AN HISTORICAL LOOK

IN HIS OWN WORDS:
Interview with L. E. Bagshawe

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THE ISSUES....

AN HISTORICAL LOOK

The recent English translation of U Tin's *The Royal Administration of Burma* provides the outside world with one of the most detailed views of Burma's early governance and political system available to date. Using actual court records collected from the palace after the fall of the monarchy, this work gives an in-depth account of the Burmese kingdom, the relationship of its Kings to the Buddhist religion and a comparison between the rule of the Kings to that of the British. While one objective of U Tin's effort was to set forth precedents upon which government officials could act, it also documents ideas offered during pre-colonial times on the value of a representational form of government. Published in 1931, *The Royal Administration of Burma* looks at governance in the past, but allows the reader to consider its relevance to the present, and perhaps, its implications for the future.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

Regarded as "one of the unsung heroes of Burmese studies," L.E. (Euan) Bagshawe has had a rich and colorful life, much of it having been spent in Burma. His translation of *The Royal Administration of Burma* is the latest of several works that have significantly contributed to deepening the understanding of the country's history. During his more than two decades in Burma, Bagshawe mastered both Burmese and Pali. His meticulous translations and extensive knowledge reflect not only his scholarly abilities, but his great affection for the country.

BREAKTHROUGH OR BLUFF?

On March 19, 2002, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding that would allow the appointment of an ILO liaison officer to Burma. This followed years of condemnation by ILO members of Burma's continued and systemic use of forced labor. Lauded as a "landmark agreement" and a major "breakthrough" by supporters of the regime, critics viewed it as a ploy for the SPDC to buy time and gain credibility within the international community. Whichever position one takes, important questions remain: What actual import does this agreement hold? And ultimately, what impact do the actions taken by the ILO have on the lives of the people of Burma?
THE ROYAL ADMINISTRATION OF BURMA
by U Tin

IN HIS OWN WORDS
Interview with L. E. Bagshawe

THE ILO AND THE PEOPLE OF BURMA
by U Maung Maung
The Royal Administration

By U Tin

Translated by L. E. Bagshawe

MYAMMA MIN OKCHOKPON SADAN
with Appendix to
King Bodaw Phaya's Yazathat Hkaw "Ameindaw Tangyi"

PART 1
In 1920, the British government of Burma, having been in possession of the country for 35 years, realized that there was much historical information about Burma still extant, but which would not be available for much longer if not organized and written down very soon. The prime mover in this was Taw Sein-hko, the Director of Archaeology, himself Chinese and a distinguished scholar. On his initiative, U Tin was commissioned to write a book on the public administration of Burma under the Kings, to be based upon the records that had been collected from the palace after the fall of Mandalay and eventually brought to Rangoon. The idea, at least in part, was to provide a set of precedents upon which the government’s own officials could act. U Tin [began this project] in 1921.

...Born at Mandalay in 1862, [U Tin was] the son of a court official and received the monastic education normal to sons of his class in the Hpon-gyaw monastery at Amarapura, first as student and then, from 1872, as a novice. After two years as a novice, he came to the notice of the Kinwun Min-gyi, King Min-don’s chief minister through, it is said, his precocious knowledge of the Min-gyi’s own legal work, Addathangeik Dama-that. U Tin remained Kinwun Min-gyi’s protégé so long as the Min-gyi held power.

In 1876 U Tin left the monastery for posts in the palace bureaucracy and succeeded in continuing in these posts even after the Min-gyi lost nearly all his influence, during the reign of King Thi-baw. The Min-gyi had been largely responsible for Thi-baw’s elevation, presumably in the hope that this King would be weak enough for Kinwun Min-gyi to force through his plans for a radical change from the traditional form of government — replacing the ancient court of the Hlutdaw with a more up-to-date sort of bureaucracy, more capable of dealing with the modern world. He had, however, misjudged his power of influencing the King against that of the Queen and, even more, against that of the Queen’s mother.

In 1884 the dynasty finally collapsed under attack from British Burma and the Min-gyi came
to the fore again, collaborating with the new rulers and resuming, more or less, his old position as chief minister, only now to the British authorities instead of to the King. This must have been a carefully calculated piece of policy; he reckoned that the British would not wish to assume direct rule of the territory and would content themselves with appointing a more reasonable king than Thi-baw, whom he would serve as Minister and guide towards his long-cherished goal of instituting in Burma a form of government closer to the forms that he had seen and admired in the West. During this time U Tin worked under Kinwun Min-ghti in the Hlutdaw [the court of ministers].

These plans did not work out, however. The British could not find any member of the royal family who they regarded as suitable: King Thi-baw and his queens had done the work of removing alternatives too well. Direct annexation was decided upon and the Min-ghti went into retirement, although he remained a respected authority on Burmese law to the end of his life.

U Tin remained in government service, originally in the Rangoon secretariat as a translator and archaeological officer, but was transferred in 1895 to the Pagan district, where he remained for the rest of his career, becoming district officer in 1907. He is therefore known as "Pagan" U Tin.

U Tin's book The Royal Administration of Burma was first printed in 1931, two years before his death in 1933. It does not quite take the shape [of the book] that he was commissioned to write, which seems to have been a mere collection of documents which might provide guidance, in the current situations, for action in accordance with precedent. [In addition] he sets himself to give a full account of the Burmese kingdom, starting from first principles in the Pali scriptures, and going on to its history and the relationship of its Kings to the Buddhist religion before giving a very full account of the actual operation of the various departments of government. [The account includes] details of office procedure as well as King Thi-baw's budget for income and expenditure — although he remarks that, in spite of the budget figures, income never matched expenditure. Most of this information is backed by direct quotation of inscriptions, orders, enquiry reports, appointment records and other documents, most of which formed part of the consignments of palace records, which, thirty years earlier, he had been appointed to bring to Rangoon from Mandalay after the annexation. The book finishes with a long comparison of the rule of the Kings with that of the British.

... [U Tin] was a highly educated Burmese scholar, who had worked both for the King's government and for the British and he knew both well from the inside. The Royal Administration of Burma is an account, therefore, complete with documentation, written by one who knew the virtues and the faults of both the indigenous and the foreign governments of an Indo-Chinese kingdom that has few, if any, parallels. He could write of either system, knowing that something different was possible. It is also an intimate picture of the scholarship, with all its faults of pedantry and longeurs, but its virtues too, of a vanished world.... I feel that a good deal of the utility of the work may be to people who are not Burma specialists, but have an interest in analyzing systems of government and society in various countries.

— Euan Bagshawe
If a country is controlled by the authority and power of just one or two men, there are many chances of many and widespread mistakes. It is not right, therefore, that things should be done only on the authority of one or two men. If business is carried on by the king in council with many ministers, there will be no mistakes.... This unity of king and ministers in council is the aparihaniya law that is called samagga — Tin ch. 84

In the same way, ministers who know the wishes and disposition of the king, will know how to increase or reduce the king's well-being. At the same time they will know well also the wishes of the king's subjects and how to increase, or reduce, their well-being. Ministers are, therefore people who come between king and people; they know both sides, both high and low. They can bring them together and work for the well-being of both. A country that is deprived of the estate of ministers cannot stand. At the present time, ministers of the type described above, who are the brokers and soldier of society, are rare indeed. — Tin ch. 88

... The people of the western countries respect the four rules of sangaha and are willing to follow them. Consequently taxes are collected and distributed from these sassamedha taxes according to pursamedha, without either excess or deficit. It is done according to rule, not merely on an estimate made by the ruler of the country. To ensure that nothing detrimental should be done, the sassamedha
Thi-baw, the last king of Burma, surrenders to the British in 1885. ‘The Abdication of King Thi-baw,’ painting by Hwaya Chone.

collections are made after consultation with the assemblies, the one appointed with the people’s consent and the other of the leading families. Out of the money so collected, sufficient for the year’s use is handed over to the Executive and the remainder, so far as there is no immediate use for it, is handed over to the Treasury, subject to the agreement of the Ministers, in whose charge the Treasury rests... — Tin ch. 44

What is called the “law of aparihaniya “is not the sort of law that is imposed by the will of one man, but it is the law that operates for a country’s prosperity, when king and ministers meet in council, consult and debate how the country’s well-being may best be served, making their ruling only after this process. Therefore, if any improvement is ever to come about, before any ruling is made purely on the basis of earlier precedents, possible new rulings must be considered, which may become the precedent for future action, and the views of the various departments, represented in the committee, must be sought for. — Tin ch. 82

Taking into consideration, first, that ruling by agreement in the assemblies leads to a long-term accumulation of wealth, next that laws established by agreement between the King and his ministers on the one hand and the people on the other will be established for a long time; again that without agreement the royal authority, wealth, and laws that have to be made, all have no long life; they will soon be done away with – if we think carefully about all that we have heard, seen, or experienced at various times, we shall see that rule by consensus in an assembly is desirable, is to be longed for, and must be introduced. — Rajadhammasangaha ch. 3
There is evidence in the classics of the custom by which women, who were myozas or ywazas by virtue of their being Queens, princesses, wives of ministers, or ladies-in-waiting, regularly made legal decisions in the towns and villages of their appanages. Queens and princesses had their own ministers and secretaries to examine and make decisions in legal questions. If the decisions of these people were not acceptable, an appeal might be made to the Queen or princess personally.... Myozas and ywazas, wives of ministers and ladies-in-waiting made special appointments of people who were styled hkon, or asi-yin - "bench" or "decision" - to rule on specific cases in their jurisdictions. If the decision of these justices gave rise to dissent, an appeal might be made to the myoza, ywaza, the minister's wife or the lady-in-waiting herself. – Tin ch. 261

Up to the year 1127 of the Burmese era – 1785 of the Christian – the sittans provided many examples in evidence that women worked as heads of villages and were actually in charge.... – Tin ch. 260

...If the Chief Queen were clever, the cities might live in peace and prosperity. Over and above this, it is prescribed in the Dhamathats that the Chief Queen should take part in deciding the law.... Even though a king was perfect in every sort of wisdom, skill and fortune, he might not receive the muddha consecration so long as his Chief Queen was not so qualified.... – Tin ch. 259

It is not only the making of legal decisions into which women enter; they often have the initiative in the most important of all decisions, that of choosing the man who is going to be the next king.... – Tin ch. 262
...King Alaung-hpaya deserves praise for the energy with which he united Burma proper, the Talaing, the Shan and the Khasi countries under one single authority during the eight years of his reign. This was done through

1. The founding of new subordinate kingdoms as he went about in the course of his wars
2. The promotion of the Religion wherever he went, building monasteries, lakes and pagodas in his travels
3. The building of new dams, canals, reservoirs and watercourses and the repair and remodeling of old ones
4. The issue of orders giving Burmese names to towns and villages which previously had Shan and Khasi names; the results of this can still be seen – Tin ch. 313

...In my [i.e. Bodawpaya’s] reign also, I have increased the enrollment of royal attendants and of the musketry and cavalry units by 40 or 50 men in each unit and, from the time when I achieved the summit of power, I have devoted all my efforts, by day and by night, to procure the prosperity of the Religion, that of myself and of my dynasty and that of all the people of this land. In the reigns of past monarchs, who have set up their umbrellas and canopies and ruled this land, the establishment of service groups has been the foundation of the State and through it the State will be perpetuated through the long future and, because of the country's peace, the Religion will flourish. Through this it becomes easy, when the country's affairs need them, to assemble the service units at short notice and by imposing the usual oaths of loyalty to ensure the country’s peace. – Tin ch. 338

King Bimbisara requests that the Buddha-to-be visit his kingdom once he attains Enlightenment.
Several types of intelligence agents were appointed [under King Min-don]. One principal type was for service in distant areas, another for service in the capital and surrounding country. There was a further distinction within these two classes between those recruited for overt service and those taken for secret service. In the overt service there were differences between principal and subordinate permanent attendants, between leading ex-monks, known as "la-byandaro", and junior ex-monks and between the permanent attendants, known as "rajapatika" and the two grades of ex-monks, senior and junior, taken together. In dealing with foreign affairs, he followed the methods of his great-grandfather.

Among those recruited for secret service were monks, children of the Queens and their attendants, senior and junior officials, service men of various units, su-gyi, su-thei and su-nii, along with religious devotees, nuns, masseurs and hairdressers.

For gathering information distant areas had to be visited by agents other than the Queens, their children and ladies-in-waiting. These went about in the capital area. At times when there was a recognized Heir, agents who had to report to the Eastern Palace made their reports daily. Agents in distant areas made their reports in writing to the palace secretariat. Matters concerning the capital that called for long explanations or which were of high importance were also dealt with in written reports. If it were not convenient to present the report personally, it might be handed over to those who had the entree to the King.

— Tin ch. 364

[The athi people] were the original inhabitants of Burma and its true natives. The king with his officials and his service men were people who had come in from elsewhere and had conquered the land. Mr. Taw Sein-hko compares them with the Norman people, who in 1066 AD crossed over from France, invaded England and conquered the island. It was in the same way that the distinction arose between lands for the support of the ahmudan and the athi lands. — Tin ch. 424

... [Avirodhana] means not to go directly against another person; it means that the ruler and those ruled by his government, the monks and the lay people of the country, should never be at odds. If the ruler and the ruled are at odds and if the people find another master more congenial, the ruled will destroy the ruler. If the ruler is exceedingly strong and the ruled can find no way to bring him down, the people may migrate to another country and be lost. — Tin ch. 103
Having spent over 20 years in Burma, L.E. (Euan) Bagshawe has contributed greatly to the field of Burmese history, first through his earlier translation of *The Maniyadandbon of Shin Sandalinka*, which chronicles the early part of the first Ava Dynasty, and now with his most recent effort, U Tin's *The Royal Administration of Burma*. Here he talks about his life and his latest work.
BURMA DEBATE • Your connection to Asia – particularly India and Burma – goes back several generations. Can you tell us about your ties to that part of the world?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • My paternal grandfather ran a tea estate in Cachar, in Assam, near the Lushai Hills and the Burma border – my Uncle George was an army engineer, mostly in Burma, and another uncle died of malaria contracted working on the Gokteik bridge. My mother's family was West Indian – originally settlers in Barbados, who later moved to Guiana.

We had quite a connection in India. As I said, my grandfather planted tea in Assam. He was married in 1865 and took his wife out to the tea estate and that, of course was in the days before the Suez Canal and you took a sailing ship round Africa. It took them four months from London to Calcutta on the ship – no land at all for four months, no interaction with the outside world. Even when they got to Calcutta, it was another three weeks journey to the estate. The river was too low to get their boats up and they finished on an elephant and a horse. My grandmother's family was very heavily involved with India — she had four brothers there. Her grandfather, at the age of eighteen, went out to join the Company's army and a few months later got involved in a badly mismanaged campaign against Haider Ali. He was wounded and spent two days lying out on the battlefield before Haider's French allies picked him up. He then spent four years as a prisoner in Bangalore.

BD • Didn't you also serve in India?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Yes, for 12 years, before I went to Burma. I was in the Indian civil service as Assistant Collector, First Division, Dharwar, which was then in the old Bombay Province; now it's in Karnataka. Then I got stuck with the horrible job of being Assistant Secretary to the Governor. Very dull.

BD • You later spent several years in Burma. What were you doing there?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • I went to Burma in 1952 to work at ICI [Imperial Chemical Industries]. When that was nationalized under Ne Win and taken over by the (BEDC), Burma Economic Development Corporation, I found myself working under Captain Barber of the Navy, a very nice man. Then Aung Gyi fell from Ne Win's favor in 1964 and Tin Pe took over such matters. Everything became the People's Stores Corporation and we were out. After that I served as the commercial secretary in the British Embassy until 1969.

An appointment in Burma had one big advantage — it was difficult to move you away if you didn't want to be moved. An application for an entry visa for a replacement could so easily go astray. Plus, I was very comfortable there.

I met my wife Sallie in Rangoon in 1958. She was working at the American Embassy at that time. I was involved in the Rangoon Amateur Dramatic Society and was cast in a play – so was Sallie. They introduced us and said "You're engaged". And it worked out that way.

BD • When did you begin working on translations?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • I started translating years ago... 1976 maybe.

BD • You recently translated The Royal Administration of Burma by Pagan Wundauk U Tin from the original Burmese to English. Could you tell us about the book?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • I came across the book back in the 1970s when I was studying at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. My supervisor was Anna Allott and we were deciding what I was going to write my thesis on. She suggested that I find some subject from U Tin’s book. I had a look at it and decided that it was too difficult, so I wrote on the introduction of Western education to Burma instead. But I was
intrigued by the book, and I started working on the translation in a desultory manner.

Pagan Wundauk U Tin started life as a civil servant sometime around the mid 1870s under the patronage of the Kinwun Min-gyi during the reign of King Min-don. After the British took over in 1885 and sent King Thi-baw (Min-don's son) away, the Min-gyi acted as a sort of officiating Prime Minister while the British made up their minds about what on earth they were going to do with the place. U Tin worked with the Min-gyi during this period. Finally, when the British decided to annex Burma, U Tin joined the British civil service. So he knew both administrations, the British and that of the Burmese kings.

U Tin retired in 1929 or thereabouts and was commissioned by the government to put together a collection of documents about the Burmese administration that would serve as a plan of action to guide the British administration. Bit late in the day, but still. He got down and wrote it out in five volumes producing *The Royal Administration of Burma*. There really isn't any parallel to such a detailed work on the administration of a Southeast Asian kingdom written by somebody who knew it from the inside and who also knew alternatives.

**BD** • What was U Tin's purpose in writing the book?

**EUAN BAGSHAWE** • He was interested in the surviving records of the court because one of his first jobs under the British administration had been to gather all the surviving documents of the palace. The court had been destroyed and the King had been deported. Some of the documents had been looted, some of them burned. U Tin collected all that he could find and took them down to Rangoon where they were stored. After he retired he was given the task of making a coherent book of it. He had volumes of information, but he was a great scholar and he couldn't bear to leave anything out. The book was meant to be a collection of documents that could be used as precedents by British magistrates, under the British Burma government.

**BD** • So these are the actual laws and regulations—it is not an interpretation. U Tin just recorded how they ruled?

**EUAN BAGSHAWE** • Right. It sets out both the scriptural and traditional basis of the royal government and the actual procedure for how submissions went from the *Hlutdaw*, the traditional court of four senior ministers who advised the King and executed his orders, to the palace and came back with the King's orders to be put into proper form and final approval at the palace and promulgated.

**BD** • You mentioned that U Tin worked under the Kinwun Min-gyi. What is revealed in U Tin's book about Kinwun Min-gyi's role during this critical period of Burma's history?

**EUAN BAGSHAWE** • We think of the Kinwun Min-gyi as King Min-don's chief minister, which he was later, but earlier he had been a junior minister, a Wundauk, in charge of border posts down the river, along the frontier of the annexed territory and the kingdom. So he presumably had some contact with British officials down there. Then in 1872 King Min-don promoted him to the rank of Wungyi, a full member of the *Hlutdaw*, and sent him to England to convey a letter and gifts to Queen Victoria. The gifts were a massive gold and ruby girdle and bracelets. I don't know what became of them—maybe Prince Edward's creditors got them. According to the records of the time—newspapers and so on—they were valued at around eighty thousand pounds, which was real money in those days—a few million now. He also brought a gold and ruby *salwe* for Prince Edward. I think that must have gone straight to the creditors.

Anyway, the mission was in trouble at the time because the British Governor General and his staff ruling in Calcutta could never reconcile themselves to the fact that the Burmese kingdom owed them no duty whatsoever. It had never been a tributary to the Mogul Emperor in Delhi, like the Indian princely states. And Calcutta hated the idea of any contact between...
the Burmese kingdom and London. They were totally in the wrong all the time, but the India Office in London never had the courage to override them. Consequently, when the Kinwun Min-gyi's mission reached Rangoon, the Chief Commissioner, Ashley Eden, made every possible difficulty that he could think up. The Burmese had bought a special ship for the mission to travel on, but Eden refused to let it leave. Eventually they had to slip quietly on board a Henderson Line ship, the "Tenasserim," and sail on that.

EUAN BAGSHAWE • How common was it for people of the rank of the Kinwun Min-gyi to make a trip of this kind and later to write a book about it?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • This was the first diplomatically accredited mission and the first published journal. I don't know whether the mission was Min-don's own idea, or who might have given it to him. It could have been originally from the Kanaung Prince, Min-don's brother and murdered heir, or from U Hpo Hlaing, his protégé, or even perhaps from Edmond Jones, the King's English agent in Rangoon. The essential thing was to set up relationships with the outside world, bypassing Calcutta, with which the kingdom's treaties were established. This was the necessary first step in getting Burma recognized as a proper modern state. It would also help in getting ideas for reforming the administration along modern lines, with modern ministries, instead of making the four ministers of the Hlutdaw jointly responsible for everything.

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Shortly before the British took over, around 1873. This is the account of the mission and the changes that took place.

EUAN BAGSHAWE • You said Kinwun Min-gyi was influenced by the West. Was that a result of what he saw while in England?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • It's written in the mission diary, where he gives accounts of visiting the [British] Parliament in session and so on. He was definitely very interested both in Western administration — including the part played by journalists in opening up government — and in Western industry. He was in England and France for over a year. He was reckoning that the whole system should somehow be transplanted to Burma.

EUAN BAGSHAWE • There is another book written by U Hpo Hlaing that also discusses ideas on government reform. Can you tell us about that?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • U Hpo Hlaing's Rajadhammasangaha written in the 1870s gives some of these ideas.... The table of contents shows its scope — "seven rules for increasing the prosperity of the country" — "the power of a monarch as against the power of a community — the benefit of ruling by consensus...".

U Hpo Hlaing became a prominent but refractory member of Min-don's entourage during his youth, long before Min-don became king. He was a son of the Yindaw Wungyi whom King Tharrawaddy killed in a fit of bad temper. After that, Min-don protected U Hpo Hlaing.
U Hpo Hlaing must have been considering his book for some time and finished it in a hurry for presentation to Thi-baw only six weeks after Thi-baw ascended the throne. It is only indirectly concerned with Western forms of government. Rather, it focuses on setting out the principles of government as laid down in the Pali scriptures and showing how the Burmese administration had departed from them — the main difference lying between the rule of a single sovereign and the joint responsibility of a group. U Hpo Hlaing was thinking of a sort of constitutional monarchy, but I don't find much thought about the selection or election of ministers. Of course, the form of government that was working in England at that time was not all that democratic by modern standards.

EUAN BAGSHAWE • I think there may have been a rivalry between two points of view — Hpo Hlaing's was based on the Pali scriptures and the Kinwun Min-gyi's was based on his experience in the West. U Tin's 1930 book reproduces much of U Hpo Hlaing's Rajadhatnmasangaha, but in shorter form.

BD • Did U Hpo Hlaing travel with the Kinwun Min-gyi?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • No — he wasn't on the mission; he was in prison, for daring to say that beer might be useful if not used to excess!

BD • Did King Min-don or King Thi-baw try to institute these democratic reforms presented by Kinwun Min-gyi and U Hpo Hlaing prior to the British annexing Burma?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Min-don introduced many reforms during his reign — money salaries instead of appanages, a currency and a formal system of taxation — but I doubt if he ever had the slightest idea of giving up any of his personal power. He probably couldn't even imagine a king with less than absolute power.

BD • Was Min-don aware that the Kinwun Min-gyi was promoting these reforms?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • I imagine that great care was taken not to let Min-don know about what was being prepared for his successor — but it would not have been easy to escape his spy network.

The ministers must have started working on their ideas for reform before King Min-don died, but they had to wait for him to die before they could try to put them into effect. It was after his death and the accession of King Thi-baw, who was essentially the choice of the Kinwun Min-gyi, that the ministers of the Hlutdaw tried to assume the administration. I doubt if, at first, the new king had any idea that they were trying to limit his powers. The Min-gyi picked Thi-baw out as a very young, weak and useless king, over whom he thought he would be able to pull anything and get his
reforms into practice. But it didn't work. Whether that was because they tried too much at once, or whether it was because they didn't have the infrastructure necessary — I don't know.

BD • Who was the driving force behind the reforms?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • The Kinwun Min-gyi. U Hpo Hlaing was dismissed from office very soon after presenting his book to the King [Thi-baw]. Whether that was Thi-baw's own idea or, if not, whose it was, I don't know.

BD • What is interesting is that they even tried these reforms. Would you say that it was the civil service trying to drive through the reforms, assisted by the monarchy?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • It wasn't really the civil service. The civil service and its obstruction would have been half the trouble. Basically it was just some ministers trying to push it through.

The Kinwun Min-gyi was the most prominent minister — the most influential of the four ministers of the Hlutdaw — but his position depended almost entirely on the King's grace.

I don't know how far these reforms were brought by the court and the bureaucracy, but there was a sort of basic democracy in Burma's tradition. For instance both military and civil appointments had to be accepted by the group over which they would be in charge before they could be confirmed, but this of course was mostly a matter of personalities, not policies.

BD • And how long-lived were these ministries?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Well, they started setting them up within six weeks of Min-don's death — notably on "orders from the Hlutdaw" not "orders from the King" so they must have gotten the whole scheme ready.

BD • Why was Kinwun Min-gyi so progressive?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Perhaps because of his contacts with the British. On his mission, he saw what was happening in the Industrial Revolution in Britain, and he decided that that's the way that Burma would have to go.

BD • Did he think that it would save the monarchy in the long run?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • He hoped it would, I suppose, as a constitutional monarchy. And it didn't work — unlike in Siam.

BD • In The Royal Administration of Burma, does U Tin give any analysis of these reforms?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • No, he just gives his account of the new ministries that were set up, but it is noticeable early in [his book's] account of the general principles of government that he is very close to Hpo Hlaing's book.

BD • What influence did the British have?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • At this time, very little. After Thi-baw got rid of all the Princes, the British residency pulled out and they didn't have any representation at court at all.

BD • Was Thi-baw in favor of these reforms?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Queen Supayalat [Thi-baw's wife] certainly wasn't and she counted!

BD • Many people outside Burma believe that the Burmese have no history of democratic ideals and that there is no reason to feel that democracy would take hold in Burma. Yet there have been these writings.

EUAN BAGSHAWE • It is very interesting, the kinds of precedents on which decisions were made. The first translation that I did was Shin Sandalinka. It was an account that was written in 1770 by a monk named Shin Sandalinka about Min Yaza, who was chief minister to three successive kings of Ava in the 13th and 14th centuries. It's an account of various crises that arose and the advice that he gave, based on scriptures and precedents, which might be
EUAN BAGSHAWE • At that time, yes. Then, of course, the Maw Shans came in and things rather collapsed for a while, until the Pegu kingdom, which was partly Mon, moved north. If the kingdom had stayed down there, it would have been different, but in 1635 King Thalun decided to take his capital back to Ava, remote from the world. Why he did it I don’t know. I suspect it might have been a great mistake. He was a bit of a control freak. It is a lot easier to keep control of an agricultural population depending on a system of irrigated land rather than a rain-fed country in the south. Things might have been very different if the capital had remained in Hanthawaddy.

BD • How so?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Ava was not a trading city that had many contacts with the outside world. A government in Hanthawaddy or Syriam, on the other hand, would have learned the sophistication to deal with the outside world, which the Siamese kingdom learned and Ava never did. And by the time Min-don started trying to, it was too late, they were too set in their ways.

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Oh yes, The Royal Administration of Burma has been reprinted by the government press over and over. It’s a basic historical source.

BD • There are some interesting topics in this book, such as women in the government of towns and villages. Women don’t play a prominent role under the current regime – what about during this period?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • U Tin was specifically instructed by the British Burma government to write on the position of women. That was one of the paints he was supposed to bring out.

BD • Were parts of Burma ruled by women at one time?

EUAN BAGSHAWE • Yes. The most notable women rulers were Shin Sawnit and Shin Sawbu in the sixteenth century. They were the daughters of a Talaing king, Binnyaparan, and in the mid-1600s Shin Sawbu was given as a wife/hostage to King Thihathu in Ava, where she was kept for some time after the death of her husband. Meanwhile Binnyaparan died and was succeeded by Mawdaw, who was married to Sawnit. He died quite soon and Sawnit took over. A year later again Shin Sawbu got away from Ava and deciding to reclaim her rights as elder sister, got an army together and advanced on Pegu. Sawbu’s advisers suggested that she had better give way and she left the city as her formidable sister entered it. Sawbu then proceeded to reign for seventeen years, during which she gave the Shwe Dagon most of its present shape. There were other legendary queens too, almost all, I think in the south.

EUAN BAGSHAWE • The chief thing is how closely the present arrangement is to the administration under the kings. Among the orders of King Bodaw-hpaya, for instance, there are two striking parallels: Bodaw-hpaya says the army is the basic structure of the country, on which everything depends. Another interesting point is that he reports that Taw Sein Hko, the Director of Archaeology in Burma, who was Chinese and a highly respected scholar in his time, maintained, somewhere or other, that the king and his ausgi, who were the hereditary military families, looked to him just like an army of occupation in a conquered country. The kings, particularly Min-don-min, also depended very strongly on their intelligence services, which is another parallel with today.
At the March 2002 Governing Body of the International Labour Organization [ILO], an agreement was announced between the ILO and the Burmese military regime for the establishment of an ILO liaison office in Rangoon. The announcement fell far short of the ILO request made last November for a permanent representative and an independent legal ombudsman. The Governing Body expressed the hope, however, that the liaison office would quickly evolve into a Permanent Representative’s Office and reiterated its request to the Burmese government that it allow the creation of an independent legal ombudsman. It also called again for an independent investigation into the alleged murder of seven members of the Shan community who had complained to authorities about forced labor. If the regime were to agree to a permanent office and the ombudsman, victims of forced labor may finally have a relatively safe place to go inside the country to report violations and ask for help. In the view of the Federation of Trade Unions- Burma (FTUB), this would also be a small, but not insignificant, step toward forcing the Burmese military regime to end the practice of forced labor once and for all.

The regime, with the support of ASEAN, China, and a few other governments, attempted to characterize the announcement to allow an ILO liaison officer in Rangoon as a “landmark agreement” and a “breakthrough.” It also used this opportunity to try and set the stage for removing the measures adopted by the ILO last year under Article 33 of its constitution by proposing that the issue of Burma be placed on the agenda for the June 2002 International Labour Conference.

Never before in the ILO’s eighty-five year history had Article 33 been invoked against a member state because of its utter disregard of repeated ILO entreaties to end the massive violation of a worker right — in this case the widespread use of forced labor by the mili-
The absence of cooperation by the regime over many years, combined with an unrelenting flow of information confirming that the practice was continuing unabated, forced the ILO to take this unprecedented step.

The regime and its Asian allies were unsuccessful in their attempts. The Governing Body rejected the proposal for a separate agenda item for the upcoming annual Conference. The only discussion of Burma and forced labor that will take place in June will be at a special session of the Committee on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CACR). The earliest, therefore, that any discussion on the removal of the Article 33 measures could take place would be in June 2003.

Despite the fact that the Article 33 measures should remain in place at least until then, many argue that very little has actually been accomplished since the measures went into effect in November 2000. They also argue that the agreement to appoint a liaison officer does not signal a significant "breakthrough" but is merely an attempt by the regime to gain kudos from the international community.

Indeed, a year and a half later, the ILO Committee of Experts reports, "none of the three recommendations formulated by the Commission of Inquiry...have been met. Despite longstanding promises, as well as the Government's assured good will, the [relevant laws] have not yet been amended." The Experts go on to note that the administrative order to ignore the laws "has not stopped the exaction of forced labor, in particular by the military. There is no indication that the necessary specific and concrete instructions and budgetary provisions have been adopted or even prepared with a view to effectively replacing forced labor by offering decent wages and employment conditions to freely attract any workers needed. Finally, there is no indication that any person responsible for the exaction of forced labour and often concomitant crimes was sentenced or even prosecuted..."

Nonetheless, it is the view of the FTUB that the ILO process, while not having produced the desired result of the elimination of forced labor to date, has had a number of positive effects. It is crucial that the ILO remains steadfast if this heinous practice is to be brought to an end.
Over the years, the involvement of the ILO has given moral support to such organizations as the FTUB. This has enabled us to work cooperatively with ethnic human rights organizations and provide assistance and solidarity to emerging independent trade unions in a number of the ethnic areas. These fledgling organizations often represent the first civil society institutions to emerge over the past forty years. Such representative organizations will play a constructive role in the process of political normalization by helping to address the particular concerns of their respective communities.

Raising the Profile of Trade Unions and Other Pro-Democracy Groups

Assisting the ILO in its investigation of forced labor in Burma has empowered independent human rights groups and trade unions. The FTUB, for example, was instrumental in identifying witnesses for the 1997 Commission of Inquiry hearings and arranging meetings for Commission members when they visited the region. We have provided a steady flow of detailed information documenting the inability of the central government to pay for its bloated military, regional commanders employ forced labor to operate military camps, to grow food for soldiers, and generate income for their units. This practice has destroyed village life in many ethnic communities, forced many villagers to flee across the border and has produced tremendous hardship and trauma for Burma’s ethnic minorities. Much of this was little known to the outside world until the ILO began its reporting.
widespread use of forced labor throughout Burma, often obtained at great personal risk. This information has stood up to international scrutiny and has helped the ILO develop an accurate picture of the nature of forced labor in Burma.

Maintaining pressure is not only crucial for the elimination of forced labor, but also for the potential success of the 'talks.'

Prospects for Greater Accountability

The report of the High Level Team devotes a number of paragraphs to the absence of an independent judiciary in Burma. Without one, the report goes on to say, there is no credibility with the victims of forced labor and with the international community that the legal system can provide redress. The FTUB supports the HLT proposal to appoint a "person or body of persons with the required independence and national and international credibility as well as being of unquestioned integrity — an ombudsman to whom complaints regarding forced labour could be submitted and who would have a mandate and the necessary means to conduct direct investigations without fear or favor with the required confidence of all parties concerned." The urgent need for an independent ombudsman was dramatized at the March 2002 Governing Body meeting. The Burmese government representative insisted that the allegation that seven members of the Shan community were murdered because they complained to authorities about being forced to labor was a total fabrication invented by the regime's enemies. The Governing Body did not find this account of the murders believable and proposed an independent investigation into them by the head of the HLT, Sir Ninian Stephen. The government has yet to accept this proposal.

The establishment of a legal ombudsman would be an important first step in addressing the fear of the victims of forced labor to speak out about their experience and seek legal redress. Until progress is made on this front, the prospects for the elimination of forced labor are bleak.

Maintaining International Pressure on the Regime to End Its Use of Forced Labor and to Negotiate a Political Normalization

Only weeks before the November 2000 Governing Body was to decide whether to stop the Article 33 measures from taking effect, the military regime entered into secret talks with National League for Democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. It is the view of the FTUB that the specter of economic sanctions was a primary factor forcing the regime to take this step.

Now, well over a year and a half later, the talks continue with very little concrete signs of progress toward an agreement on a process for political normalization. The release from house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi is a first step and may be an indication that these talks could evolve into a full-scale dialogue leading to a political transition. Just as the military regime only entered these talks under tremendous and growing international pressure, however, the talks will produce the desired result only if international pressure is maintained. Despite a campaign within the ILO to step down pressure led by the military regime itself with the support of its few friends, the ILO has steadfastly stayed the course. This has enhanced the international image of the ILO.

Maintaining pressure is not only crucial for the elimination of forced labor but also for the potential success of the 'talks.' Without pressure, the regime will not consider doing what it has clearly demonstrated over the years it does not want to do; end its use of forced labor, allow the country to return to civilian rule and respect basic human rights of the Burmese people.

U Maung Maung is the General-Secretary of the Federation of Trade Unions-Burma.

Brian Joseph of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) spoke on stolen elections with Burma as a case study at the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum, School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS), on April 9th.

On April 8th, Burmese refugee Rocky Htoe Thein and John Knaus of the NED delivered a presentation entitled "Burma: The Current Situation and A Refugee's Perspective" at SAIS.

The Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Meeting took place April 4th-7th at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. Among the Burma scholars who spoke at a special panel honoring Professor Josef Silverstein were Christina Fink, Martin Smith, Gustaf Houtman and Hazel Lang.

At the March 20th Burma Roundtable Jack Dunford, Director of the Burma Border Consortium (BBC), gave a briefing on the Thai border situation.

The Washington Burma Roundtable is co-sponsored by Human Rights Watch/Asia, Jesuit Refugee Service, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Refugees International. For more information contact Human Rights Watch by phone: (202) 612-4321 or by fax: (202) 612-4333.

NEW ENGLAND – The New England Burma Roundtable is an informal group of individuals and organizations working to promote human rights and democracy in Burma. Meetings are held the second Monday of every month. For information contact Simon Billeness of Trillium Asset Management by phone: (617) 423-6655 Ext. 225 or by email: sbilleness@trilliuminvest.com

NEW YORK, NY – On April 5th, Columbia University’s Graduate School for International and Public Affairs (SIPA) hosted an evening of Burmese culture and politics, which included the screening of an experimental documentary, a photography exhibit, a literary reading and dance and musical performances by U Win Maung of *Shwe Man Tin Maung*, followed by a panel of artists and human rights activists. SIPA Assistant Dean and faculty member Thomas Lansner gave an introductory address. The evening was co-sponsored by: The Asia Society; The Free Burma Coalition; and Columbia University’s SIPA, East Asian Institute, Southeast Asian Students Initiative, The Center for Human Rights and The Conflict Resolution Program.

The New York Roundtable holds periodic meetings of organizations and individuals interested in Burma. For more information contact the Burma UN Service Officer by phone: (212) 338-0048 or by fax: (212) 338-0049.

SEATTLE, WA – The Burma Interest Group is a non-partisan forum attended by representatives of NGOs, businesses, academia and other interested parties that meets monthly to discuss Burma-related topics. For more information please contact Larry Dohrs by phone: (206) 784-5742 or fax: (206) 784-8150 or email: burma@u.washington.edu.

SAN FRANCISCO – The Bay Area Burma Roundtable meets once a month and brings together American and Burmese activists and students from cities around the Bay Area. For more information please contact Shannon Wolfe by phone: (415) 255-7296 ext. 233, or by email: shannon@globalexchange.org.

LONDON – On May 7th, Desmond Kelly gave a slide and video presentation entitled ‘Kelly’s Burma Campaign,’ detailing his life growing up in Shan State and his father Norman Kelly’s obstruction of the Japanese advance into India, on which he is currently completing a book.

The Britain-Burma Society meets seven times a year to focus on cultural and historical issues and facilitate academic exchange. For more information contact Derek Brooke-Wavell by phone: 44-118-947-6874 or by fax: 44-118-954-6201 or email: d.wavell@ntlworld.com.

CANADA – The Toronto Burma Roundtable meets monthly to discuss issues relating to Burma and to plan educational and political events. For more information contact Elizabeth Shepherd by phone: (416) 465-3458 or email: mandalay@sprint.ca.

NETHERLANDS – The Netherlands Burma Roundtable is held once every two months with the goal of updating organizations and individuals on current events and activities surrounding Burma. For more information contact The Burma Centrum Nederland by phone: 31-20-671-69-52 or by fax: 31-20-671-35-13.
INSIDE WASHINGTON

PRESIDENT BUSH SHARES SUU KYI’S HOPE FOR *NEW DAWN*

Welcoming the democracy leader’s May 6th release from house arrest in a press statement issued the same day, U.S. President George W. Bush encouraged reconciliation and a move towards democracy. The president urged all parties to ‘press ahead with the urgent work of restoring the rule of law and basic political and civil rights for all Burmese.’ The statement vowed to monitor the situation in Burma, as well as to confer with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan and the European Union (EU) on how to catalyze Burma’s democratic progress.

HOUSE PULLS FOR RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONER

In a letter addressed to General Than Shwe, members of the U.S. Congress called for the release of Burmese student leader Min Ko Naing, and all 1,800 political prisoners. The April letter notes that the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) has ruled that the 12-year detention of Min Ko Naing is arbitrary, and that his continued detention flouts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Burma is a signatory. The letter received the bipartisan support of 49 representatives, including Benjamin Gilman (R-NY) and Dennis Kucinich (D-OH).

BURMA DEEMED DECERTIFIED BY U.S. GOVERNMENT

On February 25th, the U.S. State Department announced the decertification of the Government of Burma due to the country’s limited counter-narcotics efforts in 2001. Citing Burma’s ongoing poppy cultivation, production and trafficking of opium and methamphetamine, money laundering, and failure to implement counter-drug laws or extradite drug criminals, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Rand Beers termed Burma’s counter-narcotics performance ‘decidedly mixed.’ Burma, Cambodia, Haiti and Afghanistan were the only four of 24 drug producing and transit nations that failed to gain certification (though Haiti and Cambodia were granted waivers in this year’s review). The current ruling, which is based on goals adumbrated in the 1988 United Nations Drug Convention, prevents the U.S. from voting on World Bank or International Monetary Fund assistance to Burma.

SENATOR MCCONNELL SLAMS JUNTA IN U.S. BUDGET HEARING

U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) spoke out against the ‘military thugs’ in Rangoon in an April 24th Senate Committee on Appropriations hearing regarding the State Department’s budget request for 2003. Voicing skepticism on the regime’s openness to democratic transition, McConnell suggested the U.S. take a harder line of policy against the SPDC. ‘This is a regime that should be on the ‘axis of evil’ list alongside Iraq, Iran and North Korea. And it may be time to increase pressure on the junta through a ban on all imports to the United States.’ Acknowledging that the administration ‘is keen on conducting HIV/AIDS programs,’ the senator stressed the need to consult with the National League for Democracy (NLD) on any decisions.

BUSINESS WATCH

PLUMMETING KYAT RESUSCITATED AFTER SUU KYI’S RELEASE

Burma’s notoriously failing kyat, which fell to an all-time low of 1,200 to the dollar in early May, has rallied to 820 after the release of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi on May 6th. The news of Suu Kyi’s release coincided with the price of gold dropping by a quarter by May 7th.

BURMA PERMITS ACCESS TO WORLD WIDE WEB

In March, an internet service provider began accepting public subscribers to its new BaganNet internet service that permits the use of email accounts and access to around 860 carefully screened sites on the worldwide web. Bagan Cybertech, a ‘semi-government’ company that is a subsidiary of Burma’s defense ministry, and its private joint venture partner Maykha charge a hefty fee for their services, which allow access to airline, hotel chain and bank sites, in addition to the Mercedes-Benz, World Bank and U.S. Federal Reserve homepages. Despite Burma’s foundering economy, BaganNet expects its number of customers to balloon to 10,000 subscribers by the year’s end. Maykha, which is partially owned by Dr. Ye Naing Wynn, the son of Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, has been granted deals from three government ministries to establish VSAT networks for over 40 universities and government facilities, as well as for five private banks.

INDIA COURTS BURMA, THAILAND IN TRANSPORTATION DEAL

During his April 5-7 visit to Burma, India’s External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh proposed the construction of a highway that would connect the two countries, as well as Thailand. Singh, Thai foreign minister Surakiart Sathirathai, who was also in Burma at the time, and State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Foreign Affairs Minister U Win Aung also discussed bilateral relations in hydroelectricity and gas exploration. India and Burma have recently teamed up in a satellite communications venture, oceanographic surveys, and medical and education exchanges, as well as in a highway venture.

PLANS FOR YUNNAN-MANDALAY AIRLINK TAKE OFF

Chinese Yunnan Airways inaugurated their airlink from Kunming to Mandalay in early April, in a move expected to enhance economic cooperation and tourism. Yunnan Airways is the first foreign airline to fly to Mandalay, the country’s second largest city.

BURMA LEVELS RESTRICTIONS ON IMPORTS

In an effort to limit trade imbalance, the SPDC has suspended trade import licenses of all non-Burmese companies. According to Colonel Kyaw Thein, the government commenced its policy in January when it refused renewal of expired permits. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Japanese, South Korean and Indian governments have reportedly encouraged the junta to renegotiate on their ruling. The chairman of the border trade committee of the Thai Chamber of Commerce reported that Thai companies will be minimally affected by Burma’s new trading restrictions, citing the relative lack of large Thai importing businesses in Burma.
BURMA DEBATE

BRIEFINGS AND DEVELOPMENTS

AUNG SAN SUU KYI RELEASED FROM HOUSE ARREST

On May 6th, Burma's military regime released Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest, ending her nineteen-month detainment. Suu Kyi stated that the lifting of restrictions was unconditional and that she is free to travel as she pleases. Hundreds of supporters mobbed the democracy leader when she arrived at the National League for Democracy (NLD) Rangoon office on Monday after her release. The Nobel peace laureate visited a Buddhist shrine later that day, and received foreign diplomats in her lakeside home on Tuesday.

ASEAN SPLITS WITH EAST ASIA IN SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) expressed approval of a resolution passed by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights that castigated the military regime, while China and Japan considered it too harsh. Diplomat Mohd Johar Ahmad Jazri of Malaysia, speaking on behalf of ASEAN, stated that the draft on Burma "had been crafted in an accurate, balanced and unbiased manner." Said Chinese diplomat Shen Yongxiang, "Human rights must not be used to put pressure on developing countries and to intervene in their internal affairs." Both Japan and China criticized the resolution as inaccurate and incomplete.

BORDER HOSTILITIES RAGE BENEATH VENEER OF BURMA-THAI AMITY

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's tolerant take on Burma's military regime was undermined in early May as border violence sparked a bitter exchange of accusations from both sides of the margin. Even as Bangkok feted Gen. Maung Aye during the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) vice-chairman's four-day, late-April visit, bilateral ties frayed in the fallout of hostilities surrounding the capture of two United Wa Sate Army (UWSA) fighters suspected of scouting for narcotics trafficking. The UWSA then penetrated the border and traded mortar and cannon fire with their Third Army troops.

The Burmese regime recently claimed that Thai military elements are attempting to subvert the pacific relations that Rangoon and Bangkok have pursued in recent months. Thai top brass has refuted that the Third Army sought to "stir up [border] tensions" — as the junta accused — and has blamed the violent clash on UWSA provocation. On April 30th, Thaksin urged the Thai military to overlook unintentional border incursions by Burmese troops and their allies, unless narcotics trafficking is suspected.

During his visit, Gen. Maung Aye vowed an immediate crackdown on the UWSA, while Thaksin promised that Thailand would bar Shan troops from launching military assaults against the Tatmadaw from the Thai side of the border.

ILO TO OPEN RANGOON OFFICE

Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has permitted the International Labour Organization (ILO) to station a liaison officer in Rangoon to monitor the country's practice of forced labor. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in March in Geneva by representatives from the ILO announced that the SPDC liaison officer will be posted in Burma by June 2002. While attempts were made by the regime to herald this development as a reason to reconsider ILO sanctions against Burma, the UN body agreed that such a discussion would not be a topic on the agenda for discussion at its annual conference in June.

EU CALLS FOR TOUGHER SANCTIONS ON BURMA

An April 11th vote in the European Parliament advocated tougher European Union (EU) sanctions on Burma if the SPDC-NLD talks fail to progress in the next six months. The resolution, which also demanded the immediate release of NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest, urged the 15 EU member states to "strengthen economic sanctions and consider an investment ban."

HIV TESTING MANDATORY FOR BURMESE MIGRANTS

Pushing forward with plans to repatriate the over 500,000 Burmese migrants living in Thailand, the Burmese and Thai governments have agreed to screen all illegal workers for HIV, according to an April 9th BBC report. Thai Foreign Affairs Minister Surakiart Sathirathai announced that those who test positive will be separated from the other workers during the repatriation process. Thailand, which has been eager to return illegal Burmese migrants, finally penned an agreement with the Burmese junta during a transportation conference that took place in Rangoon earlier this month.

ANNOUNCING BURMA DEBATE ON-LINE

The Open Society Institute/Soros Foundations is pleased to announce the launching of our on-line version of Burma Debate. Beginning August 1, 2002, you can find monthly postings of our magazine at www.burmadebate.org. Our on-line version will highlight original features by Burmese writers, translations of Burmese-language articles and literature, interviews, op-eds and more.

We will continue to publish Burma Debate in print on a bi-annual basis with Spring and Fall issues.
VOICES OF BURMA

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, on her May 6th, 2002 release from house arrest:

"I hope to be able to carry out my duties to my country, my people and my party in the best possible way... I can go wherever I like. The road to my house has not yet been opened, but this is decided in agreement between two sides because we thought, for the time being, it would be easier for us to cope that way."

(Kyodo News, May 6, 2002)

"A lot of the time I [was under house arrest, I] was doing party work because the senior members of the NLD had access to me, so through them we were carrying on with our party activities. Running a political party under the present circumstances is not an easy job; it is very much a full-time job."

"In the past 18 months, the gains have been mainly by the NLD— we have gained better opportunities to do our work. Some of our offices have reopened and some political prisoners have been released and, of course, a lot of the political prisoners are members of our NLD. What we want is the freedom of all political parties to operate in accordance with the law and exercise their rights. Not just our party, but other parties as well."

(Times Online, May 10, 2002)

"There are many things that we have to do at the same time, but I have to say that our main priority is the release of all political prisoners who still remain in jail."

"Matters of policy [on humanitarian aid] remain unchanged because conditions remain unchanged—we have always said that the minimum necessary requirement (for aid) is independent monitoring, and certainly the National League for Democracy should be part of the independent monitoring process, as a basic requirement."

(CNN, May 6, 2002)

SPDC SPEAKS

"TURNING OF A NEW PAGE"

Today marks a new page for the people of Myanmar and the international community. As we look forward to a better future, we will work toward greater international stability and improving the social welfare of our diverse people.

We celebrate today the security and unity of Myanmar. Since World War II, and under the adversity of the legacy of colonialism, the people of Myanmar have relentlessly struggled to achieve national unity and cohesion. Today with more than 50 million people and 135 ethnic groups, we stand humbly before the international community with a sense of accomplishment in maintaining our national identity and security for all the people of Myanmar.

To mark this day of national unity, we have taken and are taking a series of steps.

First — we have released nearly 600 detainees in recent months and shall continue to release those who will cause no harm to the community nor threaten the existing peace, stability and unity of the nation.

Second — we shall continue to work together with countries near and far in the fight against terrorism, the total eradication of narcotic drugs, and also in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS which are threatening mankind.

Third — we shall recommit ourselves to allowing all of our citizens to participate freely in the life of our political process, while giving priority to national unity, peace and stability of the country as well as the region.

Information Sheet MYANMAR INFORMATION COMMITTEE, YANGON

May 6, 2002

MEDIA RESOURCES

SPLENDOR IN WOOD: THE BUDDHIST MONASTRIES IN BURMA
By Sylvia Fraser-Lu
December 2001
Orchid Press
www.orchidbooks.com
Email: wop@inet.co.th
Weatherhill Inc.
41 Monroe Turnpike
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Tel: (800) 437 7840
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weatherhill@weatherhill.com.

Fraser-Lu’s twofold approach to her subject considers the historical development of wooden Buddhist monasteries in Burma and details the architecture throughout Upper, Lower, and Central Burma, and Shan State. Examining the religious and societal contexts for monks and monasteries, and how these changed over time, this extensively illustrated text balances its thorough history with a rich visual survey of monastic architecture.

GATHERING STRENGTH: WOMEN FROM BURMA ON THEIR RIGHTS
By Brenda Belak, Images Asia
January 2002
Images Asia
PO Box 2
Muang Chiangmai
Thailand 50200

Employing a wealth of primary sources, Belak’s study examines the treatment of women in Burma, surveying a broad spectrum of issues including sexual violence, education, reproductive health, societal construction of gender roles, political participation and the government’s commitment to women’s rights. The report pays special attention to the implications of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

MYANMAR: THE HIV/AIDS CRISIS
and
MYANMAR: THE POLITICS OF HUMANITARIAN AID
By the International Crisis Group
April 2nd, 2002
International Crisis Group
www.icg.org

In its latest look at Burma, the International Crisis Group (ICG) serves up a one-two punch aimed squarely at the chin of pro-sanction policy. Following the release of their briefing paper that placed Burma’s HIV/AIDS infection rate at around one in 50 adults, Myanmar: The Politics of Humanitarian Aid argues for a substantial increase in donor aid. Arguing that “supporting social development” and promoting democratic progress are not mutually exclusive, the report tethers its
"unequivocal" endorsement of major international assistance both to humanitarian need and to ensuring political stability.

THE MARITIME FRONTIER OF BURMA
Edited by Jos Commans and Jacques Leider
2002
KITLV Press, Leiden
Asia Books
PO Box 497
Richlands QLD 4077
Australia
Tel: 61-7-3278 7507
Fax: 61-7-3278 7587
www.asiabooks.gil.com.au
asiabook@gil.com.au

This seminal collection of essays tackles the complex politics of geography from the perspective of Burma's littoral. Examining mercantile ventures, territorial expansion and cultural exchange, The Maritime Frontier of Burma melds a variety of scholarly disciplines in a catholic and eclectic study that spans centuries.

FEAR AND SANCTUARY: BURMESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND
By Hazel J. Lang
Southeast Asia Program Publications
Cornell University
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www.einaudi.cornell.edu/bookstore/seap

Lang's book focuses on the plight of Burmese refugees on the Thai border, paying special attention to the political variables and historical imperatives in which their situation is embedded. Examining the roles that various parties such as the United Nations, Thailand and Burma's governments and the refugees themselves, Fear and Sanctuary offers an retrospective analysis of the border crisis's evolution.

BURMA'S ARMED FORCES: POWER WITHOUT GLORY
By Andrew Selth
May 2002
East Bridge
70 New Canaan Avenue
Norwalk, CT 06850
Phone: (203) 849 8892
Fax:(203)849 9181
Email: asia@eastbridgebooks.org

Selth, an expert on the Burmese military institution, chronicles the junta's defense expenditures and policies, combat strategies, military doctrine, intelligence capabilities, possible possession of chemical and biological warfare technology and its relationships with other countries. Burma's Armed Forces also muses on the ways in which the Tatmadaw might change within the context of a democratic transition.

The United Nationalities League for Democracy – Liberated Area (UNLD-LA), an umbrella organization of ethnic pro-democracy groups and political parties.

A STATEMENT CALLING FOR "TRIPARTITE DIALOGUE"

1. Since Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released from 19 month-long house arrest, the so-called 'confidence building process' is over, and the political process is now beginning. The UNLD (LA) welcomes the recent political developments.

2. The UNLD (LA) firmly endorses the statement issued jointly by the SNLD under the leadership of Khun Tun Oo, and other ethnic nationalities, in which they called for a 'tripartite dialogue'. Tripartite dialogue is negotiations between the SPDC, the democratic forces led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and ethnic nationalities in order to resolve the country's problems together peacefully, through dialogue.

3. The UNLD (LA) strongly believes that political crisis in Burma is rooted not just in an ideological confrontation between democracy and dictatorship, but in a constitutional problem revolving around the question of the right of self-determination for the ethnic nationalities who co-founded the Union in 1947 at the Panglong Conference.

4. In order to resolve the constitutional problem of Burma's political crisis, ethnic nationalities' participation in the national reconciliation process is indispensable. We believe that without ethnic nationalities participation, we might be able to change the government in Rangoon but we will not be able to resolve political crisis, including the five long decades old war. Tripartite dialogue and three ways negotiation must begin without any further delay.

5. The UNLD (LA) further believes that tripartite dialogue must comes first, before any transitional arrangement. The UNLD position is that any transitional arrangement prior to tripartite dialogue will not be useful and could create serious problem for a smooth and orderly transition.

6. In preparation for the tripartite dialogue and a smooth transition, the UNLD (LA) sees the need for a nation-wide conference of all Ethnic Nationalities leaders and forces, and as well a United Nations sponsored international conference on national reconciliation in Burma.

7. The main objectives of tripartite dialogue should be the formation of transition authority and National Convention, or the Second Panglong. The transitional authority shall be a political body granted with limited administrative power during the transition period.

8. As the founding members of the Union, the Ethnic Nationalities believe that we have the responsibility to solve our country problems and rebuild our nation. No matter how big the problems, we can resolve them in the context of the Panglong Spirit, the spirit that gave birth to the Union of Burma.

The United Nationalities League for Democracy (Liberated Area)
UNLD (LA)
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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.

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