Ethnic Issues and Civil Society in
Burm

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Almost every nation's population includes within its composition different ethnic or cultural groups. Ethnicity has become one of the underlying issues of Burma for almost six decades. The international community does not generally encourage the establishment of independent states on the basis of ethnicity, in the interests of preserving or maintaining peace, stability and socio-economic cohesion. However, to justly and peacefully resolve the stability and development issues within societies, the “minority rights” of different ethnic groups residing within nation states must be recognized in practice. National unity is emerging as a paramount issue within the boundaries of such states, particularly those developing nations that are emerging as liberal democracies subsequent to periods of authoritarian rule.

Social cohesion and harmony can only be achieved in such societies where the principle of unity in diversity is truly valued. Every member must be committed to the achievement of a pluralistic society, within which the cultural uniqueness of each ethnic minority group has a place. The principle of equity must permeate throughout each state institution and resources, political positions, employment opportunities should be fairly shared between all peoples, regardless of their membership to any particular ethnic grouping.

While the rights of ethnic minority people are highlighted, extreme ethnic nationalism should be avoided. In practice such extremism may translate into an approach that views all the issues only from an ethnic nationality perspective; where decisions are reached, whether right or wrong, solely on the basis of ethnicity; where a cooperative and collaborative approach is restricted and
confined to ethnicity. This could penetrate the making of critical decisions such as the appointment of political and government positions. It is clear that such practices would certainly discourage the national unity within a society. It is also required to reasonably resolve the claim for self-determination of the minorities living in areas dominated by other minorities. In order to realise “minority rights” within a liberal democracy a democratic system should be sufficiently flexible and creative in its approach. To facilitate this, ‘federalism’ is usually considered in a way that it is to be incorporated into democratic governance. However, federalism alone may not be sufficient as it focus mainly on division of governmental power among the constituent units of a country vertically. In that case, if civil society, from horizontal aspect, does not energetically exist within each and every constituent unit, such a society or a nation state may end up in its collapse in the long term.

One of the most telling definitions of civil society is that, “Civil society is a dense network of associations working openly in a democratic society and having the ability to reach the decision-maker in order to influence events”. A civil society will consist of a mixture of various forms of associations that will freely interact and communicate with each other in a spirit of civility and tolerance for the sake of the entire population. Societal pluralism i.e. the ability of all groups to work freely, openly and equally without violating the rights of others, is one of the underlying concepts of civil society. Here, it is important to note that a civil society, which extols the idea of democracy, does not allow one civil group to act selfishly for their own goal without regard to the others.

This paper attempts to briefly introduce the issues of the ethnic minority people in Burma, from the perspective of the right to self-determination and recommends a certain type of federalism as a way to resolve it. In addition, it also highlights that the whole federal union entails the existence of civil society. It is expected that Burma may become peaceful and developed in future if the concept of civil society can be adopted and amalgamated with federalism on the basis of constitutionalism.

Nationalism and the Concept on National Unity

Aung San is the national hero in Burma. Though Aung San passed away in 1947, a great majority of people in Burma still recognize him as the founding father of contemporary Burma.
He united the various ethnic nationalities in the whole country. He remains as a symbol for cohesion and unity in contemporary life.

Aung San's conception of national unity follows from his ideas on nationalism. When asked to define nationalism he said: In my view...every nation in the world must be free not only externally but internally. That is to say...every nation in the world being conglomeration of races and religions should develop such nationalism that is compatible with the welfare of one and all, irrespective of race or religion or class or sex. That's my nationalism.1 By this, Aung San did not conceive of a strictly plural society with the several groups living in a common territory with little or no contact between them. Rather, he saw one society sharing a common life, the development of common interests, the use of a common language, and the growth of a feeling of community.2 On more than one occasion, he said that national unity meant, unity of the entire people, irrespective of race, religion, sex, and sectarian and party interests.3 He further held that nationalism is “ever changing in form and content”. From his view of nationalism, it is clear that national unity was a vital problem for the peoples of Burma.

Aung San's idea of unity in diversity was the basis for the answers he gave to many of Burma's problems. In a report to the Executive Committee of the Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League (AFPFL)4 in November 1946, he criticized the feudal administration in the Shan States.5 He also restated his position as regards the Hill People. He said, “The Hill People would be allowed to administer their own areas in any way they pleased and the Burmans would not interfere in their internal administration.”6 Thus in practice as well as in theory, Aung San stood for local autonomy and diversity among the groups which were ethnically different from the Burmans and who wanted to retain their differences.7 Regrettably, Aung San's assassination prevented him from translating his ideas into practical programs and policies. The responsibility for leading the people through the final stages of separation from Great Britain and into self-government fell upon the shoulders of U Nu, a man of different temperament and outlook.8 U Nu, Prime Minister of the Union of Burma who ruled the country during the period between 1948 through 1962, argued that the problem of national disunity was as old as Burma’s history. He perceived three sources of national disunity: those “caused by the natural barriers of water, dense forests and mountains; dissension and discord which naturally arise in the course
of centuries”; and colonial rule, which he hypothesised, encourages mutual distrust and antagonism between peoples. An examination of Burma’s history reveals that in pre-colonial times, there were three short periods when the country was united; and this came as a result of force and violence under strong Burman Kings. Following the death of these men and their era, “their kingdoms, instead of firmly established, crumbled like a house of cards”.9

For Nu, the problem of national unity involved three interrelationships— the unity between ethnic groups, the unity between political groups, and the unity between the peoples and the government.10 Nu constantly argued that unity was natural between ethnic groups in Burma because all their members were “sons and daughters of this land”. But, the act of political union, he argued, was a voluntary one. Therefore, each must accept an equal responsibility to protect its creation. Further, as co-equals, all must progress together in matters of politics, economic growth, and social development. “If portions of the Frontier Areas continues to be backward, the Burma union would be weakened in the same way a weak limb weakens the whole person.”11 Whilst these assumptions did not differ greatly from the approach and views adopted by Aung San, the conclusions Nu drew were very different. He favored the establishment of a unitary state where the sole principle of ability or merit would determine who would be the administrators, without regard for ethnic composition.12 “My idea is that Burma should have a unitary constitution, and I want leaders with the required qualifications, whether they are Karens, Shans, Chins, Kachins, Karennis, Mons, or Burmans, to administer it.”13

Nu, as the successor to Aung San, felt obligated to follow the path marked out by his predecessor, but as times and circumstances changed he gradually developed his own approach. As a result, a great deal of misunderstanding occurred between Nu and the minorities— misunderstandings that reflected the dichotomy between Aung San's promises and Nu's practices.14 In the conference of the AFPFL held in May 1947, Aung San expressly mentioned that a unitary state system would not be suitable for Burma. After he was assassinated, his guidance was however ignored by his successors.15 Furthermore, the sense of betrayal or disillusion of various ethnic communities was strengthened as the federal proposal to guarantee ethnic and cultural diversity, aiming to unite the whole people within a reasonable political framework was never been implemented.
The Ethnic Minority Problems in 1947 Constitution

On the basis of the agreement and support from ethnic nationalities held at Panglong in February 1947, Burma gained its independence in 1948. The 1947 Constitution was drafted in the pre-independence era by a 111-member constitution drafting committee, composed of leaders from AFPFL, members of Cabinet, representatives of ethnic people, and intellectuals. The Constitution was merely a blueprint, due to the haste in drafting it in time for the independence. The equal rights for the ethnic people provided in the Constitution were not realized mainly due to lack of infrastructure and insufficient attention from the then country’s leaders. The 1947 Constitution provided that parliament would consist of, which was composed of the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Nationalities. The Chamber of Deputies was formed on the basis of population, while the Chamber of Nationalities was constituted from representatives of different ethnic states. The former was to practice democracy based on majority rule and the latter was to protect the rights of ethnic nationalities in the Union in terms of the structure of the state. However, non-Burman ethnic leaders were dissatisfied with the formation of the Chamber of Nationalities as their analysis concluded that the Burman nationality influenced both the Chamber of Deputies but also the Chamber of Nationalities. The number of representatives comprising in the formation of the Chamber of Nationalities was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Representatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shan</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karenni</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachin</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chin</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Territories</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Shan, Karen, Karenni, Kachin and Chin are the ethnic minority people. Under the title of “Remaining Territories” the Burman nationalities could also be represented in the National Assembly. In the formation of the State governments, the central government retained in practical term a high level of control and power in accordance with the constitution. Accordingly, Heads
of the States of the non-Burman ethnic nationalities who would also be Ministers and members of the Union government were to be appointed by the President only on the nomination of the Prime Minister of the Union Government.  

Under the 1947 Constitution 25 seats for representatives of Shan State were reserved in the Chamber of Nationalities. However, the selection process within Shan State was not democratic, with only the Chaofas or Saw Bwas (traditional local feudalists) selecting representatives from among themselves. Democracy was also not observed across Burma in the process of selecting heads of state. Democratic principles require that the people of a state should be able to elect their own head of state.

Despite the constitutional guarantees of democracy and self-determination, the reality was very different. The practice was when a leader supported the AFPFL, that leader would be appointed as Head of that State. However, if a Head of a State was not an AFPFL, he would be dismissed by the Prime Minister of the central government. This meant that, without the formal approval of the Prime Minister, a person could not be the Head of a State, although he might be elected by the State Council. (In practice, Prime Minister U Nu first attempted to dismiss U Htun Myint (Lin Khay) whom was democratically elected by the Shan State Council as Head of Shan State and finally transferred him to another government department.) Accordingly, it was evident that the 1947 Constitution deprived the States of the right to self-determination. Economically, the key legislative power rests with the Union, not with the States. Hence the capacity to raise revenue was heavily weighted towards the Federal Union. These powers include the power to legislate with respect to the following:

- natural resources such as forests, mine and oil-fields, mineral development, petroleum;
- land such as land tenures, including the relation of land lord and tenant and the collection of rents; transfer, alienation and devolution of land;
- development of industries and electricity; and
- taxes derived from sale of goods, companies, income, the capital value of the assets of individuals and companies, the capital of companies.

According to 1947 Constitution, the States of ethnic nationalities, despite possessing rich natural resources, did not possess the right to manage their own resources. Rather, the central government wielded the power and benefited directly from these resources.
U Chan Htoon, who mainly took responsibility for drafting 1947 constitution and who became the then Attorney-General of the Union of Burma, analysed the constitution and described it as federal in theory and unitary in practice. Since then, non-Burman ethnic leaders concluded that they were hoodwinked by the Burman leaders and legal academics by taking advantage of their lack of political experience and legal knowledge. When it became apparent that ethnic people did not and would not in the foreseeable future enjoy political and economic equality with the Burman majority under the 1947 constitution, civil war broke out.

However, the 1947 constitution had many worthy aspects. These included parliamentary democracy; the guarantee of free elections and a multi-party system; an introduction of open market economy; a guarantee and protection of basic individual liberty and individual rights such as the application of habeas corpus, mandamus, prohibition, quo warranto and certiorari in the Supreme Court; and the creation of an independent judicial system. More importantly, under 1947 constitution, civil society to some extent existed in Burma.

**Ethnic Nationality Issue and 1962 Military Coup**

The democratic governments formed under the 1947 Constitution, which ruled the country from 1948 to 1962, fostered economic development for the country. The farmers who constituted about 80% of the whole population were content and growing prosperous. Burma exported over one million tons of rice. With the exception of isolated nationalist movements to promote the rights of ethnic nationalities, the situation of the whole country was generally stable. However, under the 1947 Constitution development throughout the country was uneven. Progress generally occurred in the low land where the majority of Burman people resided whilst very little change happened in areas where other ethnic nationalities were found. The movement of the ethnic leaders for constitutional reform, based on federalism, emerged in this context. However, the military, led by General Ne Win, manipulated the situation and staged a coup in 1962 under the pretext of protecting the union from disintegration. With regard to the movement towards federalism, the two main issues centered on where power was located—that is, control over the financial resources and military. The federation sought to change the central-state relationship from a colonial-like arrange-
ment to one between co-dependent entities. It was hoped that reforming the Constitution in this manner would strengthen the Union and remove grievances that were contributing to unrest. The then Prime Minister U Nu was open to such discussions and arranged for a national conference to consider the new federal proposals. The conference, which began on the 24 of March 1962, never completed its work because General Ne Win overthrew the elected government and installed a military dictatorship. The next four decades of military rule in Burma only exacerbated the ethnic divide in Burma as it consistently waged a propaganda that federalism would lead to secession and disintegration of the union.34

The 1974 Constitution and Ethnic Rights

Following the coup in 1962, to overcome the glaring problem of legitimacy, the regime drafted a constitution, known as 1974 Constitution, for the formation of a one-party state, which fully guaranteed the perpetuation of the military dictatorship. Some academic analysis conclude that the 1947 Constitution established a semi-federalist state under which the rights of the ethnic people were to some extent protected by the bi-cameral system through which legislative power can be checked and balanced. However, the 1974 Constitution abolished the Chamber of Nationalities, which had comprised representatives from the ethnic states. State power was exercised only by the People’s Assembly, with its great majority of Burman representatives who were mostly army and ex-army personnel.

After dissolving the previous Union, composed of five ethnic states and Burma proper, as provided for in the 1947 Constitution, the constituent units in the 1974 Constitution were transformed into seven ethnic states, largely inhabited by non-Burman people, and seven geographical divisions, largely inhabited by the majority Burman people. As a result, an ethnic state had status equal to one division, in which only one seventh of the Burman people lived. Under the new 1974 Constitution the multi-party democratic system35 and free-market economy was abolished.36 The dissatisfaction of the ethnic people greatly increased following this further dilution of their rights and political influence. The armed struggle of the ethnic organisations consequently gained momentum between 1974 and 1988. The 1974 Constitution deprived individuals as well as collective groups of the freedom of association and political participation. As a consequence, the economic and socio-political situation of the country deteriorated
dreadfully. This set the scene for the popular democratic uprising in 1988. Then in September 1988 the military again staged a coup, abolished the 1974 constitution, and established a military administration that is undoubtedly the most rigid and centralised in the history of Burma.

The Ethnic Cease-fire Policy

In mid-1989 the military junta initiated a policy of ethnic cease-fires. This occurred first in the north-eastern part of Burma, which had previously been controlled by the CPB. In 1989, the Wa ethnic people revolted in the north-eastern part of Shan State where the CPB held a liberated area. They expelled the CPB leaders to China, formed the United Wa State Party (UWSA) in 1989, and became the largest armed opposition force.\(^{37}\) Previously, China had supported the CPB in establishing its liberated area. Following the coup, China no longer supplied the Wa troops, shifted its policy in favour of collaboration with the Burmese military junta, and abandoned the BCP.\(^{38}\) It put much pressure on the Wa, including severing communication lines to China that resulted in a supply crisis within the UWSP.

The Burmese military junta manipulated this situation and persuaded the UWSA leaders to enter a cease-fire without requiring their laying down of arms. Many carrots were dangled, including the guarantee of the creation of “Wa” state, with regional development projects to be carried out therein. It is important to consider this in the context that the Chinese Government has direct relationship with the Burmese military and that there is a policy of cross-border trade. The Wa community was pressured to accept the cease-fire in return for access to territory across the frontier. Following the cease-fire between the military junta and the Wa group, other ethnic groups based in northern Shan State entered cease-fires one after another, domino-style. Other cease-fire agreements were reached with the following:

- KIO mainly based in Kachin States in February 1994;
- Karenni Nationalities Peoples’ Liberation Front (KNPLF), Kayan New Land Party (KNLP), Shan Nationalities Peoples’ Liberation Organization (SNPLO) mainly based in southern Shan State, in 1994 and in March, 1995
- New Mon State Party (NMSP) based in Mon State, in March 1995; and

( after three months, KNPP resumed fighting)
Cease-fire agreements between the military junta and ethnic organizations are pursued and determined solely by the military. Despite the request of ethnic organizations, political dialogue has not occurred since 1989 - the period that the UWSA entered the first cease-fire agreement. The military junta continues to ignore the ethnic minorities’ political demands for a larger degree of self-determination and equality. Given, the inconsistent approaches by the junta with the various ethnic organisations in the ethnic cease-fire areas, economic and socio-political implications have become quite complicated. The SPDC has persuaded the leaders of the ethnic cease-fire organizations with business licenses, employment opportunities, and other material incentives such as land, houses and other facilities. As a result, economic inequities have grown between the leaders and grassroots members, and between the cease-fire organizations and the local ethnic people of economic status. These inequities have become more problematic as the common ethnic people in local rural areas presently face a serious socio-economic crisis. They have also seriously damaged relations between the local community and their organisations’ leadership.

The Military’s New Constitution, Ethnic Minority Rights and Civil Society in Burma

In order to produce a new constitution, the military junta has commenced convening its sham National Convention in January 1993 and laid down the detailed basic principles. Accordingly, the legislative power of the State is apportioned to the Union Assembly, the Regional Assemblies and the State Assemblies. The Union Assembly consists of the People’s Assembly and the National Assembly. In the People’s Assembly, out of the 440 representatives, 110 military personnel nominated by Chief of Staff of the Defense forces will be the members. In the National Assembly, out of the 224 representatives, 56 military personnel nominated by Chief of Staff of the Defense forces will be the members. Military personnel, submitted as representatives by Chief of Staff of the Defense Forces, whose number shall be equal to one third of the number of representatives, will be the members of the Regional and State Assemblies. The military is effectively established as an ultra-constitutional organization. It operates in practice, above the constitution and the rule law. The “Chief of Staff of the Defense Forces” is the most powerful person under the constitution. His appointment and removal are not referred to in the constitution. It is antici-
ipated that he will be beyond the control of a civilian government. The Chief of Staff of the Defense Force and the military will be regulated by the military’s own regulations, which will override the constitution. The Chief of Staff of the Defense Forces is entitled to nominate twenty five percent of all members of the People’s Assembly, the National Assembly and the State and Regional Assemblies. He is also entitled to nominate the Ministers for Defense (i.e. the Chief’s own boss), the Minister for the Interior and Minister for Border Affairs. The State President and Vice-President shall be elected by the Presidential Election body comprising three groups: the elected representatives of the National Assembly; the elected representatives of the People’s Assembly, and military personnel representatives. Each group shall elect a Vice-President. Out of these three Vice-Presidents, one will become the President and the others will become the Vice-Presidents. Accordingly, at least one military personnel representative nominated by the third group will become either the President or the Vice-President of the State. Once first and second group also nominate two military personnel as their presidential candidates, all three military personnel will become President and two Vice-Presidents. It is anticipated that the members of the Union Assembly appointed by the military will form a block vote and unite with the political parties aligned with the military to ensure that the Vice-President nominated by the military is elected as the President. The President will appoint not only Union Ministers and Deputy Ministers but also a Chief Minister for each state and region. It is evident that executive power is above the judiciary as the President has the power to dismiss the Chief Justice of the Union. In the regions or provinces where ethnic nationalities mainly constitutes, Chief of Staff of Defense will appoint the Ministers for Security and Border Affairs in every government; these governments will be headed by Chief Ministers appointed by the State President; and, Chief Ministers will further appoint other Ministers. As such, it is evident that the constitution would be one which exercises the most rigid centralization in the history of Burma, absolutely ignoring the rights of ethnic minorities, in terms of self-determination and equality, while prohibiting the emergence of civil society.

**Rights Oriented Culture and Constitutionalism**

In the case of Burma, it would be tricky to predict when the structural change will take place. ‘Structure’ can be considered as ‘Form’ whereas ‘Rights’ can be regarded as ‘Essence’. It is to
promote the rights of the people, be ‘individual’ or ‘collective’ rights, by applying the structure of society; and, the structure should be re-created on the basis of the protection and the promotion of rights. The notion is that ‘Rights Oriented Culture’ be practiced and ‘Rights Based Society’ be established.

The term ‘rights’ is not familiar with the people who have been living under the rule of authoritarian regimes, regardless of whether they are ‘left’ or ‘right’ oriented governments or military juntas in Southeast Asia. Previously the issues were approached mainly from the aspect of “community” or “society,” but not on the basis of ‘rights’ of the people. Structures of the state were applied and the reasoning was this was being carried out in the interest of society, but only elites benefited. In terms of structure, a constitution is one of the major elements. Producing a constitution will be meaningless for the people, if it is not based on constitutionalism. To this end, it will be impossible to protect such ‘rights’ if society does not practice a “rights oriented culture”.

The existence of a society should be to protect and to promote the ‘rights’ of the people. ‘The well-being and development of society’ should not be a proper reason to ignore or reject the ‘rights’ of the people. At the same time, the well-being and development of society should also be effectively sought. In fact, the protection and promotion of the rights of the people is also for the well-being of society. The question is how these two objectives can be reasonably and practically amalgamated. “Popular sovereignty” is highly regarded as one of the major fundamentals in constitutionalism thereby government by the people through representative institutions, universal and equal suffrage by all citizens, and freedom of political activity (speech, press, assembly, association) are all well acknowledged. Genuine national unity within a society can be achieved by providing ‘mutual respect’ on the basis of ‘rights’. Efforts should be made to promote national unity within a society by guaranteeing the rights of the people; raising awareness on “rights” among the people; furthermore, creating institutions and situations whereby the people themselves promote their own rights.

The Civil Society

In a country, where ‘rights oriented culture’ is well regarded, the establishment and strengthening civil society is essential. Despite that a constitution plays a major role in creating the structure of a society, it alone may not be able to protect the rights of people. The protection of ‘rights’ in connection with the constitu-
tion may become a reality only when institutions, people's associations and non governmental organizations exist independently and protect the rights of people. This is one of the fundamental characteristic of civil society.

When the organizations are formed with voluntary participation and cooperate with other organizations socially, economically and religiously, they may be considered as an initial stage of civil society. However, they may be regarded as sectors of civil society only if they skilfully watch, criticize and balance the government's corruption of power, its manners affecting individual and group rights, and damages done to society and the country because of its implementations. This means that independent organizations balance, supervise and monitor the policies and power abuses of the government.

Unfortunately, in Burma, the military junta is still attempting to mislead the international community by promoting organizations such as the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), similar to the Golkhar of Indonesia, Myanmar Maternity and Child Welfare Association, which are rigidly controlled by the SPDC, as being civil society. The establishment of civil society will entail empowering the grassroots people in Burma, as an effective alternative to help create changes in society in order to achieve human rights for all people for the long-term purpose.

**Current Background Situations of Burma from the Aspect of Civil Society**

Government controlled organizations such as Union Solidarity Development Association, Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association and Myanmar Red Cross are still playing major role by the name of civil society. Almost half of the other organizations inside Burma are those affiliated with religions. Professional organizations constitute about 20% while the remaining percents have been occupied by welfare, charity, relief or humanitarian assistance, and development organizations. Unfortunately, those organizations mainly existing in areas of Burma under the direct control of the ruling regime have not yet oriented to the track of civil society in balancing, supervising and monitoring the policies and power abuses of the government. More importantly, independent status and gender dimension have remained controversial; interaction with the poorest people has not yet been known; and, poverty, livelihood and other underlying social issues have never been addressed and highlighted by those organizations. No
organization operating formally inside Burma under the rule of SPDC has established a clear objective to stand as a counterweight against the unjust ruling and fight for social justice, as a foundation for civil society.

The effective laws and judicial system do not facilitate the emergence and strengthening of the civil society in Burma. 1988 Association Law enacted by the regime prohibits formation and function of independent organizations. The existing judiciary is not able to provide protection for civil society educators and human rights activists given that it is subservient to the ruling military regime. As such, characteristics of the independence of judiciary have been waning rapidly. Despite that there are a number of rich business people in Burma, majority of them shares benefits with the regime in exploiting country’s natural resources, foreign trade and enterprise licenses and they do not constitute a middle class that will facilitate the emergence of civil society.

The international community and UN agencies have as yet established a clear policy and working program for the emergence of civil society in Burma. Except ICRC and ILO, UN agencies reportedly seek appeasement with the regime for their concern that they may no longer be permitted for operation in Burma. Merits and demerits of their activities have not yet been publicized well. Particularly, in respect of fund transferred by the international community to those so-called civil society organizations inside Burma, transparency is lacking. The ruling regime is enjoying a lot of benefit from the support of such international community by taking advantage of currency exchange rate.

Ethnicity and Civil Society

In many areas of Burma, mainly where the ethnic armed organizations control, the grip of the SPDC is to some extent loosing. While political stalemate is taking place for both democratic opposition and ethnic armed organizations, the younger ethnic generation is attempting to explore another alternative to promote the situation of society. They have formed a number of organizations focusing on youth, women, worker, ethnicity, human rights, legal affairs, environment and other contentious local issues, in spite of the fact that they cannot operate formally. In cooperation with the civil society organizations based on Thai Burma border, they were able to publicize the issues on sexual abuses, human trafficking, lack of the rule of law, narcotic drugs, environmental degradation, forced relocation and forced labor,
natural gas, ethnic language, land confiscation and etc. internationally.

The existence of civil society organizations in every constituent unit of the federal union will assuredly facilitate the decentralization processes and protect the rights of local people. More importantly, networking among themselves transcending over the boundaries of each unit will strengthen the cohesion of the whole federal union and facilitate the national unity.

**Conclusion**

In spite of the fact that it needs to address the ethnic issue properly with a special emphasis, it doesn’t mean that the issue has been too complicated to resolve. It is also unreasonable, as the military junta usually mentioned, that without a strong centralization by military prowess in order to establish stability, Burma would collapse. If Burman and non-Burman ethnic nationalities reach a common understanding on how to construct a political union, where the minority groups feel they belong and which they are proud to be a part of, “trust” would be established.

The possible emergence of civil society in Burma might strengthen the power of grassroots people, Burman and non-Burman alike, and help create a venue to gather together for all ethnic nationalities in attempting to resolve the particular issues in their local areas peacefully, thereby stepping forward to establish a new democratic society within the framework of a federal union.

Burma have not yet sufficiently learnt and adopted the concept of civil society.

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End note

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49 Para (2) Appointment of Union Ministers, Detailed Basic Principles for the Executive.
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51 Para (22) Appointment of Regional or State Ministers, Detailed Basic Principles for the Executive.
52 Para (4) (j), Empowerment of the State President, Detailed Basic Principles for the Judiciary.
53 Para (22) Appointment of Regional or State Ministers, Detailed Basic Principles for the Executive.
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