

National League for Democracy
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Statement 1 (1/00) (translation)

On the Occasion of the 52nd anniversary of Independence

We have entered the 21st century and today, 4th January 2000, is the 52nd anniversary of the Union of Burma's independence.

The architect of our Independence, our national hero and martyr, father of the Burmese Independence Army (BIA) Bogoyoke Aung San addressed his men on the eve of their departure from Thailand (then Siam where the army was formed) to enter the war zone in Burma. Those utterances reflect the long and difficult struggle under harsh mental and physical conditions when they struggled with all their might risking their lives for Burma's independence.

"xxxx Yebaws (comrades) -- if you cannot sacrifice your lives, your wife and children, your home, your property, I do not wish you to join the Burmese Independence Army xxxxxxxx"

"xxxxx Yebaws, we do not have any provisions or food to eat while we fight. As far as clothing goes we have nothing. This is why my comrades, throughout the war the ground is where we will have to sleep, sands and stones is all we will have to eat. This is all I can afford. This will be the rank and rights you will gain for serving in Burma's Independence Army"

" Have no expectations of becoming rich men. The luckiest reward will be death."

(From the sparse speeches of Bogoyoke Aung San)

These were the sacrifices and risks taken to gain independence. We are greatly indebted to the warriors who fought for our independence. Never ever should this be forgotten.

Burma (Myanmar) was a proud independent kingdom for nearly two thousand years with all the paraphernalia that goes with royalty. However on the 1st of January 1886, the British imperialists arrogantly proclaimed that it had taken over the country.

From the day that sovereignty and independence was lost the ethnic races viz. Kachins, Karens, Kayahs, Chins, Burmese, Mons, Rakhines, Shans and others living in Burma struggled to free themselves from the yoke of serfdom on many occasions and in various ways but were not successful.

Independence is important for the people and a brief recount of this struggle will set an example for the youth and the new generation.

The Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) (religious organisation with a political undertone) was formed in 1906 to promote the social, religious, and literary interests of young Burmese.

The events that occurred and followed are:

- „h 1920 - the formation of the General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA)
- „h 1920 the Rangoon University students strike
- „h 1930 the peasants revolt
- „h 1936 Students strike
- „h 1941 Formation of the Burma Independence Army (BIA) led by Bogyoke Aung San
- „h Formation of the Burma Defense Army (BDA)
- „h Formation of Burma National Army (BNA)
- „h 1945, 27 May, Formation of the Anti Fascist movement headed by Bogyoke Aung San.
- „h Formation of the PBF -Patriotic Burmese Forces.
- „h 1945 Formation of the regular Burmese Tatmadaw

The world recognized and extolled the Burmese who successfully repelled the Fascists and acknowledged Bogyoke Aung San as the true leader of the country. Under his leadership all the inhabitants of the country united and gained independence.

Also, following our victory over the Fascists, the British imperialists had been left considerably weakened after the 2nd World War and most of their colonies were revolting demanding independence. The British realized their inability to control their colonies.

Under these circumstances it was not necessary to go to war for Burma's independence and Bogyoke Aung San and his colleagues comprehended that negotiation and peaceful means was the way to go. But they were prepared to fight if it was necessary.

The leaders continued tirelessly in their efforts to get the support of the people. In 1945 the "Naythuyein" public meeting was held where the British "white paper" policy was strenuously opposed which effectively put a check on the British governments rule. Other public meetings were held on the middle terrace of the Shwedagon Pagoda and in the Cantonment garden to rally the people and get their support.

Bogyoke Aung San was able to capture and build up unity amongst the ethnic groups. The country's independence is a matter of politics and as such he resorted to political means for solutions.

Bogyoke Aung San's leadership was so apparent that he received an invitation by the British colonial government and after discussions and negotiations, on the 27 January 1947 the Aung San-Atlee Agreement was signed. Then to achieve unity and solidarity with all the ethnic races dwelling in Burma he was able to reach an understanding with them and the Panglong Agreement was signed on the 12 February 1947. He was able to boldly proclaim that independence would be gained within one year.

Under Bogyoke Aung San's leadership the constitution for an independent Burma was written in 1947.

Final adjustments were completed and on the 4th of January 1948, freedom from being slaves of another was obtained and independent Burma, a sovereign state was born.

Bogyoke Aung San's description quoted below is very pertinent.
"Independence was not a copper coin flung into a beggar's bowl. It was a hard won victory gained through struggle and risk."
(Taken from Dr. Maung Maung's book "How our Union of Burma's constitution was written")

These words should be forever inscribed in our hearts so that we will never forget the value of independence which we must always defend.

The essence of independence is freedom, Only when its entire people have freedom this essence will be secure. Only when sovereign power is in the hands of the people the essence of independence will be enjoyed. Bogyoke Aung San's utterances in relation to this subject was-

"xxx a country may be independent, but if the people have no freedom, they cannot say what they want; they cannot express their thoughts that are just and correct; they cannot give away what they want to; they cannot do what they want. Under the Japanese, the country had independence but you kept your mouth shut out of fear. That was independence with a sword hanging over your head. The people were not free. xxxx " (Excerpt from speech given at the AFPFL conference on 23-1-46)

In the preamble of the 1947 constitution these facts are precisely mentioned.

It reads:

"WE, THE PEOPLE OF BURMA including the Frontier Areas and the Karenni states, Determined to establish in strength and unity a SOVEREIGN INDEPENDENT STATE, To maintain social order on the basis of the eternal principles of JUSTICE, LIBERTY AND EQUALITY and To guarantee and secure to all citizens JUSTICE social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, vocation, association and action; EQUALITY of status, of opportunity and before the law, IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, this Tenth day Thadingyut waxing, 1309 B.E. (Twenty fourth of

September , 1947 A.D.) DO HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.

Moreover Section 34 of Chapter IV states -

"The State shall pay special attention to the young and promote their education."

Section 36 states -

"The State shall regard the raising of the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties."

Bogyoke Aung San and his martyred colleagues with great foresight and desire for the health, education and prosperity of the people conferred with economic experts and knowledgeable people and what is known as the "Sorento Villa" two year plan was written (dated 6 June, 1947).

The object of such planning was to bring about immediate economic recovery. A way to solve the immediate hardships. It was also a reminder to the authorities that they had it in their power to bring about change and it was up to them to implement plans with sincerity and good will. To use their knowledge and experience to the best of their ability. This is the same kind of situation that we face today under the dictators in power. But, this is not what is happening today.

Politics denotes all the affairs of the people and the country. Actually it is concern for the human life. Some political scholars say, "man is a political animal". Politics is intertwined with man's basic needs like food, clothing, living conditions, and wealth. They cannot be separated.

For this reason, Bogyoke Aung San in his utterances declared that immediately after independence was obtained it would be necessary to be committed to making plans and successfully implementing them for immediate economic recovery. That in the fields of trade and finance there should be free partnership and association and that urgent steps be taken for recovery of national wealth to its original state. As genuine patriotic leaders, though the country was still in a state of war, they were fully cognizant of the importance of the economic welfare of the people.

But under the military dictators of today even our original wealth has been destroyed. Because of their policy of "My horse, I ride" and their various projects, using extreme authority, making demands, not having the qualifications, ignoring the people's wishes, and stubbornly not wanting to consult, the entire national wealth has been squandered and reduced. Their only consideration is for self and power preservation. Ignoring the true situation, they put on airs and shout out about the seemingly good things with a willful determination to push ahead and not examine or make proper assessment of what has been done. The country is poverty stricken and undeveloped. To get relief it is necessary to get loans from the World Bank

and other financial institutions just like what similar situated countries are doing.

The findings of the World Bank are:-

Burma has the natural resources and labour but the government's poor economic management has caused irretrievable loss. If the government continues in its present policies it is likely to exacerbate poverty and devastate national cohesion. Therefore major and in-depth economic reform was necessary. Reforms recommended were:

- (a) Foreign Exchange regulations.
- (b) Internal and external free trade of rice.
- (c) Budget reform
- (d) Freedom in private enterprise
- (e) Privatize national enterprises and reform those national enterprises that remain.

In the first 10 years of the 1990s though the economy had improved somewhat, the poor derived no benefits. The government needs a plan for a better distribution of wealth. One of the findings of the World Bank was that compared to other Asian countries the life span in Burma was decreasing especially with children and this was cause for concern.

The true situation in Burma today is the instability and deteriorating national prosperity. Declining economic activity and degenerating social intercourse has resulted in loss of trust in one another. Dearth of compassion, selfishness and absence of equity in politics is prevalent. This has lowered the morale and character. The students and the youth have no future. People have no security. Misconduct of the people in government at every level is transparent.

The deterioration and instability of the country's education is of special significance. People have lost faith in the health system. Forced labour without payment is the cultivator's lot. They suffer like slaves, serfs, servants at the hands of the military and their cohorts. Corruption is a survival necessity for civil servants and workers. The gap between urban and rural dwellers is wide. Divide and rule methods are employed with the ethnic races. Economic policy is designed to benefit the rulers and their families only.

National unity has been destroyed. There is no genuine unity. Democratic rights have been unjustly and illegally set back. Human Rights are systematically violated. All this is happening because the expressed wishes of the people and their representatives have been ignored and because of the determination for preservation of power and authority for themselves and their relatives.

In a democratic country;-

Sovereign power lies with the people, which then devolve on its representatives through elections. They make laws and take responsibility

for governing the country. People can openly associate and live. The courts are independent and can make impartial judgments. Civil servants discharge their duties with loyalty and honesty. People freely pursue knowledge, get education with freedom to work and worship.

Now, the military dictators are ignoring the results of the 1990 elections. They have arrested and incarcerated the representatives that the people have elected. They find fault and imprison some. Many parliamentarians are still suffering imprisonment and forced incarceration. Illegal pressure has been applied to force others to resign without proper consultation or legal advice from any one.

In dictatorships, the people's vote has no value. Weapons are relied upon. Power is exercised with a dangling sword over an individual's or a group of individual's heads. Torture and killing continues. Objectors and dissidents are subjugated and crushed. Rule by force results in loss of trust in the people and fear of opposition. That is why they need secret services of many varieties to keep them informed about what the people are saying. Torture, harass, arrest, incarcerate, imprison are the tactics they use.

When the individuals belonging to groups committed to opposing the dictatorship expose the dictators' methods and activities, they are illegally framed and sentenced to the maxim period prescribed and even after the full period has been served they are again held under a different unjustifiable law.

The courts are subjected to the authority of the dictators. They are sham courts that do as they are ordered to by the dictators and they act as cover-ups for them.

Civil servants are at the mercy of these dictators. Every wish has to be fulfilled to protect themselves from the anger and displeasure of their bosses, which could result in loss of positions, imprisonment and punishment.

This is not confined to the educators, workers, cultivators, civil servants, traders and others in every walk of life, it extends to the members of the sangha. Their existence is not peaceful either. If their teachings and preachings go beyond the territory and does not suit the practices of the dictators they are pulled back, threatened and intimidated, manipulated, given special favours, split and divided. Deceitful tactics and strategies to crush, subjugate, flatten out, and to keep the people in darkness are the characteristics of dictatorships.

The military dictators in Burma today are not planning how to meet the future. They have ignored the fate of the future generation by destroying the existing projects, organisations and educational facilities. They disregard good scholarly advice and continue stubbornly and without proper consideration and study the projects they have started and are working only

for the benefit of their relatives and associates. As the saying goes, "The gold glitters, but stomachs are hollow" is the situation today.

In democratic countries where the government is by the elected representatives, there is the obligation and duty to doggedly strive to fulfil the wishes of the people. Whatever the government does or wants to do is fully explained and submitted to the people. In matters of trade and commerce and social welfare, there has to be openness and accountability without false and misleading representations. Political parties act like a bridge connecting the people with the government. How different from what is happening here? Every conceivable deceitful means is eternally used to destroy the political parties.

To gain prosperity and respectability for the people and the country and as a member of the United Nations, in matters of trade, social welfare, administration, education, health, environment there should be interchange of ideas, information and expertise, compliance with diplomatic norms and established practices of the international body and cooperation with organisations promoting human rights. This is how representatives of the people should be governing. The dictators here think that they have plucked out a country and that it has now become their personal property.

The military dictators have illegally and by excessive use of power arrested parliamentarians and members of the National League for Democracy. They have forced them illegally to resign from the party. They have destroyed the lives and well being of family members and friends of the NLD. Threats, harassment and devious means have been employed for their stagnation in life by denying their children the legal right to education.

Because of all this the problems of today will never be solved and can never be solved. The military dictators have full knowledge of how countries of the world operate to bring about peace. But they choose not to adopt those procedures because they want to cling to power. But the National League for Democracy has firmly committed itself to keep on working for the extinguishment of all these injustices.

We have gained freedom from the control of a foreign country. The country has gained independence and likewise every citizen alike must enjoy the taste of equality and freedom. We must be able to enjoy the freedom that is enjoyed by free people in a free country. Burma today is suffering under the tyranny of the military dictators though we have come out of bondage to a foreign government. The people of Burma are denied the freedom that belongs to free countries. We remain slave people.

The most important point for considerable thought deep down in our hearts is as long as democracy and human rights are not restored to Burma, the people and citizens of Burma will be denied freedom and the rights and privileges they are entitled to as free and equal citizens. Under whatever guise that

may be adopted, life under the military dictators will be miserable, and surrounded by fear.

The National League for Democracy will apply non-violent means to get freedom for the people and solve their political, economic and social problems. We will consult with all the races, negotiate and find solutions. We will resort to peaceful means. This is our plan for the future.

We seriously urge you to join with the National League for Democracy as we commit ourselves and strive to achieve for Burma, our mother country, genuine freedom that will be everlasting and its people highly respected by all; to transform it into a modern democratic country established on this planet earth in the 21st century with all its ethnic races enjoying full and equal human rights.

Central Executive Committee
National League for Democracy
Rangoon

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