action. The report is available for Canadian $12.00 which includes shipping and handling.

BACKTO MANDALAY
Burmese Life, Past and Present
Abbeville Press
488 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022
Tel: 1-800-ARTBOOK (in U.S. only)

Published in 1996, this collection of essays by eight highly respected English and Burmese writers offers the reader a look at the country, its people and traditions. The book is illustrated with images by photographers who, with special permission from the government, were able to travel to vast and varied parts of the countryside.

MYANMAR: Update on Political Arrests and Trials
Amnesty International
September 1996

International Secretariat
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 8DJ
United Kingdom
Tel: (44-171) 359-7679
Fax: (44-171) 354-3987

This report (AI Index: ASA 16/46/96) provides updated information about political arrests and trials which have occurred after the late May crackdown by the SLORC on the activities of the NLD. At that time the SLORC arrested over 300 NLD MP's-elect and activists, most of whom were released a few days after their arrest. Two deaths in custody of political prisoners in June and August 1996 are also documented in this update.

U.S. CONGRESS MEMBERS SEE BURMA AS SLORC GUESTS

On the heels of a surge of anti-government protests in the streets of Rangoon, four members of the U.S. House of Representatives toured Burma on a "private" visit. According to Burma's official newspaper, The New Light of Myanmar, Congressman Dennis Hastert (R-III), Bill Paxton (R-NY), Tom DeLay (R-TX) and Congresswoman Deborah Pryce (R-OH) were in the country December 8-12, at the invitation of SLORC Vice Chairman and Deputy Chief of Defense Services, General Maung Aye. Their itinerary reportedly included dinner at the home of General Maung Aye, visits to Mandalay and Pagan via SLORC aircraft, and a tour of the gas pipeline area now being developed by the military regime in conjunction with the petroleum firms UNOCAL (USA) and TOTAL (France).

STATE DEPARTMENT RELEASES PRESS STATEMENTS ON SLORC ATTACKS

The United States government issued a statement on November 9, stating that it was "outraged" by the attack that day on Aung San Suu Kyi by "thugs wielding chains and knives and equipped with walkie-talkies." The automobile in which Suu Kyi and other members or the National League for Democracy were traveling was attacked as they were on their way to address democracy supporters. On November 14, the U.S. State Department followed with a second press statement expressing its grave concern over the potential for violence that existed in Burma following November 9 incident; calling on the SLORC to punish those responsible for it; and urging the Burmese military to enter into a tripartite dialogue with the democratic opposition and ethnic leaders.

U.S. DRUG CZAR VISITS S.E. ASIA

General Barry R. McCaffrey, Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, travelled to Asia November 21-26 where he met with U.S. government officials and their counterparts in Thailand and Laos to discuss the growing threat of the narcotics flow from that region. Burma, which supplies over 60 percent of the heroin found on U.S. streets today, was a focal point of the discussions. Gen. McCaffrey overlapped with President Clinton in Bangkok during his visit there and updated him on the narcotics situation.

U.S. SENATORS CALL FOR TOUGH ACTION ON BURMA

In a letter dated November 15, five of the U.S. Senate's most influential members urged the Administration to refuse to engage in anti-narcotics cooperation with Burma's military regime and to impose a ban on new U.S. investment. The letter, addressed to General Barry McCaffrey, was signed by Senators Jesse Helms, Daniel Moynihan, Alfonse D'Amato, Mitch McConnell and Patrick Leahy and was sent to McCaffrey prior to his trip to Southeast Asia.

CLINTON CHOOSES NEW NATIONAL SECURITY TEAM

With his November re-election behind him, President Clinton has spent the past few weeks putting together his new national security team, naming former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, to be Secretary of State. Samuel 'Sandy' Berger will move up from his deputy slot to head of the National Security Council (NSC) and former NSC chief, Anthony Lake, was chosen as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Retiring senator, William Cohen, has been appointed Secretary of Defense and Congressman Bill Richardson will replace Madeleine Albright as U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Many of these key foreign-policy players are familiar faces when it comes to Burma-related issues. Both Ms. Albright and Congressman Richardson have traveled to Burma and have met with SLORC officials and Aung San Suu Kyi. Senator Cohen is the sponsor of an amendment, which recently was signed into law, that would allow for economic sanctions against the Burmese government under certain conditions.
In a declaration at the 1990 elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD) stated that all the indigenous races and ethnic groups in the Union must have equal rights and responsibilities.

That no single group shall have more rights and that the rights of no group shall be curbed.

10 embody in the Constitution, the right of autonomous policies within respective regions.

In the interim before a National Convention can be drawn up and ratified, the Hluttaw may legislate for administrative bodies to be formed within existing States.

10 convene the "National Coordination Convention" when democracy can be successfully established with a view to the solidarity of the Indigenous peoples and the Union as a whole and the progress and prosperity of the entire nation. 10 firmly set the foundations of a democratic society.

That each and every group shall have the right to maintain and develop their culture, traditions and language.

That all shall work together for the sovereignty and unity of the nation, the promotion of democracy and the development of Political, Economic, Social, Education, Health and regional developmental matters.

Following the elections, with a clear view of the aspirations of the people for a genuine Multi-Party Democratic Nation, the NLD strove to seek out and understand the aspirations of the indigenous peoples. Following negotiations with the 21 party coalition, "The United Nationalities League for Democracy," a declaration of attitude was issued on August 29, 1990.

Among other things, this declaration called for building of a Union with the racial and political equality of the different peoples, the right to autonomy within the Constitution and the assurance of democracy and human rights.

The call for autonomous policies within individual regions shall not lessen existing rights and privileges and it is accepted, in principle, that full autonomy is allowed in the Hill Regions.

With this principle in mind, the local administrative bodies shall be given adequate authority after comprehensive discussions.

The NLD has not and will never forget, renge on, or deviate from its oath to the people given before and after the elections.

Should an Indigenous race with the States and Divisions desire to have one, regions should be demarcated, with their own peoples, language and a reasonable population.

a) Regarding this and taking into account national and international conditions, it may be necessary to establish Autonomous States or Indigenous Racial states. Should this become the case, there are guidelines put up to the initial AFPFL Convention for the drafting of the 1947 Constitution, by the National hero General Aung San.

b) The existence of clear geographic boundaries.

c) A common culture.

d) The existence of a group of peoples with a common historical background.

e) A reasonable population.

The States within the Union shall, in accordance with the Constitution:

1. have autonomy

2. laws and regulations promulgated within the states shall be in accordance with the Constitution and shall be subject to scrutiny by the Hluttaw should the law or regulation have adverse effects on the Union.

For there to be genuine multi-party democracy, the system of government must be based on democratic principles. Therefore, this calls for the various levels of administration up to the Hluttaw to be staffed by democratically-elected people or groups of people.

The General Secretary of the NLD, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi had, since, July 15th 1989, had discussions with the United Nationalities League for Democracy and it was made clear then that a Federal Union was not for the different States to secede but for the Central government to designate authority to the States and for all to work together in harmony. Therefore, to create a Democratic Union, it is necessary to establish,

a) A Hluttaw comprising members duly elected by a constituency of a certain number of the population, and

b) A Hluttaw comprising members duly elected by an equal number of the population from the States and Divisions.

It must be understood that the Hluttaw members are entrusted with, given the responsibility of being people's representative, by the democratic right of the people.

The two Hluttaws should have the equal responsibility of drafting of Bills and scrutinizing laws, whereas, laws regrading Finance should be drafted by only the Hluttaw.

With our aspirations for National Solidarity and the affairs of the Indigenous Races, we see a necessity for:

- Equal States and Divisions to have their own respective State or Divisional Hluttaw.
- Administrative bodies to be formed within regions which have been granted Special Administrative status.
- Elections of officials at all levels of government.
- Designating legislative, judicial and administrative powers to the various levels of authority in the State, Division and Special Zones, after careful consideration and discussion.
- In so doing, an equitable standard must be set for the State Divisional and Special Zones, so that the affairs of each may be carried out.
- Local officials to have the authority to consider cases of special cultural and traditional matters.
- Freedom of religion.

This stance and beliefs regarding the Indigenous peoples of the Nation must be enshrined in the Constitution because a Constitution is a Charter between a government and the people. It is especially vital for the Constitution to be credible to all the Indigenous peoples for their future and dignity.

For this, there has to be face to face discussions and dialogue among leaders of the Indigenous races, the governing body in authority and leaders from political parties.

Only then would it be possible to have a genuine Multi-Party Democratic State or a Democratic Union as aspired to by the Indigenous and other peoples of the whole nation.
WAVE OF STREET PROTESTS HITS RANGOON

In the largest and most sustained demonstrations against the military regime since 1988, thousands of students took to the streets of Rangoon. The demonstrations began on December 4 when a few hundred young people reacted to the beating of three of their fellow students by police officers. Over several days, the numbers taking part in the protests fluctuated from 200 to 2000, but students continue their demands for disclosure of the police brutality and for the reestablishment of an independent student union. Meanwhile, SLORC tightened security, attempting to disperse the demonstrators by using fire hoses and batons. Universities classes were cancelled, troops were moved into Rangoon and Aung San Suu Kyi was once again temporarily placed under house arrest. General Tin Oo, one of SLORC's top officials, has threatened to "annihilate any internal elements... trying to disrupt the country."

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY PASSES RESOLUTION

On December 12, the 51st session of the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on "the situation of human rights in Myanmar." The resolution, which was adopted by consensus, expresses grave concern over the continued violations of human rights as reported by the Special Rapporteur; the November 9 attack on Aung San Suu Kyi and restrictions placed upon her and other political leaders; and the regime's failure to implement steps toward democracy. It urges the Burmese government to release all political prisoners and to engage in a political dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of the ethnic nationalities.

BURMESE DOCTOR RECEIVES HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

Ma Thida, a medical doctor and member of the National League for Democracy, was one of five recipients of the ninth annual Reebok Human Rights Awards presented in Boston on December 11. Dr. Ma Thida was arrested in 1993 for her work with the democratic opposition in Burma and was convicted in a secret trial of "endangering public tranquility, having contact with illegal organizations and distributing unlawful literature." She has been sentenced to 20 years in prison.

FOREIGN JOURNALISTS ISSUE PROTEST TO SLORC

The Foreign Correspondents Club of Myanmar (FCCM) has strongly condemned the beating of a fellow journalist by members of SLORC's security forces during the student demonstrations in Rangoon. In a resolution passed by members of the organization on December 4, the FCCM stated that it "...condemns the brutal and humiliating act of the security personnel on member U Myo Thant while he was on legal and routine news coverage duty" and has asked that appropriate action be taken against those responsible. The incident occurred on December 3 when Myo Thant, a local correspondent for the Japanese newspaper, Yomiuri Shimbun, was forced from his car and beaten several times on the head, requiring hospitalization.

SLORC SPEAKS

"CLIMBING UP THE PANDEL POLE JUST TO BE VISIBLE TO TRAITORS WITHIN"

By Sein Lun

Bill Clinton was elected to the second-term presidency in the 1996 election so that he can do what he wishes to during the tenure. There is no more third term according to their law. So he now feels free to do what he wishes to. He need not be worried even if the people do not like his activities during the second term. What he wishes to do means acts compelled to be perpetrated by American Presidents to bully and dominate all parts of the world and destroy the welfare of other nations in the interests of America. That is their inherent, historical duty.

Clinton came out in his rare visit to South-East Asia only a few days after his winning the second term. That was his Australia, the Philippines and Thailand trip. Conclusion should be drawn as to what benefits accrued to South-East Asia from the visit of Clinton, leader of a big powerful nation. American President Clinton who arrived in Thailand on 26 November also went to Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok and made a speech. It is learned according to BBC and VOA broadcasts that it is a University where Myanmar expatriates, insurgents, and CIA stooges often assemble and give talks and observe the Four-8s [8 August 1988 mass democracy protests].

He made the speech at a ceremony where Chulalongkorn University conferred an honorary doctorate in economics on him as a person capable of bringing economic progress to America. It would be noteworthy if he, as a holder of doctorate in economics [sic], talked on the economy of America and that of Thailand with wise assessment. As Myanmars [Burmese] know America is the country which has the largest budget deficits, the largest external trade deficits, the greatest number of the unemployed by the crores [millions], the greatest number of persons without houses of their own, and the greatest number of companies which have gone bankrupt... [Ellipsis as Published] would like to hear a piece of news that there are no more unemployed persons and all those without houses of their own have been moved into apartments. Their newspapers still write that America is the biggest debt-ridden country. Just let it be. I do not want to say much about internal affairs of America.

Clinton's Chulalongkorn University speech has driven a wedge to jeopardize solidarity, peace, and security of Asia and stability, peace, and goodwill relations among South-East Asian countries. He talked in his speech about America [Burma] for 17 and a half lines, or in words, 109. However, BBC and VOA exaggerated it in their broadcasts to more than seven pages.

President Clinton lauded Thailand's fight against drug trafficking and promised American's continued support to the cause. It is well worthy of reciting 'well done.' It seemed that Clinton had not read writings of international researchers that narcotics from the Golden Triangle had been taken out through Don Muang Airport in Bangkok, Thailand.

It seemed that Clinton had not known that American diplomats, former American military officers, Western journalists, and CIA agents had been coming in and out of the camps and locations of drug-trafficking. All Myanmars [Burmese] know that there have been reports appearing with photos in the newspapers.

Clinton accused Myanmar military government of being related to narcotic drug-trafficking and of making political coercion and he also unjustly accused her of producing methamphetamines.

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