

Karen New Year

KAREN New Year in Karen State moved venue this year from its usual location at Shwe Ko Ko, where it has been celebrated for the past two years, to the Karen State capital of Pa-an. The main venue for DKBA celebrations moved to Waley, opposite Thailand's Umphang district, where festivities included boxing, a rock band and Don Dancing displays.

In KNU liberated areas the main celebrations took place at Kher Law Ghaw presided over by Nerdah Mya, unfortunately the celebrations had just ended when the Tatmadaw broke the ceasefire and launched an attack against the village (see news).



Don Dancers perform at Waley, in Karen State

The First Karen New Year Message, 1938

Today we recall our heritage, our ancient poet, prophets and our tradition of Ywa (God). We believe that every individual, every home, every village has a place in the new advance. Progressive in thinking, constructive in planning, and courageous in living, we can share responsibility with other communities for the making of Burma a united people.

This is a historic day. It is our first officially recognized National Day. It is a day of opportunity. We are emerging from isolation into the stream of national affairs. Our conviction is that our two million Karen have a significant part to play in Burm&s destiny.

We owe our existence a people not to organization or any political arrangements but to certain distinctive qualities that have beer given us. Our traits include simplicity, a love of music, honesty, steadiness, and sense of God. We believe that we can best keep and develop these characteristics in free association with other people.

We are at a crisis. For us the choice lies between seeking protection through isolation, or adventure through active participation in the live of Burma. United ourselves, we could help to make Burma a nation. We recognize that as leaders we must be fully committed to our country free from fear, personal ambition, racial and religious prejudice.

Are we ready on this New Year's Day to put the best traditions of our people at the service of this whole country?

Signed

San C. Po, Shwe Ba, Hla Pe, Sydney Loo Nee, Saw Pe Tha



Don dancers at Kher Law Ghaw carrying the Karen flag . Boxing and Burmese dance performance from Waley









Villagers listen to New Year speeches by Nerdah Mya at Kher Glaw. Don Dancers wait to perform at Waley.



KNU President Saw Ba Thin Sein's Address on Karen New Year Day of the Year 2744 Karen Era

Dear All the Karen People, Officers and Men of the Karen Revolution,
Today is the Karen New Year Day of the Year 2744 Karen Era. On this New Year day, I wish you all to have health and happiness with the New Year. At the same time, I would like to talk about the following matters.

First, I would like to say that the Karen are the people who started to enter and settle down in the country now known as Burma, around 739 BC. They are also the second largest in population among the peoples who have entered and settled down in Burma. More than 1,000 years ago, when city states were the order of the day, the Karen people were able to live in freedom and peace. However, later, their freedom was deprived together with the national right to decide their own destiny, and they had to live under oppression through successive ages. For that reason, we have to strive on until this day, for the rights of the Karen people to decide their own destiny, to establish a viable Karen sate in accordance with the will of the Karen people, to enjoy democratic freedoms and to establish a federal union.

If a people do not have the right to decide their own destiny politically, they will not be able to maintain their language, literature, culture etc., will become a dispossessed class of people, en mass, and die out eventually. We can distinctly see it, if we look into the disappearance of Pyu, Kanyan and Thet peoples, who had been well known during the period of Thayaykittaya (Pyi).

As the struggle of the Karen people to get the right to decide their own destiny is related to the fate of the Karen people to remain as a separate entity, we must think deeply about it and strive on with unity.

Nowadays, for gaining the right of the Karen people to decide their own destiny, the entire Karen people must have political alertness, unity and respect for Karen language, literature and culture. We must be "One" in spirit and mind. We must avoid acts and speeches that might harm our unity.



A Karen elder observes the ceremonies in front of the offerings to Pi Bu Yaw - the rice goddess. Waley.

The revolutionary resistance of the Karen people has been going on for more than 50 years. This resistance is not to harm the basic rights of other peoples but to gain our own basic rights. For that reason, we must respect the basic rights of the other peoples. There must be mutual recognition, peaceful co-existence and cooperation with the other nationalities for mutual benefit.

At the present, we, the KNU are making an effort to resolve political problems justly in the interest of the Karen people. In making the effort, we always stand by our own basic principles. In saying principles, the 4 eminent principles of Saw Ba U Gyi are the most paramount. If we strive on with firm political objective, unity, steadfastness, courage, - political, military and organized alertness, and in firm cooperation with fellow ethnic and democratic forces, we shall certainly achieve victory and reach our goal.

In closing, I wish you again to have all kinds of grandeur and may all your wishes be fulfilled!



Address given at the Wrist-tying Ceremony held at Shwe Koako, Karen State, 2004. .

Wrist-Tying

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen and especially special guests from Thailand

Now, I would like to express to you, the brief history of our 9th Karen Traditional Wrist Tying Ceremony on behalf of Karen people. Among the two significant ceremonies, of Karen nationalities:- Karen National Day and Karen Traditional Wrist Tying Ceremony, this is one of the ceremonies called Karen Traditional Wrist Tying Ceremony which is not only the cultural ceremony but also a Karen National's Traditional ceremony.

Every year of this season, this ceremony reminds to every Karen nationals around the globe to love, to help, to unite one another, and live in harmony. till the end of the world and it's also a good memorandum for every Karen nationality, By doing this. Wrist Tying every year brings unification and strength of Karen People together and show, Karen is one of the nationalities of the world. This lovely ceremony also tells all the Karen People that to always keep and stand the nation, to integrate the strengths, showing the tradition of culture of Karen nationals is among the world communities' cultures. The Karens, as a race, are noted for their sweet voice. The harp, bamboo clappers, the drums are some musical instruments used by the Karens. The harp is a popular musical instrument used by the Karens, especially for the young men of a village to court a young lady. Group singing of both sexes, during funeral ceremonies tell the spiritual life of a person, showing the way to another life, and a region beyond.

Karens of yore, whose lives were always on the run, have left this legacy so that no Karens will forget their language, culture, identity and their ethical codes.

Weaving

The patterns tell you from which region a particular Karen belongs. Why is this yearly wrist- tying ceremony significant? Karens of yore, whose lives were always on the run had left this legacy so that no Karens will forget their language, culture, identity and their ethical codes as Karens live in groups helping one another.in the hunting expeditions, sharing the spoils.

Religion

Ancestor worship and animism, where pigs and roosters are sacrificed, not for the atonement of sins but calling upon the spirits to guide and protect their lives.



Collective Social Gathering:

Wrist-tying ceremony in particular. invokes the good spirits (Wee-Kala) to bless, to guide, to protect us in our life's journey.
In so doing certain symbols are used.
1. Rice-balls - Rice when pressed into a ball. implies unity. Whenever a difficulty arose, resolve it as a united Karens.
2. Sticky-rice - The rice is tightly tied in bamboo, banana or pine-apple leaves and boiled. This tells the character of the Karens. This shows the Karens' spiritual unification.
3. Banana - The Karen nature is never to dominate others or to wish evil on others. They are honest, simple and friendly, wanting to live in harmony with its neighbours and races. As such people want to mix with Karens. Employers want only Karens to work for them, because they are hardworking and honest. Banana is a symbol for such innate character.
4. Pan Nu New is supposed to be an everlasting flower. It grows in all kinds of weather and once its roots are firmly rooted in the earth it spreads and multiply. So are the Karens, who can thrive and live under different situations and multiply never to let the race diminish nor die.
5. Sugar-cane - Like the sugar-cane plant where every jointed stem of the plant can reproduce another plant, the Karens.are expected to maintain their race's continuation.
6. Water - Water sustains life. The Karens also will have to live, for its race to grow, multiply in the land they live. Thus. their lives .must be beneficial, for the sustenance of the race.
7. White thread - Purity is a good sign. for the growth of mankind. Hence every Karen must have the white-thread tied on their wrists after obtaining the blessing from elders, friends and well-wishes, who will call upon the guarding spirits.to enter their lives, through the white thread. The white-thread tells, showsthat this is a true Karen owned possess with all the inherent qualities, practicing its culture and declaring to the world its bravery, honesty, simply life-style and its purity of heart.

So our forefathers have left this valuable inheritance for us, continue to live with such qualities and bring honour to our race.
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The seven spirits involved in this Wrist-tying ceremony observed in the month of Wah Gaung have the

