"I think, practically speaking, we will have to take certain loans, we will have to accept certain aid but the NLD has produced our views on how we would handle the economy. And one of our basic principles is that we want to take out loans and accept aid in a responsible way. We don’t want to take more aid than we can handle efficiently." – Daw Aung San Suu Kyi responding to economic policy questions during an October 1999 interview.

"The Karen children" by Mae Dah Eh, age 15
IDEAS FOR REBUILDING A JUST & CIVIL SOCIETY

Idea's to guide Burma's peace movement must pose real solutions to real problems and dilemmas. The following six ideas provide some insight into Burma's past, present and future. All but the first are recommendations for policies and activities which might help to rebuild civil society in Burma. Most can be fully undertaken only when a more open government relaxes the state's grip on Burmese society. But all can begin in some way today, either integrating with existing social work (as in the case of education) or allotting resources to new and important areas (e.g. research into the dictatorship's cultural impact).

1. Ethnic nationalism

Peace in Burma depends on discarding ethnic nationalism. Nationalism is the most common manifestation of ethnic chauvinism, and is one of society's most destructive myths. Nationalism teaches one to recognize, respect and filter others according to ethnicity. It interprets and seeks to explain actions, words and attitudes through murky concepts of race. Thus, a person's political motivations, personal desires and social behavior can always be reduced to the presence of overriding "national" traits. Nationalism stifles discourse in a diverse society by proposing that racial and cultural differences are innate and fixed, and that peoples are best served by political organizations which unify and promote each "nation's" best interests. Nationalism tolerates a narrow margin of social diversity. Nationalism prefers solidarity within a racial group over the universal social equality due to all people regardless of ethnicity. Thus democracy and nationalism are incompatible, as are nationalism and human rights. Nationalism is also incompatible with peace in any meaningful sense.

2. Education

Burma could benefit from decentralized education. Many people fear that the government education system enforces homogeneity on a diverse nation. It promotes a mainstream vision of Burmese history and national identity which non-Burman people find offensive or inadequate. To work around this fear, a future democratic Burma should support community-based education for which the central government creates standards, rather than a single template curriculum, and provides resources for local schools. This way, rural schools in ethnic minority-inhabited areas get the attention and resources of central administration but don't suffer the drawbacks of an imposed national curriculum. New standards might include:

- All students should have access to Burmese language education as well as education in their native language at local public schools.
- No curriculum should present negative stereotypes of ethnic, religious and cultural groups, and no curriculum should promote ethnic nationalism.
- Education should emphasize critical thinking about communal, regional, national and global politics, economy, environment and history.
- Special emphasis should be given to sustainable subsistence-first agriculture and strengthening of local economies.
- To promote the benefits of cultural diversity, Burman students should study a minority language as an elective course.

3. State Religion

Burma should be a secular state. States are political bodies, not human bodies, and therefore can not hold religious beliefs. Establishing state religion is fundamentally unfair, no matter how liberally the constitution declares religious freedom and equality. Ultimately, state-sponsorship for a national religious identity is more conducive to conflict than to peace. The more diverse a society is, the greater is the potential for religious conflict arising from state promotion of one faith or another. Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and others in Burma should be equally free to practice and promote their religious beliefs without any state involvement, either enabling or disruptive.

4. Truth and reconciliation

As soon as possible, Burma should establish a national truth and reconciliation commission to expose the suffering incurred during fifty years of civil war. Victims of abuse, survivors and relatives of the dead and disappeared must have their suffering recognized publicly and officially. Without acknowledgement of past wrongs, the country can not move beyond armed conflict. Discovering the truth and mourning the country's losses should be a collective, constructive act aimed at restoring victims' dignity. While a national commission is desirable, equally important, and perhaps more relevant to the immediate lives of many victims, are parallel exercises undertaken locally. The first step would be nation-wide human rights abuse research and documentation to create a database of these experiences.

5. Land reform

In the past and present, the struggle to determine proprietary land rights has been one of Burma's major causes of conflict, and will persist as such in the future. With arguments often dwelling on who was in a place first, the status of "indigenous" communities must be clearly defined. Arguments over tenancy should not degenerate into competition over what ethnic group may have populated an area hundreds of years ago, which is ultimately an irresolvable line of argument. Instead, land rights should weigh traditional ownership systems with contemporary needs, with priority to:

- Continuous residence and use of land for subsistence agriculture,
- Restoration of lands lost in armed conflict, military occupation or appropriation since either independence or the beginning of land nationalization in 1962,
- Community claims to traditional corporate lands,
- Need-based allotment of lands to landless peasants and small-holders.

6. Psycho-cultural Research

As soon as possible, extensive and detailed research should be undertaken on military rule's cultural, social and economic effects on Burma's people. If dictatorship has damaged communal trust and increased paranoia—as is often alleged, then the phenomenon should be explored and revealed. If war has resulted in ethnic hatred growing, then the causes, expressions and implications of these attitudes must be thoroughly understood and publicly shared. If decades of one-party rule and corruption have built a culture of resentment and opposition among people for the potential benefits of government, then this culture must be brought to light and offered to Burma's people for dialogue. In other words, the entire national experience must become a subject of scrutiny, dialogue and education. This should not be an academic exercise, but a social movement which seeks to touch the lives of all of Burma's people in creative and appropriate ways. At times this dialogue may be contentious, and there will be a danger of falling back into the habit of suppressing dissent. But the democratization of Burmese society will depend on how the country remembers and expresses its history: hopefully, with vitality, insight and frankness. This is a continuous process without a final resolution; by nature it stimulates the diversity and tolerance of opinion evoked by freedom.
I am writing this essay based upon my experiences in the Karen revolution, other personal experiences and discussions with Burman and other ethnic friends. As I have little writing experience, this essay will contain weaknesses. It is also very subjective. However, I am writing with the honest intention of finding a solution to the root causes and consequences of vengeance and hatred between the national races in Burma.

In ancient times, various ethnic groups migrated into the land today known as Burma. They lived together in relative peace as they tilled the land or hunted the jungles. But among these groups, some set up feudal systems to gain control over the people and the resources. This started conflicts among some of the groups as the practice of slavery and exploitation spread. Those groups without strength naturally became the tools of stronger groups. As a result, those without strength lost their land, their houses, and their lives. Weaker ethnic groups, which were initially united, were scattered into many smaller groups and spread across the land in flight to escape encroaching battles. Some groups almost entirely lost their languages and cultures.

These events have occurred across the course of history because of the feudalists’ single-minded pursuit of their own willful desires. Some flippantly say that this happens because it is a “natural” historical event. But for the author, these events are an important part of Burma’s unique history which must be accepted and studied carefully. If ethnic groups know their exact history then they will be able to guard against similar oppression in the future. Likewise, if they have a good sense of history they will be able to protect their traditional land rights and way of life. In order to develop peace in the land it is very important to recognize the role of history. For a society to develop peacefully, an understanding and acceptance of true history is essential. History cannot be made up of lies, nor is it shameful to expose genuine history. In history, everyone has made mistakes. History is not simply a tool to identify who is bad and who is good. We have to get lessons from history to prevent wrongs from taking place again in the future. So true history is very important. Some people are willing to say “let bygones be bygones,” but I believe one cannot forget. To forget is to become an “historical criminal,” one who fails to take responsibility for history and seek ways to correct it. Furthermore, even today, the Burma Army and others continue to implement the practices of the past. This is the root cause of vengeance and hatred among the people of Burma. Consequently, revenge takes the form of civil war and other horrendous events which continue to occur even today.

Many people say that these events have taken place due to the 1947 Constitution which was conceived while the nation was a British colony. I maintain that this is not the real root cause of conflict in Burma. The reason is that this language of blame-placing on the colonialists is frequently used by chauvinists as an excuse for the realities of today. I accept that, in the past, Westerners were part of the problem. However the events that have unfolded in the nation are not purely due to the actions of the British. Histories, both the oral traditions passed on in songs and poems and more formal written histories tell of centuries of war and oppression. It is even possible to examine the conditions during colonization and compare them with the current situation and see that the problem existed before the colonial history.

The current issue in Burma is also not an issue of democracy or who is in power. If there was democracy or if the opposition group gained power but the people didn’t solve the root causes of the problem, violence and murder would rear their ugly heads again. Furthermore, because seeds of hatred were planted long ago, they are rooted very deeply in the hearts of the people. However, I believe that everyone can work together to end this problem one day. Today, Burma’s hatred, vengeance and civil war is not an accident that popped up in the last few days or via the will of God. If one group dominates another and does not treat them with human dignity, then problems will arise.

The terrible suffering of all the ethnic nationalities before and through fifty years of civil war cannot be ended at once. There will continue to be terrible personal vengeance until the root cause of the problem is identified and solved. Presently there seems to be little progress in this. One reason is that the wrong medicine is being given to cure the disease.

There is inter- communal distrust, and those who have committed wrongs are not brought to account for them. Consequently, the victims don’t dare to forgive. There is also self-centeredness and egoism. This has all resulted in the long term conflict. It should have finished long ago, but it has been prolonged. Consequently, everyone has a responsibility to end the hatred and vengeance. In my opinions every ethnic group must be involved in the writing and dissemination of genuine history. Writing such a history would require a process of discussion on the past and continuing problems in the country. In order for history to be genuine, all perpetrators, victims and also foreigners need to be involved. The British, in particular, need to be involved as they contributed directly to the ongoing problems. It is also of particular importance to this process that a mediating ‘third party’ be involved as well. This group would be made up of persons from all the national ethnicities, Asian leaders and concerned and involved members of the international community. Included in this group would be religious leaders, academicians, people with historic ties to Burma, UN officials or members of other trans-governmental organizations and politicians currently concerned with the country and the region. Most importantly, however, the members of such a team would need to be individuals trusted and respected by all of the parties involved. This outside party would have to help others agree to principles before discussions, agree on what issues exist actively to discuss, give suggestions on possible solutions, maintain the balance between the parties involved, reduce tension, ask questions about whether or not issues are agreed to and help and encourage participants. If they get agreement from all sides, they have to record it in an official manner. They have to discuss what to do if some group breaks an agreement. So this third party must be honest, brave, perseverant and patient. In this way the discussion will be just and they can help find the way to solve the problems. If they do not work in this way, they will become a tool for one of the groups.

While a mediating group would have a significant role in such negotiations, they only assist in the process. In order to work effectively towards a solution to the conflict in Burma, everyone needs to understand the reason why hatred has happened, understand the feelings of those who have suffered, and seek creative ways to change the present negative situation. Every group must accept the differences that exist between them: religious, cultural, ethnic, racial, etc... Honest mutual respect based upon human dignity is necessary and it must be taught on the grassroots level to every ethnic group. This is one way to destroy hatred, to create a new country that everybody can participate in. In this way we can build justice and lasting true peace for our country and our people.

Phar Haw Hsuh

November 1999
The dam needs maintenance, and if you don’t go you are fined 100 kyat per day.

Government plans to increase rice production included chemical fertilizers and farm machinery as well. Because of corruption, however, farmers did not benefit from these enhancements:

The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation

sells two kinds of fertilizer which farmers can buy on credit at 3,200 kyat per acre. But our township council prefers selling to merchants, leaving farmers with only 4 bags for 10 acres. But when the debts are due, farm owners have to pay the full value, as if they had actually received 2 bags per acre. We heard that the government sent irrigation pumps, but after the township council received them all the pumps disappeared.

Apart from farming, the people must work on a variety of projects run by the military. Some, such as roads, are public works projects, while others seem to be soldiers’ private concerns.

Villagers build roads without pay. If you don’t go, the soldiers make you a porter to the frontline. IB 33 Commander Aung Te Min established a rubber plantation on 500 acres near the village. The army made people plant trees then fence in the plantation. Cattle used to graze there, and now if they stray back the soldiers shoot and eat them.

So, even without insurgency, rural people face local military rule and hunger. The witness described food scarcity in his village:

Taxes and oppression are starving the village. There’s no time to work, only to pay taxes and do forced labor; many villagers have little food. Some must eat porridge, some only water skimmed off boiled rice, and others only sweet potatoes. To feed the children some adults go without food for one or two days at a time. Even so, children increasingly suffer diarrhea, sore stomachs, and death.

Living under these conditions, the informant’s own family did not eat adequately. Food security eluded them, despite their collective efforts. In the end, he left home to find work abroad:

I have 5 children. My oldest daughter, who is eleven, always went to do forced labor while we parents looked for food. You see children 8 or 9 years old working. Sometimes we only had enough rice for porridge. I worked all day, then went home only to hear my children cry from hunger. My tears fell, too. I could not suffer the poverty of my village. I came to Thailand to work and send money home, so that they can eat.

Farmers everywhere face the quota and forced labor on top of debt and natural disaster. A Dawei (Tavoy) Township farmer with four children said:

I have 3 acres. Last year there was a big flood and my entire farm was destroyed. I replanted, but only got 130 baskets, instead of the normal 200 to 250. We have to pay 12 baskets per acre as quota, so that was 36 baskets. Because of the flood I planted twice, so costs doubled. To pay and still meet the quota meant I couldn’t even feed my family. I was conscripted as a front line porter for five months, during which my family had nothing to live on. The only way was to borrow money. That is why we, the people, never get sufficient food, never develop. Several in my village have not been able to repay debts, and have watched the government confiscate their land and transfer it to other farmers.

We learned that the government forces

November 1999
people to raise crops for export even when they have nothing to eat. We read about this practice, environmental problems and poverty in the Shan State:

Central Shan State around Hsi Paw and Hsen Wi has big paddy plantations. But nowadays many people have quit farming because the government forces them to raise cash-crops for export. Paddy also is becoming less beneficial for farmers. Agriculture Department officials push new strains of rice unsuited to the soil and cool weather. They also push soybeans and peanuts as cash crops. But peanuts drain fertility, and the soil must be left to regenerate or it will be useless. The government pays less for produce here than in central Burma. For all of these reasons, people are quitting the land.

It seems that government input to agriculture had always created problems. We read how the BSPP failed to invigorate the land:

During the BSPP period, especially in the early 1980s, farmers traded paddy for chemical fertilizers under the quota system. At first, crops were good, but over time the soil deteriorated and the produce lost its flavor. More fertilizer was required to get the same yield. Now much of this land no longer produces; the chemicals caused permanent damage. Nowadays, the only chemical fertilizer comes from China, and only big landowners can afford it. Large areas once cultivated in Hsen Wi are now barren, commodity prices are rising and people are hungry. Disused land is taken by the army.

We also have a report about hunger in Arakan State, where the Muslim minority, known as Rohingyas, are generally denied Burmese citizenship and have been repeatedly swept into refugee camps in Bangladesh. International human rights organizations noted:

Since most of the Rohingyas are unskilled day laborers, one day of work without pay can mean one day without food for the whole family. The availability of work depends very much on the agricultural cycle, and during summer there tends to be very little work. In the past, Rohingyas traveled to find work in towns, but since 1991 their freedom of movement has been severely restricted… They thus have very few sources of income to begin with, and since the dry season also happens to be the best time for construction work, when forced labor demands are most intense, the burden on the Rohingyas is particularly acute.

All the above evidence demonstrates food scarcity’s prevalence. However, we saw that hunger is not only widespread, but also serious. It has caused malnutrition and death in children, and increased poverty for the whole family. An informant from a fertile region of the Irrawaddy Division, recorded hunger’s impact in his neighborhood.

In 1993 three children died a couple of doors down from my house. All boys, they were around 10, 8 and 6. The children had always been weak and malnourished, especially in the last couple of years. Their bellies were distended and their ribs stuck out—like starving African children we saw in magazines. Their knees were swollen and their calves were sticks. Their skin was white, their lips pale. They often had diarrhea. Their father worked cutting grass and bamboo to build houses. They all died about a week apart—I remember because I went to cut timber for a week, came back and heard one had died. I went back to the forest, came home the next week and another was gone. Just one week later the third child died. We knew the family well. I remember the family’s condition and how this all came to pass.

Before they died, the children were hungry for many years. Their family was caught up in a political and economic crisis going on far outside their village.

Their father used to grow bananas, cucumbers, and watermelons on a small plot about two miles outside the village. After the 1988 uprising, the government consolidated the village, so the family had to move. Wild elephants ate all their plants, and so he turned to cutting bamboo. He earned about eighty kyat per day, which might have been enough, but he only got cash when bamboo traders came, so the family sometimes went hungry. Also, at 45 he was getting arthritis and couldn’t work every day. His family of seven ate no more than mine of five, and my children were younger. They begged for help frequently. Of course, we pitied them and helped as we could. Apart from rice, my wife gave them salt and fish paste.

When the children got diarrhea nobody suspected anything serious. They took some Burmese medicine, but that didn’t stop it. Intravenous drips might have helped, but those cost 150 kyat or so, and nobody could afford them. So they passed away. The parents knew their children were dying, but there was no health care or medicine. Their father could only weep, heartbroken.

Reflecting on these tragic deaths, the informant commented on the government’s role in food scarcity:

I knew this was a wrong and terrible thing. In my opinion, these children died from starvation. If they had adequate food they wouldn’t have died. And they weren’t the only ones, but I don’t know the others’ details. In nearby villages there was a minor epidemic. No matter how deep in poverty, people are never excused from demands for labor and money. This family had no alternative but to struggle for survival every day, and so the children died.

Human Rights

Endnotes: “No War, No Peace…”
1 Asian Human Rights Commission, Voice of the Hungry Azalea: 1999 can be obtained by writing AHRC at Unit 4, 7th Floor, Mongkok Commercial Centre, 16 Argyle Street, Kowloon Hongkong SAR or email ahrc@ahrc.org
2 AHRC, First Submission to the People’s Tribunal on Food Scarcity and Militarization in Burma, February 1999, p.181.
Further information on food scarcity can be found in “Rohingya said to be fleeing famine,” The Nation, 11 May 1997 and Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, “Starvation Looms in Arakan,” Newsletter, April 1997.
Border re-opens

The government of Burma re-opened its borders with Thailand on November 24 following a meeting between Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan and officials in Rangoon. The border closure followed the October 1-2 siege of the Burmese embassy in Bangkok. As the border crossings at Mae Sai-Tachileik, Myawaddy-Mae Sot, Three Pagoda Pass and Ranong opened people from both sides of the border rushed to buy and sell goods. It was clear that not only the merchants had been affected by the closure. “I don’t want to see the border shut again because we suffered from a shortage of food and high cost of living during the month of closure. When it was closed the price of goods tripled,” said one Burmese woman who crossed the bridge into Mae Sai on the opening day.

In Mae Sot, the first morning of trade in almost two months was accompanied by a township border committee meeting and there was evidence that local government officials in Burma had also been negatively effected by the closure. At the meeting Myawaddy governor Li-Col Sura Saw Win requested Thailand import more agricultural products from Burma to reduce the bilateral trade deficit. However, previously imposed agricultural import tariffs intended to help Thai farmers during the economic crisis prevented Thai authorities from committing to such imports. Thai businessmen, on the other hand, anticipate exporting more than US$ 10 million worth of goods into Burma by the end of the year.

Despite the resolution of the border closure, the future of Thai fishing concessions in Burmese waters remains in question. Burmese foreign minister Win Aung, in comments prior to the Manila ministerial summit, said that all past fishing concessions would be reviewed along with the designated fishing areas and enforcement mechanisms, as some Thai fisherman had broken their agreements. “They have duplicated licence numbers for a dozen ships and sometimes also fish in non-permitted areas,” he said. Win Aung mentioned that fishing concession fees might be raised but that these extra fees might initially be adversely affected, they would be able to find substitute workers and adjust to the situation.

The repatriation has met with logistical and political difficulties as well as criticism by human rights organisations. The first group of 200 migrants ferried across the Moei River were met by Burmese soldiers who threatened to shoot any of the migrants who set foot on Burmese soil. Despite these threats and demands from the Burmese government for cross checks on the identity of each returning person, the repatriation continued unabated in Mae Sot with police claiming that between 500 and 800 persons were being deported daily. At other border points repatriation continued at a slower pace and in Chiang Rai province deportees were held in custody on the Thai side following incidents on the initial day of repatriations where Burmese troops had fired on deportees crossing the Sai River.

Human Rights Watch Asia requested Thai authorities allow the UNHCHR access to the deportees to determine potential refugee status, especially in the case of Shan workers who don’t have access to refugee camps. Further human rights complaints were raised when 15 women left on an island in the Moei River November 6 were allegedly taken by Burma soldiers to the far bank of the river and raped. The Thai National Security Council said that there was nothing that could be done about the incident as it had occurred on Burmese soil, and Prime Minister Chuan remained firm on his policy of repatriation.

Business interests also lodged protests with the government. Soon after the repatriation started, 30 Hong Kong and Taiwanese factory owners requested the government reconsider its policy, pointing to the potential loss of 16,000 Thai jobs if their factories went out of business. Demands from 200 other business owners, represented by the Tak Chamber of Commerce, included an immediate end to the crackdown and recruitment of 80,000 Thai workers to replace the departing migrants. Still other entrepreneurs threatened to pull their businesses out of Thailand and move them elsewhere. However, factory owners received little sympathy from the government and a protest rally planned for November 10 fell far short of the anticipated 5,000 participants, with only 400 people turning up to support business owners. Deputy labor minister, Jongchai Thientham said, “I don’t care how those employers in Mae Sot will suffer. The employers have enjoyed using cheap labor for so long, now they have to pay for something more expensive.” Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai appealed to the businessmen to cooperate with the government and said that while they might initially be adversely affected, they would be able to find substitute workers and adjust to the situation.

Despite the hard-nosed approach of the central government, there were some questions, even on the part of local officials, about the effectiveness of such repatriation efforts. Police authorities along the border acknowledged their own limited ability to keep migrants from returning across the long and porous border. “The Moei river is not more than 200 meters wide and is only as deep as a man’s neck,” said Tak Police Lt-Col Sorapol Payoogveeranoi. “We’ve sealed several spots on the bank but we can’t watch all of them.” Border residents have reported that migrants have returned to Thailand within hours of repatriation. Private boat owners hired to transport the deportees to Burma have allegedly been taking bribes from their passengers for immediate return passage while others have simply walked back. According to immigration police officials more than 10,000 migrants were deported in the first week but about 60% had already returned to Thailand.

“Factories lay off thousands,” Bangkok Post, 3 November 1999
“The rice-millers stand up for foreign hands,” The Nation, 5 November 1999
“Government expelled workers,” Bangkok Post, 4 November 1999

Continued on next page
The following article was taken from an interview with U Tin Myint, a farmer from Yepyu Township, Tenasserim Division. It appeared in the Karen language Kwe Lu newspaper (30 September 1999, p. 3). After losing his land he came to find work in Thailand at the end of August, along with his whole family.

Nattwin is our ancestral village. My parents inherited 5 acres of land from their parents. As I have no brothers or sisters, my parents in turn gave me these 5 acres when I was 30 years old. Now I am 47. These 5 acres are situated in lowlands, so in years when there are floods they are submerged. After the flood waters recede I have to start planting all over again, so I lose out and just get what I can. In the past, the lands tended to flood only once every three years. After the beginning of the military regime [1988] I don't know what happened, but they began flooding every year. My expenses at that time outweighed my income, so I had to borrow from the Village Council Chairman, U Aye Pe, in order to give the paddy quota to the Agricultural Corporation.

The Agricultural Corporation quota is 12 baskets per acre, so for my 5 acres I have to give 60 baskets and receive 300 kyat for each. I have fertile land so it can yield 300-400 baskets per acre, so for my 5 acres I have to give 1500 baskets of our paddy. For the last four years I had to borrow 10,000 kyat per year from U Aye Pe but for the last three years there were floods every year. I was unable to repay the debt, so the principal grew to a total of 40,000 kyat.

In 1999 my land flooded three times. I had to borrow money from U Aye Pe twice. After it flooded on the last occasion there was no longer enough time to grow paddy before the end of the season. U Aye Pe knew that I had no land to cultivate in the gathering during a side conference between Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and Gen. Than Shwe, the first of it's kind since the 1988 uprising. This meeting and the subsequent diplomatic mission to Rangoon, led by former premier Ryutaro Hashimoto, indicate that the Japanese are willing to resume aid if moves toward economic and political reform are made. At a press conference during the mission, Burma's leading economist expert Brig. Gen. David Abel, praised Japan for breaking ranks with sanctioning countries, but acknowledged that the Japanese government was being forced to "toe the American line." The Japanese said that they hope that they will be able to encourage Burma's military government to implement change.

"A more flexible approach wins wider support," Cecilia Quambilao, Bangkok Post 30 November 1999

"Burma's junta lends Japan's efforts to revile dying economy," The Nation, 3 December 1999

Endnotes: “Falling...”
1 On the paddy quota system and land tenure, see "Burma's rice economy: An historical overview," Burma Issues, October 1999, p. 3. See also “Rice” in The People's Tribunal on Food Scarcity and Militarisation in Burma, Voice of the Hungry Nations (Asian Human Rights Commission, October 1999, pp. 4-10.)
2 “The Chettiars were a caste of bankers and moneylenders from Madras. Their original homes were in Chettinland but they began spreading throughout India and much of the rest of Eastern Asia... Following the great slump in rice prices in 1930 many Burmese cultivator-owners were unable to meet their payments, and the Chettiars, partly because of the pressure exerted on them by the great banks of India, were compelled to foreclose.” Robert H. Taylor, The State in Burma, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), pp. 144-5.

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The Last Word
What Others Have to Say About Burma

“Throughout modern Thai-Burmese relations, Thailand has constantly been held hostage by Burma mainly for two reasons: the desire to trade and exploit Burmese natural and maritime resources and the lack of consensus among the Thai authorities in dealing with Burma. Whenever there were divisions within Thai society, outside enemies would not miss any opportunity to use these weaknesses to their advantage. Burma’s victory over Ayudhya was a good case in point. It was due to internal bickering and lack of solidarity among the Thais.” – Thai journalist Kavi Chongkittavorn in Bangkok’s The Nation newspaper, 12 October 1999.

“Myanmar’s method of trying to create legitimate businesses to make a decent living and stop their dependency on poppy cultivation is the only workable solution and should be given support.” – A November 1, 1999 government of Burma statement defending its refusal to extradite drug lords to western countries.

“We all think the situation will change soon. If I stay in Thailand I can get a job easily. Thai employers need us.” – Migrant worker Ar Kyaw upon returning to Thailand mere hours after being repatriated to Burma during the Thai governments drive to push illegal laborers out of the country.

“But what we want to say to them, is that what we are fighting is the use of arms to bring about political change. So we cannot support such acts where people with arms force people without arms into a particular situation. We have to face this kind of situation from day to day in Burma. Our people are arrested, our people are harassed, they are oppressed, they are bullied, they are tortured. Why, why are they putting up with it - because the people who are doing it have guns in their hands. And they are fighting with their guns, and it is because of the guns that they are forced to submit to acts of injustice. So we don’t want the system whereby the gun rules man. Whereas it’s man who should rule the gun. After all the gun was invented by men. It’s men who make guns so man should have power over guns. And to use guns to oppress your fellow men is something we cannot accept.” – Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on change through armed struggle in an interview on 7 October 1999.

“As Burma is at a strategic cross-roads linking India, Bangladesh and China with Southeast Asia, ASEAN can’t do without Burma. Within ASEAN Burma will be strong. With Burma, ASEAN will also be strong.” – Win Aung in a statement prior to the ASEAN ministers’ meetings in Manila, the last week in November