

BURMA

D E B A T E

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50 YEARS OF
INDEPENDENCE

IN THEIR
OWN WORDS:
Ludu Daw Ahmar
& Bo Mya

SAYONARA
SUU KYI SAN?

THE ISSUES....

BURMA D E B A T E

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ON THE COVER: The signing of the Britain-Burma Friendship Treaty at No. 10 Downing Street, October 17, 1947. Seated left to right: Bo Let Ya; Burma's prime minister, U Nu; and Britain's Prime Minister Attlee.

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TO OUR READERS: Beginning in 1998, *Burma Debate* will be published quarterly.

50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

January 4, 1998 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Burma's independence from Britain. The country's hopes for democratic governance following independence were marred by decades of civil unrest, ethnic conflict and military rule. Here two of Burma's most prominent political figures, State Peace and Development Chairman General Than Shwe and National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, give their perspectives on where the nation has been over the last fifty years and what the future may hold as Burma enters the twenty-first century.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

For those who came of age with the birth of their nation, the commemoration of independence holds particular significance. In these excerpts from a special anniversary broadcast by Radio Free Asia, Ludu Daw Ahmar, one of Burma's most prolific and respected writers, and General Bo Mya, head of the Karen National Union, share their thoughts and their personal messages with the people of Burma.

SAYONARA SUU KYI SAN?

Over the last several months, a strange phenomenon has occurred in the Japanese press. Termed "Aung San Suu Kyi bashing," it is an unusual and unexpected shift for a country that has not only long demonstrated respect for the Nobel Laureate but also has historical links to her father, General Aung San. Asian specialist Donald Seekins examines recently published articles by well-known business consultant Ohmae Kenichi, and explains how big-business is driving its agenda through the Japanese media.

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COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

SENIOR GENERAL

THAN SHWE'S

MESSAGE

ON THE OCCASION

OF THE GOLDEN

JUBILEE OF

INDEPENDENCE



In this auspicious and momentous Golden Jubilee Independence Day, I extend my greetings with love and esteem to all the national people of the Union of Myanmar.

It is fifty years, at this auspicious time of the new year, since we regained the independence and sovereignty of the Union of Myanmar through sacrificing lives, blood and sweat of many of the national people.

Our nation, after having stood as a sovereign State in the world for years countable by the thousand, was subjugated and dominated by colonialists in Konbaung Era.

With intense patriotism, the national brethren valiantly fought back the colonialist aggression and occupation with whatever weapons they could lay their hands on resorting to both mild and rough ways with the spirit of sacrifice. Victories of the patriotic heroes from among the various national races such as Kachins, Kayahs, Kayins, Chins, Bamars, Mons, Rakhines and Shans have been put on record in the annals of Myanmar history.

Endeavours of the sons and daughters of the national people — members of the Tatmadaw and service personnel — and all Union nationals who unitedly and conscientiously fought in the battles with great courage and spirit of sacrifice to safeguard national independence not to let it be lost in our time must also be placed on record with all esteem.

Throughout Myanmar history, Myanmar people's spirit of cherishing and safeguarding independence has been firm and prominent. We have the everlasting responsibility to strive to keep this spirit alive and dynamic in our future generations for posterity.

If we study the historical events Myanmar people experienced, we can see that all the people born in the Union of Myanmar have always been able to overcome the dangers of any subversives attempting to undermine the Union which is home to all national peoples residing together through prosperity or adversity. Movements crowned with



Victories also stand witness to the fact that we have marvellous power and strength to build anew at every instance of destruction.

In modern times, we must be vigilant against various wily schemes of some neo-colonialists who frequently interfere in the internal affairs of others. It is the time when we must keep constant vigil against any movements of those who want to disrupt stability and undermine national consolidation finding fault without any reason on pretext of democracy and human rights. Under these circumstances today, the national brethren of our Union are required to be more consolidated than before so as to firmly build the three strengths of the Union — political power, economic power and national defence power — living in the spirit of kinship and in amity.

To enable the Union of Myanmar to stand staunchly among the world's nations as an independent nation and to safeguard its sovereignty perpetually, all of us must make collaborative efforts and also strive for greater consolidation of national unity, maintenance of stability and enhancement of national development.

Today, the Union of Myanmar, as a member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, is participating in Asian and international affairs with dignity on par with other nations. Similarly, as the Heads of State of other countries paid visits to our peaceful and pleasant Union of Myanmar on the basis of exchange of goodwill visits, we also paid goodwill visits especially to the South-East Asian nations. It is evident that Myanmar's cooperation with the South-East Asian nations in political, economic and social sectors has been enhanced this year.

All of us, Myanmar people, must put on record with great honour the Union of Myanmar's significant achievements and accomplishments in international affairs.

We can also distinctly see the role of the Union Solidarity and Development Association which is now capable of making extensive movement as a result of all Union nationals' taking responsibility and their united efforts.

Due to the unity of the national brethren, the internal insurrection of the post-independence period has nearly come to an end today. As a result, transport and agricultural infrastructure could be built more extensively all over the country including border areas. The completed irrigation projects, dams and reservoirs, river bridges, new roads and industrial establishments stand witness to the nation's socio-economic development.

FOUR OBJECTIVES FOR OBSERVANCE OF THE 1998 GOLDEN JUBILEE INDEPENDENCE DAY

- ◆ All citizens to always collectively safeguard perpetuation of national independence and sovereignty,
- ◆ All citizens to unitedly strive for non-disintegration of the Union and non-disintegration of national solidarity,
- ◆ All citizens to conscientiously implement the projects for building a modern and developed new nation, and
- ◆ All citizens to be united in endeavouring for the emergence of an enduring Constitution.

After the market-oriented economic system was adopted, national economy has developed with change on an upward trend. Participation of the private sector has been increasing at a high rate year after year. As proper economic foundations and good prospects including local and foreign investments have been acquired, we all have to make constant efforts for materialization of these opportunities.

All of us could unitedly build proper political, economic and social infrastructure with zeal for emergence of a modern, developed nation. We are also preserving our culture and fine traditions so as to revitalize the dynamism of patriotism and to promote national prestige and safeguard cultural heritage. Tasks covering preservation of cultural heritage such as rebuilding and renovation of ancient Myanmar palaces and old pagodas and stupas in accord with

the characteristics of the olden times and holding of Myanmar cultural literary, music, painting, sculpture and performing arts competitions and exhibitions are aimed at revitalization of a civilization.

Stepping up the political, economic and social foundations which we have already built, all of us must strive for emergence of a new modern, developed nation with perseverance, industry and diligence. The door is open for enhancement of scientific and technological skills to be able to catch up internationally and for human resources development. We are also organizing exhibitions and exhibitions and training programmes as much as we can for industrial and technological development.

For writing a firm State Constitution that will guarantee Our Three Main National causes, the National Convention is undertaking the tasks on behalf of all Union nationals.

With the aim of seeing to emergence of discipline-flourishing democracy and building a new peaceful, modern and developed nation, the State Peace and Development Council has been constituted at the present time and it is marching onward without losing sight of its objective.

With the dedicated resolve to step forward from the Golden Jubilee to the Golden Era without fail, the Four Objectives for observance of the 1998 Golden Jubilee Independence Day were laid down as follows:

- All citizens to always collectively safeguard perpetuation of national independence and sovereignty,
- All citizens to unitedly strive for non-disintegration of the Union and non-disintegration of national solidarity,
- All citizens to conscientiously implement the projects for building a modern and developed new nation, and
- All citizens to be united in endeavouring for the emergence of an enduring Constitution.

On this auspicious occasion of the Union of Myanmar's Golden Era, I would like to urge with love and esteem to all of our Union nationals to implement these four national objectives with might and main with oneness of mind and in unity.

*This first appeared in THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR
Monday, January 5, 1998.*

LETTER FROM BURMA

Honoring Those Who Fought for Freedom

BY AUNG SAN SUU KYI

BURMA'S
"GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY"
Dated: 1/12/98

The nature of time is incomprehensible. Days that crept and months that crawled telescope into years that seem to fly past.

Burma is a land of soothsayers. Campaigning in the Irrawaddy division in 1989, I met a young doctor who told me anxiously that after careful astrological calculation, local Buddhist monks had come to the conclusion that nine years would pass before the movement for democracy was crowned with victory. "Nine years," he said with furrowed brow, "Can we bear it for so long?" "Why not?" I replied absently, wondering about the scientifically calculable probability rate of astrological predictions with one part of my mind while the other tried to work out the implications of a decade of struggle. At that time, a decade stretched out mistily into the unforeseeable future; but now that almost the whole of it has been left behind, it has shrunk to negligible proportions.

While 10 years seen in retrospect do not seem much, 50 years in retrospect, perhaps because it is almost a lifetime for me, or perhaps because it constitutes a historic phase, take on a "forever" aspect. On January 4, 1998, Burma commemorated the golden anniversary of her independence.

I cannot remember a time when my country was not a sovereign independent nation, just as I cannot remember a time when I did not know the story of our struggle for independence. I grew up on tales of the exploits of the Rangoon University Students' Union, the "We Burmese" association, the war, the resistance movement, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League



(AFPFL), the general boycott that brought the colonial government to its knees, the negotiations with the British Labour government, and the Panglong accord between the Burmese and the other ethnic nationalities.

**Those were the days when parliamentary
democracy was practiced in Burma. Undeniably
there were flaws in the system, but equally
undeniably the people felt free.**

These tales were illustrated by photographs of my father as a university student; as the young commander of the Burma Independence Army; as war minister (by that time my mother and brothers had begun to feature as well); speaking at public rallies after the war as the leader of the AFPFL; wrapped in an oversized greatcoat during his trip to London for talks with the British government; and adorned with Kachin turban and sword around the time of the Panglong agreement. The story of the Burmese independence movement was intertwined with that of my father's life.

Together with stories about the independence movement and my father, I heard discussions about the latest "insurgent situation." It seemed then that rebellions and civil strife were part and parcel of nationhood. There were newspaper articles about military operations and news photographs of "liberated" villages. Arguments raged over the efforts of the AFPFL government to negotiate peace.

At one time the government made an offer of amnesty, and daily we heard on the radio songs meant to lure insurgents back into the "legal fold." The popular term was "coming back into the light," and we children became adept at chanting the slo-

gan, "Don't stare vacantly, comrade! Don't be lost in thought, comrade! Come back into the light, comrade, comrade!" It was something of a joke.

A play written by Prime Minister U Nu in which communist insurgents featured as the baddies was part of our school syllabus and we had to memorize some of the politically crucial dialogue. Later a film was made of the play starring a couple of military officers, who later left the army to become professional actors. It all seemed part of normal life in Burma.

Our regular visitors included a number of passionate politicians, not all of whom supported the same causes, so that if their visits coincided there would be some colorful exchanges. I understood roughly that the communists and socialists were not too fond of one another, that both groups had many sympathizers, but also that there were many who loathed both, condemning them either as fanatics, as deceivers or as troublemakers.

I understood too that the fighting taking place in the jungles outside Rangoon was an extension of the politics raging in the capital even though I had never heard of Clausewitz. There were Red Flag Communist insurgents and White Flag Communists and the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO).

There were also the "White Comrades." I was politically sophisticated enough to understand that they were quite apart from the White Communists with whom they sometimes entered into temporary alliances, but it was not until I was 8 or 9 that I really managed to sort out who they were and why they had taken up arms against the government. My somewhat biased informant was a young woman who had "come back into the light" after "taking refuge in the jungles" for several years as an adherent of the White Comrades group.

Those were the days when parliamentary democracy was practiced in Burma. Undeniably there were flaws in the system, but equally undeniably the people felt free. They could embark confidently on political discussions without peering around to make sure there were no informers lurking in the background. Newspaper articles criticizing the government were read aloud in the shops to the vociferous satisfaction of the audience. The family of a Karen friend who had joined the insurgents came and went freely. Neither they nor we felt under any threat when we were together; the government did not believe in

persecuting family and friends for the political beliefs of one individual. That was just as well, as most people seemed to know or be related to somebody who belonged to some armed rebel group.

Looking back, there is an almost golden glow to that era of parliamentary democracy in spite of the insurgencies. The judiciary was independent, the press was unmuzzled, and elections took place regularly. We could choose our own government, we could shout at it, and we could throw it out with the power of our vote.

Gray seems to be the color most often associated with socialism of the nondemocratic brand. The color actually favored by the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), scion of the military revolutionary council that assumed power in 1962, was blue, and a rather pretty blue at first, but the years of BSPP rule in Burma definitely appear monochromatic and dull. When the people of Burma eventually erupted in frustration in 1988 after the drab years, angry greens and reds became the key colors: the jungle green of the army and the grass green of its civilian arm, the Union Solidarity and Development Association, the red of the flag (stamped with white a star and a yellow fighting peacock) of the National League for Democracy.

The spectrum of Burma's first 50 years of independence is not soothing. And we are beginning the second part of our independence century with political and economic woes. "Where have all our wonderful ideals gone?" Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru once wrote in bewilderment as he struggled with the problems of post-independence India. When nation-building is accompanied by internecine fights, it can be so much more disruptive than any revolutionary war of independence.

Our young people of today listen wistfully to accounts of the exploits of the student unions of their grandfathers' day. It is astounding to think that the colonial government allowed unions to be formed and permitted demonstration marches and rallies and even tolerated the burning of the Union Jack and demands for the British governor to "go back home". True, in a demonstration organized by students, one of them was struck down by a mounted policeman and later died of his wounds. However, there was a proper official enquiry into his death and students and politicians were allowed to organize his funeral with due honor.

This is in glaring contrast to the situation today: Students are not allowed to organize unions and universities have been shut since the student demonstrations of December 1996.

Political parties too were able to operate more freely under colonial rule. They freely recruited members, organized and reorganized their various committees, campaigned throughout the country, held public meetings and openly discussed ways and means of getting rid of the alien government. Of course, numbers of politicians were arrested and imprisoned but the lot of a political prisoner was not such an unhappy one. They were fed and treated well and allowed to organize various activities within the prison, including classes on political subjects. Many felt they had graduated in politics during their term of imprisonment.

After British administration was re-established at the end of the war, the AFPFL went into party work full swing, carrying the public with them in the sweep of pre-independence elections enthusiasm. And when the party won, their victory was not swept aside and ignored, it was duly recognized. Those were simpler days.

What, some might question, is the point of celebrating the 50th anniversary of our independence when the people of Burma are so patently lacking in the basic freedoms: freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom from unlawful restraint?

The NLD will be commemorating the golden anniversary with all due honor because we want to acknowledge our debt of gratitude to those who fought for independence in the hope and belief that self-government would mean better and more just government. If their hopes have not been realized, it is not their fault but that of those to whom fell the task of preserving independence and making it truly meaningful. As we celebrate on Jan. 4 with a Burmese orchestra, an electronic band, traditional games such as the climbing of a greased pole and a play (political in content of course), we shall be renewing our resolve to make the sacrifice of those who fought for independence really worthwhile.

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This letter was originally published in Japan's Mainichi Daily News, January 12, 1998.

IN THEIR

Ludu Daw Ahmar's Message

Ludu Daw Ahmar, Burma's most prolific writer, is Mandalay-born. While attending the University of Rangoon before World War II, she participated in the student movement of the Rangoon University Students' Union. After independence she wrote and published news reports and editorials in the family-owned Ludu (People's) Journal and is perhaps best known for her series of books on Burma's most famous personalities in the world of fine arts. At 81 years of age, she resides in Rangoon and still contributes her writings to many magazines and journals.

It has been 50 years since we have gained our independence, hasn't it?

So it means that we already have completed half a century...

Now that 50 years have come to pass, what I would like to express is my earnest wish to see all of us —



all nationalities — hand-in-hand, in a relentless effort, striving towards a common goal in a warm and cordial manner, in unity and harmony.

In order to achieve this goal, if we could work together with a consensus on a system of reconstruction of our nation, with internal peace, democracy and trust, then it would be most rewarding.

May we attain this vision to the fullest...

May we be able to achieve our objectives in warmth, compassion and happiness towards one another.

Remarks on the of Burma's

Bo MYA • As far as we are concerned, until *Na-Wa-Ta* [the regime] changes... until they change the military dictatorship system and restore democracy and human rights, make Burma's *Tatmadaw* into the *Pyidaungsu* [Union] *Tatmadaw*, and return power to all the people... then, and only then, can we accept them...

QUESTION • Is there anything else you would like to say to the people inside Burma? What other message would you have?

BM • There is one thing that the people of Burma need to understand; that all the people in the entire country are in a state of suffering. The suffering is *Na-Wa-Ta's* doing. It alone has brought upon this suffering to the whole nation. That is why the people need to build unity... need to have understanding. In this struggle to obtain democracy again, there needs to be complete trust among ourselves, complete understanding between the various ethnic nationalities. As

OWN WORDS

Over the past 20 years, General Bo Mya has served as the president of the Karen National Union (KNU), commander-in-chief of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and chairman of the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) and the National Coalition for the Union of Burma (NCUB). He has fought in the Karen resistance for nearly 50 years.



50th Anniversary Independence – General Bo Mya

we see it, *Na-Wa-Ta* has no consideration, possesses no feelings of empathy for the people. That's the reason why it is crucial for the '*pyi-thu ludu*' [the people] to build unity and trust towards each other.

Q • How would we 'build' this unity?

BM • The way to build this would be for all of us, all nationalities, to strive toward unity on a steadfast path toward democracy. To obtain democracy we need to stand firm. For as long as democratic principles have not been established, the people will continue to suffer. This is the reason the KNU is still waging its struggle for democracy.

We have the highest regard for the people and therefore will never surrender to *Na-Wa-Ta*. *Na-Wa-Ta* said that they would convene a National Convention... draw up a constitution. In addition they said that when the draft constitution has been completed

there will be changes... they said democratic rights will be bestowed. We don't believe they will do what they say.

Our sources say that the National Convention has already completed drawing up the draft constitution. It seems that the ethnic nationalities will only be there to listen to what has already been decided. Should they — the nationalities — attend the National Convention... when no changes will be allowed anyway? The military will outnumber [the other participants] by about twenty-five percent. That's the plan they have laid out... to perpetuate the military's power. That is our understanding.

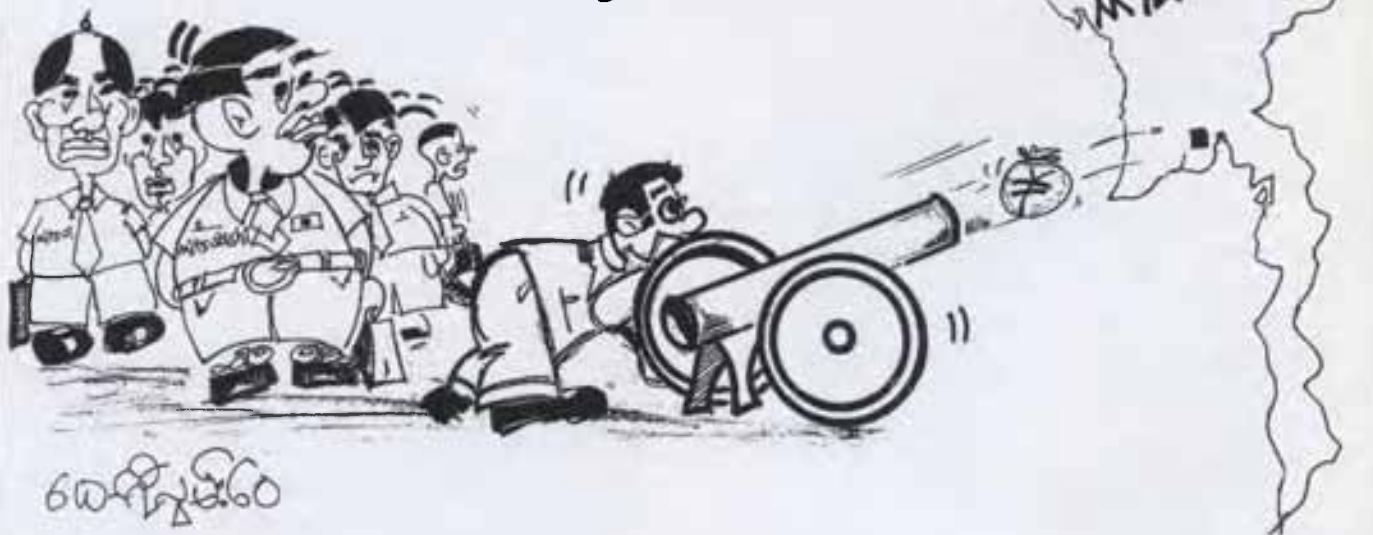
The above remarks by Ludu Daw Ahmar and General Bo Mya are excerpts from Radio Free Asia's 50th Anniversary Independence Day special broadcast.



"ONE TRIP TO EVERYONE

BY DONALD M. SEEKINS, PH.D.

Japan Incorporated Rolls Out a Big Gun



MYANMAR AND WOULD LOVE THE COUNTRY"

Burma-Japan relations go back to before World War II, and the opinions of Japan's "old Burma hands" are often better informed about internal conditions than those of Western observers, even if one doesn't entirely agree with them. But a new Japanese perspective on Burma has emerged, which could be described as "Aung San Suu Kyi-bashing" or "hitching one's wagon to the star of Asian values."¹ A representative of this approach is Ohmae Kenichi, a well-known business consultant, who warmed the hearts of the generals in Rangoon with a couple of articles at the end of 1997. One appeared in the year-end issue of *Asiaweek*, a Hong Kong publication, in which he asserts that:

"The West knows about Myanmar through one person, Aung San Suu Kyi. The obsession with Suu Kyi is a natural one if you understand that U.S. superficial democracy is golden in the United States; Americans love elections. Just as Myanmar is Buddhist, and Malaysia is Islamic, America has a religion called Democracy. There is merit in promoting democratic reforms. But America is a simplistic country. Americans insist that what works for them should work for others at any time and in any stage of economic development."

Ohmae recently went to Burma with a delegation of fifty-one Japanese businessmen, and was impressed by the great "progress" which has been made since the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC, known since November 1997 as the State Peace and Development Council, or SPDC) seized power in 1988.

Ohmae's *Asiaweek* comments are relatively restrained, but he shoots from the hip in two articles which appeared in a popular Japanese magazine, *SAPIO*, in November 1997: "Mrs. Suu Kyi is becoming a burden for a developing Myanmar" (November 12, 1997) and "Cheap and hardworking laborers: this country will be Asia's best" (November 26, 1997).³ *SAPIO* is an example of new-breed Japanese journalism, full of trendy neo-nationalist themes, reading bait for Tokyo rush hour strap-hangers. The *SAPIO* articles are a fascinating excursion into the little-known realm of Japanese-style Orientalism. They tell us almost nothing about Burma itself but a great deal about the worldview of a certain type of Japanese media-intellectual (*hyooronka*). Given the importance of these people in Japanese popular culture and Japan's importance to Burma, Ohmae's views warrant close examination.

He claims that the United States "has established her [Aung San Suu Kyi] as the Jeanne d'Arc of

Myanmar and is using her to spread their propaganda and pressure the regime. However, why the US feels the need to do this and to achieve what end is beyond my comprehension.” Yet America’s policy of isolating the country “despite its steady economic progress, engenders suspicion.” He believes that “in a year or two, Mrs. Suu Kyi will be a person of the past.”⁴

Since the Japanese public tends to see the country’s problems in terms of [Aung San Suu Kyi’s] struggle with the junta, Ohmae’s tactic of delegitimizing her by linking her to something resented... is an effective way of getting public support for normalization of Tokyo-junta economic ties.

His accusation strikes a responsive chord with many Japanese, who believe — not without justification — that their own country has long been a victim of American bullying. Ken-bei (“dislike America”) sentiment has been on the rise because of trade disputes and skepticism about the post-Cold War usefulness of the Japan-U.S. security alliance.

Aung San Suu Kyi, however, is highly respected. Her “Letters from Burma” appeared as a weekly series in the mass-circulation newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun* in 1995-1996, winning a national journalism award.⁵ *Mainichi Shimbun* and the more liberal *Asahi Shimbun*, another major newspaper, have reported sympathetically on her activities since 1988. Her book, *Freedom from Fear*, and her collected speeches have been translated into Japanese, and her life has even inspired *Manga*, the popular Japanese genre of comic books for grown-ups.⁶

Most Japanese media coverage of Burma — as in other countries — focuses on the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize Winner. Regime abuses which affect ordinary Burmese such as forced labor or the “pacification” of ethnic minorities are given relatively little attention. Since the Japanese public tends to see the country’s problems in terms of her struggle with the junta, Ohmae’s tactic of delegitimizing her by linking her to something resented (*American gaiatsu*, “external pressure” on Japan as well as Burma) is an effective way of getting public support for normalization of Tokyo-junta economic ties. This would include large-scale resumption of official development assistance (ODA), and lucrative aid procurement contracts for major Japanese companies. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that following Burma’s admission to ASEAN last year the only obstacles standing between Tokyo and SLORC/SPDC are Aung San Suu Kyi’s international stature and pressure from the United States government. Linking the two is a good way of “killing two birds with one stone.”

Washington’s quarantine of the junta has been getting on the nerves of the Japanese establishment. A major issue is modernization of Rangoon’s Mingaladon Airport, a pre-1988 ODA project which was frozen because of the political crisis and problems internal to the project. After Burma was admitted to ASEAN, the government sent a high-ranking Ministry of Foreign Affairs official to Rangoon to investigate the possibility of a partial restart of aid in order to improve the dilapidated airport’s safety. But the United States government strongly opposed a plan to release 7.0 billion yen in funds for this purpose.⁷ [Editor’s note: Japan announced on March 11 that 2.5 billion yen would be released.] Tokyo has joined the European Union in protesting the State of Massachusetts’ Selective Purchasing Law before the World Trade Organization.⁸ This law and others passed by American states and cities are having an impact on Japanese companies penalized for doing business with the junta. Thus Burma has become a sideshow in Japan-United States economic conflicts.

Ohmae is clearly enchanted with Burma, its people and their culture. “One trip to Myanmar and everyone would love the country,” he exclaims.⁹ He contrasts the Burmese with the Chinese: “(i)n China, for example, on the surface they appear sincere and serious, but in reality they do everything for money.”¹⁰

This off-the-cuff remark could be interpreted as reflecting unease about China's growing economic power and its aspiration to replace Japan as Number One in Asia. Also, there is concern in Tokyo about Beijing's close ties with the SLORC/ SPDC regime. According to one newspaper account, a reason the Japanese government proposed restarting the airport project is to offset China's growing influence over the junta at a time when the ASEAN countries are cutting back on investment because of their own economic problems.¹¹

For a capitalist like Ohmae, an advocate of rigorous business globalization, it is ironic that his SAPIO articles express a nostalgic longing for a pure Asia outside of allegedly money-mad places like China and Vietnam, where "everyone seeks to become rich quickly."¹² Burma reminds him of his boyhood village in Kyushu, southern Japan, where people worked hard, had just about enough to eat, and lived simple lives without electricity or running water: "(t)he current Myanmar mirrors these memories of farming villages in Japan. Japan at the time was poor in comparison with the United States but this was not detrimental to Japan."¹³ Logically, Ohmae ought to oppose Japanese and other foreign investment in Burma to prevent the undermining of its — in his words — "fervently Buddhist ethics."

Last year NHK, Japan state-run broadcasting network, aired a television documentary on post-1988 economic liberalization.¹⁴ One sequence showed young Burmese women recruited to dress up in bright red silk dresses and hawk Chinese-made cigarettes ("Red Pagoda Mountain Brand") in Rangoon. The sight must have disgusted both many Burmese passers-by, but that's capitalism, global-style, the sort of thing both Ohmae and Japanese big business are crusading for all over Asia.

The Bottom Line is never far from Ohmae's thoughts. He practically salivates over the basement-level wages paid Burmese workers, about US\$20.00 a month. The Burmese "have a high level of education" and "(t)heir sense of morality prevents them from stealing." "This," he exclaims, "is an unprecedented top-class labor market." The title of his November 26 article says it all. He is amazed at how

cheap everything is. A massage is only ten dollars. A friend of his bought a ruby originally priced at US\$200, but bargained it down to five dollars!

Ohmae's enthusiasm might be dampened by reading a little Burmese history — about the University Boycott of 1920 or the Oilfield Workers' Strike of 1938. Or about the close association of nationalism and revolution in 1988 as well as 1938. He might also be discouraged by recent reports about labor activism and work stoppages at textile factories run as joint ventures by the junta and foreign investors or at Burma's largest mine at Namtu in Shan State near Lashio.¹⁵



Ohmae's "Orientalism" is evident in his illogicality. Burma is pure and unmaterialistic, unlike China or Vietnam; but it is all right to exploit Burmese workers to make a profit. There is, in this sort of mentality, a profoundly reactionary sentiment which is universal rather than uniquely Japanese in nature. It idealizes a harmonious hierarchy of lesser and greater peoples, a benevolent ruling class seated firmly on top, governing humble, industrious and docile serfs as in feudal Europe or

Japan — or the British colonial regime which Aung San and his comrades fought to overthrow. Such fragile ideological tissue dresses up very large economic interests.¹⁶

One wonders how many days Ohmae spent in Burma after reading statements like — “Villages are extremely clean. There are no slums. This is due to the lack of difference in wealth... Myanmar is a rare

[Ohmae] concludes by suggesting that young

Japanese people should visit Burma in order to

“confirm the reality that Myanmar is entirely

different from the image portrayed by Japanese and

American media as ‘military dictatorship –

repression – poor Suu Kyi.’”

case; it does not suffer from either overcrowded cities or destitution.”¹⁷ He is apparently oblivious to the many reports, published by the United Nations and other agencies, about the country’s endemic poverty and neglect of public health and social welfare. It is unlikely that his hosts informed him that the reason central Rangoon has relatively few slums is forced relocation of thousands of residents to undeveloped “new towns.” He comments that the armed forces have outdated weapons — “The technology is so ancient that it is unnecessary to fear the government as a military dictatorship.”¹⁸ This will be news to the Karens and Shans, not to mention the parents who lost their children in the mass shootings of 1988. He also accepts uncritically claim of former economic planning minister David Abel that SLORC/SPDC is doing its utmost to combat narcotics, and that the real source of the drug problem is the United States, “the largest consumer of drugs.”

He concludes his November 26 article by suggesting that young Japanese people should visit Burma — there are three flights to Rangoon weekly from Kansai International Airport — in order to “confirm the reality that Myanmar is entirely different from the image portrayed by Japanese and American media as ‘military dictatorship’ — repression — poor Suu Kyi.”

How representative of Japanese opinion are Ohmae’s articles? This is difficult to assess. *SAPIO* is not a mainstream publication like the *Mainichi* or *Asahi Shimbun*, or prominent monthly reviews such as *Chuuoo Kooron*, or *Bungei Shunjuu*. But Ohmae, author of popular business-oriented books like *The Borderless World* and *End of the Nation-State*, is a big gun in the arsenal of Japan Incorporated. A strong believer in the dynamism of the marketplace, he excels at the role of the “tough-minded internationalist” (*Shitataka na Kokusaijin*), who forcefully speaks up for the national interest rather than hiding behind a mask of diffidence like many of his countrymen.¹⁹ Many if not most high-ranking businessmen and bureaucrats with an interest in Asia probably share his sunny view of the junta. Many other Japanese people do not, including a good number of “old Burma hands.”

What should not be overlooked is the way Ohmae’s rhetoric fits into an ideological context. A concept known as “Re-Asianization” has become fashionable within the business and bureaucratic establishment: a refashioning of Japan’s “identity” as a part of Asia rather than an aspiring western-type country, and an affirmation of undemocratic “Asian values.” Popular politician and novelist Ishihara Shintaroo writes in his 1995 book, *The Voice of Asia*, coauthored with Malaysian prime minister Mohamad Mahathir, that Japan should “come home” to Asia and establish a mutually-supportive regional community of nations based on “Asian” identity.²⁰ In part, “Re-Asianization” is fueled by a resentment of the West, which allegedly can never accept Japan as an equal. As Laura Hein and Ellen H. Hammond write in a recent article, “Re-Asianization” promoters tend to portray this Asian community in terms of hierarchy, with Japan occupying the highest position. The resemblance to the wartime “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” is striking.²¹

It is unclear from the articles whether Ohmae can be considered a proponent of this view. Liberal in many ways, he might protest being put in the same category as Ishihara, a romantic rightist. But the hierarchical view is consistent with his reactionary view of the "ideal" Burma, a "country which will be Asia's best," where a comfortable alliance of domestic generals and foreign businessmen can reap the benefits of rich natural resources and a docile, hardworking and population.

Burma's new role as an ideological football between Japan (or Asia) and the West does not portend a happy future. The origin of the political crisis afflicting the country since 1988 — fundamentally since 1962 — is wholly within Burma's historical experience and the dynamics of its multi-ethnic society, though foreign actors have played an often disruptive role. International support for a peaceful resolution of the crisis — including a genuine dialogue between Aung San Suu Kyi, the ethnic minorities, and the junta — can only be effective if foreigners appreciate the country's distinct situation rather than making it a part of their own ideological or self-interested fantasies.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dr. Kenichi Ohmae, the author referred to in this article, refused *Burma Debate* permission to reprint translations of his articles "Mrs. Suu Kyi is becoming a burden for a developing Myanmar" and "Cheap and hardworking laborers: this country will be Asia's best," which appeared in *SAPIO* magazine. *SAPIO* is a popular Japanese-language magazine published by Shougakukan.

END NOTES:

- 1: The term "Suu Kyi-bashing," (*Suu Kyi Basshingu* in Japanese) is used by journalist Nagai Hiroshi to criticize this orientation in the mass media. Nagai Hiroshi, "Yuganda Media No Naka No Biruma [Burma as depicted in warped media]. *SEKAI*, no. 638, August 1997: pp. 293-304.
- 2: Ohmae Kenichi, "1997: A Year of Transition. *Asiaweek*, "Special Collectors' Edition," December 1997, p. 5.
- 3: Translations of these articles were provided to the author by the Burma Relief Center-Japan.
- 4: Ohmae Kenichi, "Mrs. Suu Kyi is becoming a burden for a developing Myanmar," *SAPIO*, November 12, 1997.
- 5: The English Versions of "Letters from Burma" were published in the *Mainichi Daily News*, and compiled in Aung San Suu Kyi. *Letters from Burma*. London: Penguin Books, 1997.
- 6: Aung San Suu Kyi. *Jiyuu* [Freedom]. Translated by Yumiko Jannson. Tokyo: Shueisha, 1991; Aung San Suu Kyi, — *Enzetsu Shuu* [Collected Speeches]. Translated by Ino Kenji. Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 1996. For a comic book version of her life, see Akazu Mizuha, *Aung San Suu Kyi: Tatatau Kujaku* [Aung San Suu Kyi: the fighting peacock]. "Super Nobel Prize Story" No. 2. Tokyo: Ootoo Shobo, 1994.
- 7: Mitsubishi Soogoo Kenkyuujoo. AJIA 1998 [Asia 1998]. Tokyo: Diamond-sha, 1997: p. 201; "Yangon kuukoo enjo minokuri [Wait-and-see over aid for Yangon airport]." *Ryuukyuu Shimp*, August 31, 1997.
- 8: Masaki Hisane. "US Economic Sanctions Come Under Fire at the WTO." *The Japan Times*, February 5, 1998.
- 9: Ohmae Kenichi, "Mrs. Suu Kyi."
- 10: Ohmae Kenichi, "Cheap and hardworking laborers: this country will be Asia's best." *SAPIO*, November 26, 1997.
- 11: Onaka Kaori. "US said to be resisting Tokyo's ODA for Burma." *Mainichi Shimbun*, January 12, 1998.
- 12: Ohmae Kenichi, "Mrs. Suu Kyi."
- 13: Ibid.
- 14: Nippon Hoosoo Kyookai (NHK). Shisoo Ajia — Myanmar ["Asia dashing ahead — Myanmar], broadcast May 23, 1997.
- 15: FTUB. "Textile workers' activities." *BurmaNet News*, no. 906, January 7, 1998; All Burma Students' Democratic Front. "8,000 protest over workers' rights at Burma's largest mine." *BurmaNet News* on-line service, received February 10, 1998.
- 16: For a discussion of reactionary themes in contemporary Asian discourse, see Kanishka Jayasuriya. "Asian Values as Reactionary Modernization." *Nordic Newsletter of Asian Studies*, 1997, pp. 19-22.
- 17: Ohmae Kenichi, "Mrs. Suu Kyi."
- 18: Ohmae Kenichi, "Cheap and hardworking laborers."
- 19: On the "tough-minded internationalist" and the ambiguous meaning of "internationalization" in Japan, see Harumi Befu. "Internationalization of Japan and Nihon Bunkaron." In Hiroshi Mannari and Harumi Befu, eds. *The Challenge of Japan's Internationalization: Organization and Culture*. Tokyo: Kwansei Gakuin University and Kodansha International, 1983: pp. 232-265.
- 20: Mahathir Mohamad and Shintaro Ishihara. *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century*. Tokyo: Kinokuniya, 1995: pp. 31-36.
- 21: Laura Hein and Ellen H. Hammond. "Homing in on Asia: Identity in Contemporary Japan." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol. 27: 3, July-September 1995: pp. 3-17.

THE LAST DAYS OF MR. LEO NICHOLS

It was in May 1996 when I saw Mr. Nichols in Insein Prison. I was serving my final year of a seven year prison sentence, and the Burmese military junta was campaigning hard to attract foreign visitors to the country. They had christened it "Visit Myanmar Year". Even so, I remember that the military leaders imprisoned many foreigners that year.

Most of these imprisoned foreigners were from China, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan and the majority had come to Burma for business reasons. I don't include the more than 400 Thai fishermen as foreigners because they are frequently arrested.

Among the many imprisoned foreigners I encountered, I can recall two with Burmese connections.

One of them was Dr. Shum, also known as Yunuk and Saw Yan Naing, who was a Burmese with Malaysian citizenship. He was a businessman, an artist and a song writer. The other was Mr. Leo Nichols. I didn't know if he was Burmese. All that I knew then was that he was the honorary consul-general to Denmark and was said to be very close to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Dr. Shum and Mr. Nichols were sent to Insein Special Prison where political prisoners are held. It was a well-known fact in Insein at the time that the Burmese military regime held a grudge against these two, more so than anyone else in the prison.

One evening in May 1996, when I was emptying the chamber pot with other prisoners, we saw a man in yellow sports shirt and a white prison sarong. A blue hood was pulled over his head and he was sitting among the rice pots in the back of the truck. The truck was used to carry rice and curry pots from the main Insein Jail to our Special Jail. "A new prisoner," I thought to myself.

Out of sheer curiosity, we hung around for a while to see if we could find out who the new prisoner was. I thought he could be someone I knew, a fellow student perhaps. We saw a warder lead him down from the truck before the rice pots were unloaded. He was then taken into the Main Jail office. He was tall and light-complexioned and was handcuffed behind his back.

Soon after, two warders took him towards the cells of Hall-1 where we were housed. By that time, the handcuffs had been taken off and the hood removed. The man did not look Burmese but resembled a white foreigner. He was wearing spectacles and appeared uncomfortable in his prison sarong which was designed for Burmese prisoners. The sarong barely covered his knees. We saw him untying the sarong and retying it while he was walking along as if it was not fastened properly.

When he arrived at his cell we noticed he had a large forehead and thin hair. It was clearly evident that he was shocked and frightened.

We wanted to say hello to him but we were warned by the two accompanying warders. "Don't speak to him now," they



Leo Nichols

said. "The MIS [Military Intelligence Service] captain is still in the Main Jail office." Because the warders were friendly with us we followed their advice and instead smiled at the new foreign prisoner. Blank and perplex, he looked back at us but did not say a word. Shortly afterwards, we saw warders drag him into cell-5. However, to our luck the next cell housed an elected NLD [National League for Democracy] representative who knew the foreign prisoner. Soon they were speaking in English, a language the warders did not understand.

Within half an hour, we came to know that his name was Mr. Leo Nichols and that he had just been sentenced to three years imprisonment for helping Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. He was suffering from dysentery and we were soon busy looking for medicines for him. He said he could not eat the prison food, so we collected biscuits and other dry snacks for him from among fellow political prisoners. We sent it to him through a friendly warder and hoped that it might satisfy his hunger for a while.

Mr. Nichols was unlucky. We were between prison visits from our families and the supplies we had secretly stockpiled were almost gone. We were therefore unable to give him better food. Later we were informed that the NLD parliamentarian explained to Mr. Nichols in English about rights of political prisoners and of foreign prisoners. He advised Mr. Nichols to talk to the prison authorities to demand his rights. The MP also explained to him that the jail hall where he was being housed was for political prisoners and that he should not be disheartened. As soon as he heard that he was surrounded by political prisoners, Mr. Nichols said "Hello" to everyone in English.

The same night he was thrown into prison, MIS officers came and took Mr. Nichols away for further questioning. He was taken after the warders called lights-out. They took him to the interrogation centre at Insein Special Prison. As usual, a

hood was pulled over his head. Mr. Nichols had to spend the whole night at the interrogation center while being questioned and abused. We saw warders bring him back to his cell the following evening.

We cheered him up whenever we had the chance to get out of our cells and walked by his cell. Those could speak English spoke to him as soon as the warder disappeared, and asked him various questions.

I recall some of the things he told us. He said he was detained for helping Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and that he had sent faxes for her. As a result he said he was given three years imprisonment with hard labor. A court which conducted a summary trial sentenced him. He couldn't tell us the name of the court, but he tried to explain to us that it was a special court.

Before sentencing he was taken to an MIS interrogation center and questioned for six consecutive days. He said when the MIS came to arrest him they confiscated all his money, which was more than two million kyat. The money was from the recent sale of some land in Maymyo. We didn't know whether it was his own land or if it belonged to someone else. He told us that he was arrested the day after the land sale.

He wasn't able to tell us exactly where he was sent after his sentencing and before his transfer to our cells. But he did say that he was taken to a hall where there were many prisoners and had to stay there for a few days. He then was transferred to a tiny room and had to stay there a few more days until he was taken to our hall.

The prison authorities confiscated his watch and other clothes upon his arrival in Insein. The pair of trousers he was wearing was taken away because the prison officials said that he could not wear trousers in prison. Instead, he was issued a white prison sarong and a white shirt. He said that a prisoner gave him the yellow sports shirt he was now wearing.

We asked him whether he was beaten or forced to sit in a '*Poun-san*' position upon his arrival. He said he had to sit in this position for a long time although he was not beaten. When he was telling us this, we sensed a feeling of distress in his voice.

Judging by what he had said, we concluded that he may have been detained in a section of Insein where prisoners are held before sentencing. On the day he was given three years imprisonment, we believed that he was probably transferred either to Hall-6, which was known as the punishment hall, to a 'dog kennel' cell, or held in one of the detached cells within the interrogation hall. We also concluded that by forcing Mr. Nichols to sit in the '*Poun-san*' position for long periods, the military junta had shown their extreme hatred of him.

This reminded us of U Win Tin and Saya U Tin Moe, the two most well-known political prisoners in Insein at the time.

The junta had made U Tin Win, an NLD Central Executive Committee member, stay in a cell with well-known criminals, notorious for their bullying, extortion and physical

abuse. As for Saya U Tin Moe, who is widely known for his fiery poems, he was forced to go through Hall-5, the '*Poun-san*' Hall, upon arrival. Later he was forced to share a cell with criminals in the same hall.

However, both of them were allowed to keep a shirt and a sarong which they each brought from their homes. In the case of Mr. Nichols, he was not even allowed to keep any of his belongings.

We therefore all thought that Mr. Nichols was probably the most hated prisoner of the regime.

Mr. Nichols also had diabetes and that made his condition all the worse. As a sufferer of this disease, he was required to be very careful about what he ate. In addition, he needed regular exercise. However, he wasn't given proper food and he never had the chance to take regular exercise which he needed to alleviate his suffering.

According to Mr. Nichols, he had to stand up for hours during interrogations and was not allowed to sit down or walk around in order to diminish his stiffness and pain. According to the friendly warder, the MIS officers and Mr. Nichols exchanged angry words in English during one of the interrogation sessions in the interrogation room of the Special Prison. He told us that he overheard some MIS officers discussing how to break down his morale and said they were talking about the best ways to give Mr. Nichols a 'lesson' and psychological torture. We also learned about the ruthless determination of his interrogators. Another warder who got on well with us told us that MIS Major Soe Nyunt had ordered his men to carry out their duty regardless of the consequences after he read Mr. Nichols interrogation report. The Major said, "Be tough on him no matter who he is. I'll take full responsibility if anything happens."

Mr. Nichols confided in us that he was very afraid of the night time, the time when he was taken away for questioning. Trembling and pitiful, he recounted what happened during the interrogation sessions. He said he was interrogated countless times before being sent to Insein and yet it was far from over. He added, "They have continued to question me even now and I don't know if I can go through this any longer. I can't take this anymore." He said he told the MIS everything he did for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi but they had continued to question him repeatedly in the mistaken belief that Mr. Nichols had helped Daw Aung San Suu Kyi more than what he had revealed to them.

We suggested to Mr. Nichols that he appeal to Chief Warden U San Ya, who was in charge of the Special Prison, and to his deputy U Min Wei regarding his declining health. However, U San Ya simply told Mr. Nichols that he had no authority to provide any medicine for his dysentery, diabetes and hypertension without the permission of the MIS. He told Mr. Nichols, "I'm afraid the prison cannot arrange any food that is suitable for your diabetes."

A while later U San Ya warned us, "You must not give any medicine, food or clothes to Mr. Nichols." He said that if the MIS conducted a surprise search and found anything more than what he now had in his cell, all the Special Prison officials would not only lose their jobs but would also stand trial. "And you prisoners who have provided food and medicine will be severely punished," he added.

Another inconvenience that added to his misery was defecating. The chamber pot was difficult enough to use, but he also had nothing with which to clean himself afterwards. It was all right for Burmese political prisoners because during our first few days and weeks in prison we used cigar butts to clean ourselves and broken bits from our bamboo sleeping mats. It was, however, a great discomfort and embarrassment for Mr. Nichols.

We gave him bits of clothing torn from old prison uniforms and told him to soak them in the water from the drinking water pot to clean himself. One of the prisoners exchanged his new prison sarong with the old one that Mr. Nichols was wearing and another prisoner temporarily changed his shirt with Mr. Nichols' yellow sports shirt so that he could wash it for him.

We hid a small piece of soap in one corner of the water enclosure for him. By various means we persuaded the warder, whose duty was to keep an eye on Mr. Nichols, to turn a blind eye while he was bathing. Because of that Mr. Nichols was able to spend a little more time during his bath. We also provided him with towels. We pleaded with the warder not to report these activities to the prison officials and we succeeded because we didn't hear any complaints from the officials regarding Mr. Nichols. In return, Mr. Nichols would repeatedly say "Thank you" to all political prisoners who walked past his cell. We took his expression of gratitude as recognition of our help.

While he was in Insein, there were four political prisoners Mr. Nichols was most interested in and felt extremely sorry for. They were the Venerable Sayadaw U Nyana, a monk who was forcibly disrobed and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment; the youngest political prisoner Han Win Aung who was only 20 years old at the time; Kyaw Soe Lin (aka) Pyaung Lay who had been in prison for the second time; and Thein Htun Oo (aka) Kyet Oo.

When Mr. Nichols heard that Han Win Aung, Kyaw Soe Lin and Thein Htun Oo had each been given seven years for their political work, he repeatedly cried out "Oh, my God!!" He was deeply concerned about their heavy prison terms and couldn't believe his ears. He was so sympathetic and upset that he wanted to find out more about them. He tried to talk to them whenever the opportunity availed itself and promised everyone that he would tell the world about the suffering of political prisoners in Burma in great detail when he got out of prison.

He was never able to fulfill his promise.

One day we saw him taken away by MIS officers in a truck carrying the empty rice pots. As usual, there was a hood over his head. When he failed to return we began to get very worried. Four

days later he finally showed up with the MIS officers. We noticed that his legs were swollen and his face was all puffed up. As soon as the MIS officers left, he told us that he had had to stand for many hours on end while being questioned, and that he was not allowed to take a rest. He did not understand why he was being treated this way even after they had sent him to prison. He said it several times. The MIS repeatedly asked his opinions about the possible actions of the European Union regarding Burma. They also asked questions concerning Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's personal life.

We spoke to warden U Tin Win, who was in charge of medical care at the Special Jail, and requested that he provide the necessary care for Mr. Nichols. He explained to us that he couldn't do anything to help because Mr. Nichols' case was being tackled by the MIS directly. He asked us to understand the situation. But he advised us to give Mr. Nichols at least four tablets of algae medicine everyday. This had to be done secretly. With this advice, we approached a warder to buy us a bottle of algae tablets and we planned to give Mr. Nichols this medicine twice a day. But Mr. Nichols never had the chance to take our medicine.

A few days after his return, the MIS again took Mr. Nichols away with a hood over his head. We never saw him again.

About a week later we heard the tragic news that Mr. Nichols had died.

In the short time that he lived in cell-5 of the Special Jail, he was never able to spend 24 hours straight in his cell. He was routinely questioned and transferred from one cell to another. When he was taken out of his cell for the last time, he was suffering from acute dysentery, vomiting and dizziness. His legs were visibly swollen and he couldn't walk properly.

He said a few farewell words to his cell neighbors as if he was going away for good. He said to the NLD representative, "I'll lie down on the floor if they force me to stand to ask questions this time. I can't take it anymore... I think I'll be lucky if I make it back here one more time. If I can't make it back, please tell everyone here for me that I owe them for their kind help."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This eye-witness account was written by Moe Aye, a former political prisoner who served the last year of his seven-year sentence in Rangoon's Insein Prison while Leo Nichols was being held there. Moe Aye now works with the All Burma Students' Democratic Front.

END NOTES

The 'Poun-san' sitting position is used by the authorities for inspection of prisoners, counting prisoner numbers or for punishment. The prisoner must sit cross-legged on the floor with his hands on his knee, back straight and head bowed.

The 'Poun-san' Hall is where new prisoners are taken in order to teach them the rules of the prison. It is also used for punishment.

THE WORD FROM RANGOON

This is an excerpt of an interview with Kazuo Asaki, Japan's newly-appointed ambassador to Rangoon. The interview was originally published in *The Japan Times* on March 13, 1998.

- Q: *Why has Japan decided to resume yen loans to Myanmar now after a suspension of more than 10 years?*
- A: The planned 2.5 billion yen in loans is just part of 27 billion yen loans Japan had committed to Myanmar for the airport repair and expansion project before the 1988 military coup. Therefore, it does not represent a departure from Japan's postcoup policy of neither committing nor disbursing fresh official development assistance except for humanitarian purposes. In the past decade, the use of Yangon's international airport has grown dramatically. The annual number of passengers who use the airport has risen to 1.6 million from 300,00 in 1988. In 1995, an average of 68 flights landed or took off per day, compared with only 10 flights in 1988. The airport runway and telecommunications equipment are in an advanced state of disrepair. Japan is trying to ensure airport safety with the planned loans from a humanitarian viewpoint. It would be too late if a tragic accident happened.
- Q: *Japan has apparently sounded out the U.S. administration many times about the airport financing plan since last summer. The U.S. response so far to recent media reports of the plan seems relatively muted. Is the U.S. administration's position of not supporting the plan, as stated by the State Department spokesman Foley, tantamount to "condoning" the Japanese move?*
- A: It is true that the Japanese government has taken various occasions to fully explain its views to the U.S. administration. But when you say "condoning," you are interpreting the State Department spokesman's comment. I am not in a position to interpret any remarks made by U.S. administration officials. I simply take the remarks as they are.
- Q: *Before State Foreign Secretary Masahiko Komura visited Yangon last summer, there was a heated debate within the government over whether Japan should disburse the loans. But at that time, the view that such a step was premature eventually prevailed. According to government sources, the U.S. administration warned Tokyo shortly before Mr. Komura's Yangon trip that the loans would damage Japan-U.S. relations, which were already soured at the time over how to deal with Hun Sen, Cambodia's strongman. Japan has taken the diplomatic initiative recently in helping ensure the holding of a free and fair election in Cambodia, scheduled for this summer. In the recent crisis over the United Nations' weapons inspections of Iraq, Japan also showed its cooperative stance toward the U.S. Have these developments made Japanese officials judge that any damage done by the disbursement of the Yangon airport loans to the overall relations between Tokyo and Washington would be kept to a minimum?*
- A: Japan is not directly linking the airport loan issue to the issues of Cambodia and Iraq. But the overall atmosphere surrounding the Japan-U.S. relations was an indirect factor behind the Japanese loan plan. Japan is placing particular importance on relations with the U.S. But another important factor Japan takes into account is what the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is thinking. (ASEAN admitted Myanmar last summer despite objections from the U.S. and Europe.) Last December, Japan

held a summit meeting with the ASEAN nations in Kuala Lumpur and had an opportunity to exchange views with some of them on Myanmar at the top political level. Those ASEAN nations said they wanted Japan to disburse the airport loans as soon as possible.

- Q: *Until recently, you had served for two years as the Foreign Ministry's top official in charge of international cooperation on human rights, drug trafficking and other issues of global concern. How are you going to address the question of improving Myanmar's human rights record?*
- A: Promotion of human rights protection and democracy in the international community is one of the pillars of Japan's foreign policy. I am firmly determined to continue pressing Myanmar for improvement on such fronts. But the issues of human rights and democracy are too difficult to be resolved overnight. I have learned from my experience in the past two years that dialogue, persuasion and cooperation are important when promoting human rights. I want to call on various officials in Myanmar, while exercising as much patience as possible, to improve the country's human rights record. In addition, I want to call on Myanmar, a major drug producer, to cooperate with Japan to eradicate drug trafficking. To address the drug issue, efforts by both producing and consuming countries are inevitable. Unlike the U.S. and Europe, drug consumption hasn't yet become a serious problem in Japan. But as a responsible member of the international community, Japan needs to contribute actively to addressing the drug issue. I also believe that Japan should promote economic cooperation with Myanmar in developing human resources and such humanitarian fields as medical care, regardless of what the country's regime is like.
- Q: *The Myanmar economy has been dealt a blow by the recent financial crisis that has swept through East Asia. In recent months, foreign investment in Myanmar has been declining and the market rate of the country's currency, the kyat, plummeting precipitously against the dollar. Before the Asian turmoil erupted, Myanmar's military regime had bragged that foreign investment in the country, led by its Asian neighbors such as Singapore and Thailand, was growing smoothly despite the continued U.S. and European economic sanctions. But those neighbors are now cutting back on their Myanmar investment amid economic problems at home. Some analysts say that it is a matter of time before the military regime will be forced to take some action, possibly concessions to the prodemocracy opposition, to improve its ties with the U.S. and other major donor nations as a way of pulling the country out of dire economic straits. Would you agree with them?*
- A: I don't know whether Myanmar's external policy will change because of the Asian financial crisis. Myanmar has a great potential for economic development in the medium and long term. The country is relatively rich in natural gases and other resources. Its people are said to be diligent. But Myanmar must promote transparency in its economic policy and open its economy wider to foreign competition if it is to realize that development potential. Any country can secure its economic interests only by integrating itself in the international community. Even Japan and the U.S. are not exceptions.

continued on page 25

ROUNDTABLES



WASHINGTON, DC — A briefing and slide presentation conducted by George Hogeman, Program Officer of the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration at the U.S. Department of State was organized by the U.S. Committee for Refugees on January 14. Mr. Hogeman discussed his trip to the

Thai/Burma border and issues surrounding refugees from Burma.

A Washington Burma Roundtable was held on February 12 with guest speakers: Kanji Yamanouchi, First Secretary at the Embassy of Japan; David Steinberg, Director of the Asian Studies Program at Georgetown University; Christopher Kraftt, Country Officer at the U.S. Department of State and Ieyaraj Benjamin William, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Singapore. The discussion focused on recent developments in Burma, including the internal economic and political situation, relations with ASEAN, and the implications of the Asian currency crisis.

The Washington Roundtable is co-sponsored by Human Rights Watch/Asia, The Jesuit Refugee Service, The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Refugees International. For more information contact Refugees International by phone: (202) 828-0110 or fax: (202) 828-0819.

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

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 Billenness of Franklin Research & Development Corporation by phone: (617) 482-6655 or fax: (617) 482-6179.

SAN FRANCISCO — The Bay Area Burma Roundtable is held the third Wednesday of every month. For more information contact Jane Jerome by phone: (408) 995-0403 or e-mail: jjerome@igc.apc.org.

SEATTLE — The January 26 meeting of the Burma Interest Group featured Dr. Tao Kwan-Gett who had recently returned from a visit to the Thai/ Burma border. The discussion also included an update on the pending Seattle Burma law, which would restrict U.S. investment in Burma.

The Burma Interest Group is a non-partisan forum attended by representatives of NGOs, business, academia and

other interested parties that meets monthly to discuss Burma related topics. For more information contact Larry Dohrs by phone: (206) 784-6873 or fax: (206) 784-8150.



LONDON — The Burma Briefing is a periodic meeting of NGOs working on Burma. For information contact Edmond McGovern by phone: (44-392) 876-849 or fax: (44-392) 876-525



HONG KONG — Information on Burma Roundtables can be obtained by contacting the Asian Human Rights Commission by phone: (852) 2698-6339 or fax: (852) 2698-6367.



BRUSSELS/PARIS — The NGO communities in France and Belgium host periodic roundtables in Paris and Brussels. For more information on this European forum contact Lotte Leicht of Human Rights Watch by phone: (32-2) 732-2009 or fax: (32-2) 732-0471.



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: Burma Centre Netherlands (BNC), by phone: (31-020) 671-6952 or fax: (31-020) 761-3513



VANCOUVER — A Burma Roundtable has been formed in Vancouver to coordinate activities and discuss developments in Burma. For more information on the monthly meetings contact by e-mail: tzang@interchange.ubc.ca.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The following letter was edited prior to publication.

I would like to have the opportunity to respond to statements made by Mrs. Inge Sargent, former Mahadevi of Hsipaw, in her letter addressed to the editor in the Sep/Oct 1997 issue of *Burma Debate*.

Mrs. Sargent claimed that during my time in Lashio I was busy poisoning the water and sowing discord (between the Shans and the Union). Her statement is totally untrue...

Because our outposts in the northern Shan States were under heavy attack by the KMT (the Nationalist Chinese Forces), I was personally asked by General Ne Win to transfer from my Brigade Headquarters in Mandalay to Lashio in March 1953.

It was in mid April, during the time of the water festival, that I received a call from Sao Hom Hpa, Sawbwa of Hsenwi. He was also serving as Special Commissioner of the Shan States. When I arrived at his residence, I saw a number of villagers coming to see him. Those were from Mongyaw, about 12 miles east of Lashio, I was told. The villagers had sighted some KMTs approaching their area and had come to their Sawbwa to ask for protection. I had all my available manpower stretched to the limits and had none in reserve... However, I was able to gather a light machine gun group from the 4th CHINs under its own commanding officer, another LMG group under command of a major who was visiting Lashio on temporary duty, and I got a third LMG group from my own HQ defense platoon. So we were about a dozen men in all including myself and two other officers. With the villagers serving as our guides, we managed to ambush the KMTs. The prompt action I took must have impressed the Sawbwa of Hsenwi tremendously.

A few months later, Sao Hom Hpa invited me to his office. He said he was very happy with the way I was conducting my business in the Shan States and gave me 26,000 Kyats in cash as a token of his appreciation. That was 20 times my monthly salary! I explained that I was just doing my duty and was paid for my services and that it was against my conscience to accept the gift; he still insisted that I accept. When I refused, he said no commander before me had ever refused such gifts. I said I would accept that money if given in public. I told him I could arrange a tea party at the Officers Mess and that I would invite all heads of departments, town elders, police and Union Military Police chiefs and commanding officers of all units under my command. He could give the money to me in the presence of those. He agreed.

At the tea party, Sao Hom Hpa handed the money over to me. I accepted and thanked him for his generosity. Then I explained to those present that I would spend all the money for the benefit of the soldiers, non-commissioned officers, warrant officers and members of their families. None for the officers. I would form a committee composed of all the commanding officers, District Superintendent of Police and C.O. of the Union Military Police as members and the Brigade Major as Chairman of the committee to oversee the use of the funds. The funds would be used to provide athletic equipment for the men at the outposts and sewing machines and hand weaving looms for the women. I asked the committee to hold annual sports meetings for the men of the brigade and to utilize a portion of the funds to acquire prize materials...

Lashio was my first Command outside of Burma Proper. I felt we needed better relationship with the Shans to ensure mutual respect and understanding between our peoples. I thought, members of the *Tatmadaw* had the general impression that we were the ones making supreme sacrifices in the defense of the Union and as such we were playing a more important role than the rest. I felt that attitude was not

correct. I wanted to let my men realize that the government was made up of various departments and that personnel of other departments were also doing their part just like what we were doing with our own.

When I settled in Lashio, I organized weekly lectures by various heads of departments stationed in the Northern Shan States [NSS] for my officers, warrant officers and non-commissioned officers at my Brigade Training Center to explain how the civil administration worked. The heads of every department in the Northern Shan States came and lectured.

As far as I could remember I was the only commander in the Shan States who organized such lectures to promote mutual respect and understanding between members of the armed forces and other departments. There were no public relations problems at all. None of the men under my command were ever involved in any rape, dacoity, murder or any other serious crime committed against the people of Northern Shan States in the nearly five years of my tour of duty there...

...Men of the 6th Brigade were very much liked by the people of Northern Shan States and I knew there was a lot of affection and esteem for them, not as alleged by the former Mahadevi of Hsipaw.

She also stated that I played a destructive role in the Northern Shan States while stationed in Lashio. I deny that allegation, too. I knew the people of the NSS looked to me as one of their leaders.

The year 1956 was the 2500th year of Buddhism. The entire Buddhist world planned to celebrate the 25th century of Buddhism. In the Theravada Buddhist world, we believed that every teenage boy should become a novice monk even for a brief period before entering adulthood. I knew there were many young soldiers who had not been novitiated as monks as their parents could not afford the expenses. I talked to my officers to hold a mass novitiation ceremony as an act of merit according to our religious beliefs. We agreed to raise funds from about 6 months before hand. When town elders heard about my plans, they came to me and proposed to pool our resources to have a combined celebration in a grand manner...

I had already been in Lashio for about 3 years by then. I had noticed that there were mosques and church buildings in Lashio. But not a single pagoda (*stupa*) to be found within the Lashio municipal limits. I felt the need for one.

At the meeting, I proposed to build a pagoda in commemoration of the 25th century of Buddhism. I said we could include that as a long term project. The size of the pagoda was not that important. But, it should be built to last at least another 2,500 years. It could last, if built of solid rocks and reinforced concrete. I proposed a uniform rate of 5% donation from our monthly salary toward the construction fund by those willing to participate. My proposal was accepted and the heads of departments and elders present asked me to accept Chairmanship of the pagoda construction committee...

During more than a quarter century of my military service, Lashio was the station where I stayed longest. Four years and nine months to be exact. When I received orders to move from Lashio in late 1957, the people of Lashio, headed by Sao Hom Hpa, the Special Commissioner, wanted to appeal to Gen. Ne Win to cancel my transfer. I had to restrain them from taking that action as I could not afford for it to be misunderstood.

Bawgyo Pagoda lies in Hsipaw state and every Burma scholar must have heard of its festival held in the month of *Tabaung* (March). It used to be a high stake gambling event. Before the festival, the Sawbwa of Hsipaw auctioned the right to operate gambling dens, opium dens, liquor shops, restaurants, etc. The highest bidder was

LETTER TO THE EDITOR (CONTINUED)

awarded the contract to hold gambling dens for the whole week preceding the Full Moon day. With the pretense that the contractor did not make anything, the contract was usually extended for another three days. The Sawbwas were permitted to hold such gambling festivals for ten days each year in their respective states. Proceeds from the auctions did not go in to the state budget. Everything went in to the Sawbwa's pocket as his private fund. That was one of their hereditary rights. Bawgyo pagoda festival became the most popular festival in the Shan States because of its proximity to Burma proper. People from all over Burma flocked to the festival to make or break.

They had all kinds of gambling games. When the festival was over, only the Sawbwa and the contractors were left with money. Most of the festival patrons usually returned home broke.

I had never seen opium before. Out of curiosity, I asked the police officers to take me to an opium den at Bawgyo festival. When I entered the opium den, I saw men, as well as women addicts, lying on wretched bamboo mats, smoking opium. As I couldn't stand the smell of opium, I had to run out of the den to have a deep breath of clean air. Women who ran short of funds to buy opium or do some gambling would do anything to get money.

Income from those gambling activities were considered pocket money for the Sawbwas. They received their regular salary from their respective state budgets. Depending on the size of their budgets, Sawbwas were permitted to draw from 10% to 25% from the total revenue collected from their respective states. The Sawbwas' monthly salaries were very much more than those of the ministers in the central government. That was why they could maintain large families. Normally, they had 2, 3 or 4 wives at any given time. The Sawbwa of Laikha himself told me that he had 26 wives.

While I was engaging myself in meritorious deeds by building a pagoda in Lashio, Mrs. Sargent and her former husband were enjoying themselves with proceeds they collected from the Bawgyo festival. The readers can see for themselves who was playing a destructive role in the NSS at that time.

The former Mahadevi also stated in her letter that I contributed to the mistrust and misunderstanding between the Shan States and the Union government by accusing her first husband (Sao Kyo Seng) of collecting arms and organizing Shan fighters to take the Shan States out of the Union, and by passing there falsehoods to General Ne Win.

I can say that I had *never* sent such reports. The said report about Shans collecting 30,000 fire arms and hiding them in secret cave near Namlan junction in Hsipaw state came to me the other way round. (Note: Sao Kya Seng's name was never mentioned in the report I received). The informer was Ko Kyaw Zaw who worked with the Shanpyi Alin Press in Hsipaw. He fed the information to his boss who was a Member of Parliament for the NSS. The MP conveyed the information to Defence Minister U Ba Swe who in turn, passed on the information to the Supreme Commander for verification. When the information came to me, I checked and reported that it was only a false alarm. The director of MIS [Military Intelligence Service] was not happy with my report and asked me to proceed to the area myself to check again. I was not prepared to sweat myself for nothing. However, I could not totally disregard an instruction from the War Office. So I had the situation investigated and received a report that there was no trace of any weapons being stored there at any time. I reported this news accordingly.

Some time in 1955, I was told by the authorities in Rangoon that the Sawbwas had a secret meeting held at the Hsenwi residence in Lashio to plan to secede from the Union. I knew Hsenwi Sawbwa very well. He would not have done that. He was all for the Union. His residence was only a couple of hundred yards away from my office and as nothing stood in between, we could see what was going on at each other's place. However, on that reported day, I was away in the Wa states, leading a flag march along the Burmese side of the Burma-China border. I called in Major Than Win, my Brigade Major, and asked him if he had heard about the said secret meeting of Sawbwas. Than Win laughed heartily and said: "Colonel, that was the very next day after you had left for the Wa state. During your absence, I spent most of my time at the Hsenwi residence, playing mahjong with the old man. I can assure you, there *never* was any such meeting". I submitted my report accordingly.

The former Mahadevi also stated: "Col. Chit Myaing cites the arrival of the KMT as the reason why the central government sent more military units to the Shan States. There wasn't a single KMT in Hsipaw State". Mrs. Sargent was right. There never was any KMT in Hsipaw. But Hsipaw alone doesn't constitute the Shan States. There are 31 more other Sawbwa states plus Northern Wa and Southern Wa to be known as the Shan States. Would she say that KMTs never came to Kokang, Hsenwi, Northern Wa, Southern Wa, Monglun, Mongyai, Monghsu, Mongnong, Kengtung, Mongtong, Monghsat, etc.?

Mrs. Sargent also wrote: "Col. Chit Myaing was not the democrat and peacemaker he paints himself". If she had read the late prime minister U Nu's autobiography *U Nu: Saturday's Son* she would have had an idea of how I defended the democratically-elected government of Burma. U Nu wrote: "Bo Chit Myaing, not being a politician, was loyal to the government... It goes without saying that if Bo Chit Myaing had joined the rebels there would have been frightful consequences... The prime minister... would have been like a cock in a basket bound for the noodle shop. He would have been yanked out and his neck put on the block."

If my successful attempt to prevent a coup d'etat could not convince Mrs. Sargent that I was on the side of democracy, I just do not know how to explain any further.

My response to Mrs. Sargent would not be complete without describing the incident which led to a misunderstanding between Sao Kya Seng and myself.

Sometime in the mid 1950s, General Ne Win was planning to travel by road from Taunggyi in the Southern Shan States (SSS) to Maymyo via the states of Mongpaw, Laikha, Mongkong, Kehsimansam, Mongyai, Hsipaw, and was to cover the entire journey in one single day. I was to meet him at the border of SSS and NSS and escort him right up to Maymyo. As an act of courtesy, I called Sao Kya Seng by phone and informed him about the General's planned schedule. He said he wanted to meet the General and asked me to invite him over to his residence. He could offer tea, he said. I replied that as the General was going to be on along and tedious journey that day, he would not have the time to come to his residence. However, Sao Kya Seng could arrange a 15-minute reception at his chief minister's residence which stood just by the side of the main road passing through Hsipaw. Sao Kya Seng said he could not go to his subordinate's place to meet the General. He further stated that protocol required the General to call on him at his residence. That was the very first time I had ever heard of a

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR (CONTINUED)

Sawbwa demanding the Supreme Commander to call on him. He was only one of the 32 Sawbwes in the Shan States. He was not a Maharajah. I had seen Sao Hom Hpa, Sawbwa of Hsenwi, the senior and most powerful of them all, going to the airport many times to welcome the General at Lashio. We had a heated argument over his unreasonable demand, exchanged angry words and I dropped the phone. That was the last time we talked to each other. Our dislike for each other was quite well known.

I was transferred to Myitkyina in November of 1957 and again to Rangoon less than a year later to manage the ministry of Immigration, National Registration and Census during the Caretaker Government of Gen. Ne Win. I never had anything to do with Sao Kya Seng again.

Mrs. Sargent compared me with that infamous gentleman from her native Austria. I never collaborated with the enemy. I fought against the Japanese in Tharrawaddy of southern Burma very gallantly and my services were recognized by both the Burmese and British authorities. There was no justification in comparing me to her countryman.

The former Mahadevi stated that I bear considerable responsibility for the murder of her first husband in 1962. I can only say that sometime in 1962, I heard about Sao Kya Seng's disappearance. As one of the rules strictly observed by then members of the Revolutionary Council was "mind your own business," I never inquired about what actually happened to Sao Kya Seng. I learned more about the incident only when I came across her book *Twilight Over Burma*.

As a fellow human being, I have every sympathy for Mrs. Sargent and her family for the sufferings they had gone through since 1962. As a Buddhist, I believe in one's own karma. If I did anything wrong, I will have to pay for it at one time or the other. However, as far as Sao Kya Seng's disappearance was concerned, I could say I had no part in it and I knew nothing about it. As such, I have a very clear conscience. I hope Mrs. Sargent can find solace in due course of time.

Chit Myaing

WORD FROM RANGOON (CONTINUED)

Q: *While the U.S. and many other industrialized countries continue harsh economic and other sanctions against Myanmar, China has increased economic aid to the country in recent years, a move that many analysts say is aimed at securing Chinese access to the Indian Ocean for strategic regions. The growing Chinese influence on Myanmar has raised security concerns among some Asian nations, especially India, China's rival in the region. ASEAN's admission of Myanmar last summer is believed to reflect its desire to prevent Yangon from falling under the sway of Beijing. How do you view the strengthening ties between Yangon and Beijing?*

A: I think it's quite natural that China is interested in strengthening relations with its southern neighbor. Japan has no intention of vying with China for hegemony in Southeast Asia. I think it is a good thing for China to extend economic cooperation to Myanmar. But at the same time, I am not so naive as to be indifferent to what motives China has. Myanmar occupies a geopolitically important location. At this moment, however, I do not have any immediate security concern over the strengthening ties between Yangon and Beijing.

INSIDE WASHINGTON

BURMA'S GENERALS BUY IMAGE-MAKERS

Burma's military regime is using high-powered Washington lobbyists to improve its image according to a full-page article by R. Jeffrey Smith in the February 24 edition of *The Washington Post*. At least two DC-based firms, Jefferson Waterman and Bain and Associates, can boast of having a junta, condemned by the United Nations and most of the international community for its brutality, on their client lists. Jefferson Waterman is headed by former assistant secretary of state for narcotics control Ann Wroblewski, while former NBC News White House correspondent Jackson Bain runs Bain and Associates. According to the article, the firms have received more than \$650,000 to conduct "a campaign on Burma's behalf in classic Washington style — producing upbeat newsletters, arranging seminars and interviews and funding all-expenses-paid trips — partly to persuade the Clinton Administration to lift trade sanctions against the regime." The campaign is largely funded by companies within Burma having ties to the military. Corporations investing in Burma have also funded "fact-finding" trips organized by the Burma/Myanmar Forum, a project operating out of a Washington-based non-profit organization, The International Center. According to the *Post*, both Jackson Bain and Frances Zwenig of the Burma/Myanmar Forum have cooperated closely with the regime's Washington representatives when organizing their activities.

In a Letter to the Editor dated February 25, U Tin Winn, Burma's Ambassador to Washington responded to the *Post*: "In the light of the Myanmar-bashing campaign carried out by interest groups and the media in recent years and the subsequent adoption of sanctions by the U.S. government, it has become necessary for the Embassy to prevent bilateral relations from sliding further down.... It is also not hard to fathom why private companies — American and Myanmar — have been investing time and money in trying to undo the sanctions."

BURMA FAILS DRUG TEST

Burma has once again failed to obtain certification from the United States government that it cooperated fully with the U.S. or took adequate steps on its own to meet statutory international counternarcotics performance standards. On February 26, President Clinton released a list of 22 countries that are certified as cooperating with Washington in the fight against drugs, only four countries, Burma, Afghanistan, Iran and Nigeria were "decertified." Under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the President of the United States must identify those countries that are major illicit drug producing and/or drug transit countries and certify which give full cooperation or take adequate measures on their own to achieve the counternarcotics objectives of the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

HIGH-LEVEL DELEGATION TOURS REFUGEE CAMPS

U.S. Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees and Migration Julia V. Taft visited the refugee camp at Nu Pho on January 27 to assess the situation of over 10,000 Karen who have fled to Thailand over the past 12 months. Thai officials had evacuated refugees from various border points to the Nu Pho site to prevent them from attack by Burmese forces. Ms. Taft, who was accompanied by U.S. Ambassador William Itoh and John Crowley, Deputy Coordinator for Refugee and Migration Affairs at the Embassy in Bangkok, commended the Thai government for granting asylum to those fleeing Burma. She also expressed concern about the rising population in Nu Pho and urged Thai officials to upgrade the site to refugee camp status so that it might be able to obtain assistance from the United States through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

MINGALADON INDUSTRIAL PARK OPENS

A February 21 ceremony marked the opening of the 220 acre Mingaladon Industrial Park a joint-venture agreement between the Myanmar Ministry of Construction and Mitsui Co. Ltd. of Japan. According to Ministry officials, the main objective of the Park is to attract investment from abroad and to promote technology transfer to be used in tapping into the country's natural resources. The first of its kind in Burma, the Industrial Park offers 50 year long-term leases to foreign investors and according to an official source, Mitsui Co. Ltd. has "carried out an extensive marketing drive to attract investments in the park." At this point approximately 15 percent of the available land has been leased by investors from Japan, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong.

HONG KONG LOOKING TO BURMA FOR POWER

According to an official at the Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise, Hong Kong's two electric utilities, Hong Kong Electric Holdings Ltd. and China Light and Power Corp. are currently considering several power projects in Burma. U Than Win, a division engineer at Myanmar Electric, was quoted during an industry gathering in Singapore as stating that the Hong Kong companies have expressed a "strong interest" in a joint venture of two power plants, while China Light plans to establish an additional independent power project.

JAPANESE FIRM TO SELL EQUIPMENT IN BURMA

Komatsu Ltd., one of Japan's leading manufacturers of construction equipment plans to establish joint-venture companies in Burma within the next few months. The companies will promote the sale of used construction equipment and parts, responding to a growing demand within Southeast Asia. In addition to Burma, Komatsu plans to open companies in the Philippines, Taiwan and Malaysia by the end of this year.

BURMA AND JAPAN SIGN DEBT-RELIEF AGREEMENT

The Japanese Ambassador and Myanmar's Minister for Finance and Revenue signed an exchange of notes on debt relief on February 24 which granted 2 billion yen in debt relief to the Myanmar's military government. This was the nineteenth such grant to be signed by the Japanese and according to Ministry officials, "the cash would be spent on purchasing machinery, equipment, raw materials and accessories for the ministries and organizations."

GENERALS DEMAND PAYMENT FOR PIPELINE DELAYS

Any delay resulting from the on-going protest over the construction of the Yadana natural-gas pipeline linking Thailand and Burma will cost Thailand thousands of dollars a day in fines say Burma's military rulers. The protest, which began in December of last year, has united conservationists and local villagers in the claim that the pipeline will destroy one of Thailand's last areas of virgin forests. Protesters, including one of the country's most renowned social activists, Sulak Sivaraksa, have camped out at the construction site in Kanchanaburi to block further work on the pipeline. A senior official in Rangoon was quoted as saying that, "The Thais do have to compensate the consortium building the Burma side of the pipeline as well as the government if it does not go on line as planned in July."

REGIME REVOKES TOURISM LICENSES

The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism has revoked the operating licenses of 135 tourism services. According to a February 20 report by the state-run Myanmar News Agency, the licenses have been taken away for failing to abide by the regulations issued by the ministry, failing to attend meetings and present monthly reports and for "not maintaining contact with the ministry for a long period."

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE REPORTS RELEASED:

- *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*
March 1998
Southeast Asia and the Pacific
(Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs)
- *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*
January 30, 1998
(Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor)

These reports on Burma can be accessed through the World Wide Web at: <http://www.state.gov>

THE 1997 OFFENSIVES

Suffering and Struggle for Identity and Justice of the Ethnic Karen in Burma
by Moe K. Tun

Burma Issues
P.O. Box 1076
Silom Post Office
Bangkok 10504
Thailand

This report, published by Burma Issues, documents the Burma Army's 1997 offensives in the ethnic Karen-inhabited areas of Duplaya and Tavoy/Mergui along the Burma-Thai border. Beginning in February, using an estimated 100,000 troops, the SLORC army launched its economically-motivated offensives despite the agreement to continue ceasefire talks with the KNU. The report concludes that to bring peace to Burma, cooperation among various ethnic groups and a strong international action are necessary.

SCHOOL FOR RAPE

The Burmese Military and Sexual Violence
by Betsy Apple

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This EarthRights International Report 1998 is based on interviews with *Tatmadaw* [Burmese military] defectors and villagers from army-occupied areas. As ethnic groups continue to battle the *Tatmadaw*, the war has spawned human rights violations resulting in thousands of deaths and the destruction of villages and ethnic cultures. This report illustrates how ethnic women in particular have suffered at the hands of Burmese soldiers by making visible the structural origins of rape, with attention paid to the institution that nurtures the rapists.

MEDIA RESOURCES (CONTINUED)

NEW EYE 1997

Burma Issues
P.O. Box 1076
Silom Post Office
Bangkok 10504
Thailand

This unusual English language edition magazine, distributed free of charge, is a presentation of stories in cartoon format. The contents include the works of artists from refugee communities; collections of first-person accounts retold in story form, with an emphasis on people from the different regions of Burma who have long suffered from the civil war; and supplementary texts to provoke thought and discussion on the stories and the messages they convey.

THE LADY: BURMA'S DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI

by Barbara Victor
ISBN 0-571-19944-5

This book on Aung San Suu Kyi documents human rights abuses perpetrated by the Burmese military government and provides a biography of Daw Suu Kyi, whose sacrifices for her country earned her the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. However, the portrait of Aung San Suu Kyi lacks the insight into her character that access might have provided, had the author had the opportunity to interview her. It is published by Faber & Faber and is available for USD 26.95.

RADIO FREE BURMA

(web page and weekly program)

Radio Free Burma, a Burmese-language program featuring news, views and music of Burma presented by Burmese living in Australia, is now available on the web for real-time playback via Real Audio at:

<http://www.fast.net.au/rfb>

or

<http://users.imagiware.com/wtongue>.

Suggestions and comments are welcome by E-mail to rfb@fast.net.au.

STATEMENTS, SPEECHES AND POSITION PAPERS ON THE NLD

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The National League for Democracy's statements on the Independence Day of Burma, and Union Day; reprints of the Panglong Agreement of 1947; the NLD's statements and position papers are now available for Indian rupee 35 each (mailing costs included). An audio cassette of songs and chants by well-known vocalists and musicians, on the Thingyan Water Festival "*Thitsa-kuauktone-hmauk-leipyi*" is also available at no charge (overseas mailing cost is rupee 45).

BRIEFINGS AND DEVELOPMENTS

JAPAN TO RESUME ODA TO BURMA

Following several months of discussion within the Japanese government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on March 11 its plans to release 2.5 billion yen in Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Burma. All such aid has been frozen since the brutal military coup of 1988. According to the Ministry, the funds are to be used for the repair of the runway and upgrading of safety measures at the Mingaladon Airport. Japan's decision to resume aid at this time, without improvements in the political and human rights situation inside Burma, has drawn criticism both at home and abroad. Government spokespersons, however, have emphasized that the release of the 2.5 billion is for a very specific purpose and should not be seen as a signal that regular ODA funds will be forthcoming.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CALLS FOR ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

The European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the continued human rights abuses by the military government and calling for the imposition of economic sanctions by the European Union. The resolution passed on February 19 notes the on-going use of forced labor, the killing of villagers in Shan State and the escalating repression of the democratic opposition, while calling on the Council to end "all links between the European Union and Burma based on trade, tourism and investment in Burma by European companies."

UN ENVOY VISITS BURMA

Assistant United Nations Secretary-General Alvaro De Soto visited Burma January 19-21 in an effort to open roads toward dialogue and democratic reform in that country. The visit resulted from a December meeting between UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and General Than Shwe, head of Burma's military regime, when it was agreed that a special envoy would be allowed to travel to Burma. During his stay, De Soto met with Rangoon's military leaders and with Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of the National League for Democracy.

NLD MEMBER DIES IN PRISON

U Thein Tin, a member of the National League for Democracy, has died after nearly two years in Rangoon's Insein Prison where he was serving a sentence for political activities. Thein Tin, who had been part of the NLD's Rangoon Township organizing committee before his arrest in March 1996, reportedly died of liver cancer on February 18 in Rangoon General Hospital. Exiled student groups claim that he had been tortured and denied adequate medical treatment while in prison, factors which contributed to his death.

NOTABLES AND QUOTABLES

"We've discussed this matter with the government of Japan. And we, for our part, do not support the resumption of large scale aid projects to Burma at this time... The U.S. government continues to believe that non-humanitarian bilateral assistance to the government of Burma, absent significant improvements in the human rights and narcotics situations there, is inappropriate."

— U.S. State Department deputy spokesman James Foley, February 28, 1998, on the question of Japan's plans to resume official development assistance (ODA) to Burma.

Burma Debate is a publication of The Burma Project of the Open Society Institute.

Mary Pack, *Editor*

THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE (OSI) was established in December of 1993 to promote the development of open societies around the world. Toward this goal, the institute engages in a number of regional and country-specific projects relating to education, media, legal reform and human rights. In addition, OSI undertakes advocacy projects aimed at encouraging debate and disseminating information on a range of issues which are insufficiently explored in the public realm. OSI funds projects that promote the exploration of novel approaches to domestic and international problems.

The Burma Project initiates, supports and administers a wide range of programs and activities. Priority is given to programs that promote the well-being and progress of all the people of Burma regardless of race, ethnic background, age or gender.

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

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website: <http://www.soros.org/burma.html>