

Briefing on United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC)

UNFC Foreign Affairs Department

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Brief History of Burma (Myanmar)

The Burma, annexed into the British Empire in 1885-86, was a small military empire, known as the 3rd Burman Empire. It consisted of the plains mainly in the middle and lower part of country. The British incorporated the upper parts and the hill areas and the country came to be known as 'British Burma.' The British initially administered Burma as a province of British India. The separation from India was made in 1937.

The Burman people resented the British rule from the very beginning and Buddhism was used as a rallying point in early 20th Century. Rangoon University strike took place in 1920. Organized political movement started in 1930 with the formation of a union of nationalists and leftists, Doh Ba-ma A-si-a-yon (Our Burman Organization). It was the beginning of Burman independence movement, which had a close relationship with the Indian independence movement.

The modern education system introduced by the British included the Burman language in the high school curriculum. This had made the Burman language a lingua franca of the country, especially in the urban areas. However, Burma remained a paradise for anthropologists up to this day, with 7 major ethnic minorities and close to a hundred dialect or sub groups.

Due to discrimination and maltreatment since the feudal days by the Burman majority, the country's 7 major ethnic minorities, or the 7 ethnic nationalities, have developed strong self identity, or nationalism. As a result, the ethnic nationalities wanted to remain under the protection of the British, when the time for independence came in 1947. It took the far-sighted and sincere leader, Aung San, to persuade them, with a promise of complete equality and federalism in independent Burma, to take independence at the same time as the Burman.

Aung San and the entire cabinet of the interim government which he led, were gunned down on July 19, 1947. The power passed into the hands of Burman ultra-nationalists, who drafted and adopted the so-called 1947 Constitution for unitary and centralized system of government, favoring the majority ethnic group, the Burman. Independence came on January 4, 1948.

In late 1948 and early 1949, power monger and extremist General Ne Win used his pocket army troops to crush the peaceful Karen people's movement for the right to equality and a viable state. In the face of military attacks against the Karen communities in Tavoy-Mergui District, Rangoon and Insein, the Karen had no choice but to take up arms finally in self-defense on January 31, 1949. The Karenni and Mon militia forces joined the Karen resistance in sympathy.

In 1953, Shan State came under Burma Army's military administration. The army was supposed to drive out the Kuomintang troop incursion. However, the

Burma Army troops have not left ever since. In 1958, Prime Minister U Nu forced the traditional chiefs of the Shan people, known as Sorbwa, to relinquish power.

Prime Minister U Nu handed some parts of Kachin State to China without consultation with the Kachin leaders in 1957 and dismissed the Kachin head of state, in violation of the Constitution. In 1960, he made Buddhism the state religion.

In the same year, the young dissidents of the Kachin and Shan peoples started resistance. The young Arakanese dissidents started resistance in 1975 and the Chin in 1988. That completed participation of all the ethnic nationalities in the resistance movement against aggression and domination by the Burman ultra-nationalists or extremists.

Military Dictatorship

In 1962, when the ethnic nationality leaders were urging for turning the country into a genuine federal union, in accordance with Panlong Agreement, Ne Win seized power on the pretext that the Union was in danger of falling apart and set up the Burman military dictatorship. The world was in the Cold War period. To crush the ethnic resistance forces, he took financial and military assistance offered by the Western Camp, including Japan, for fighting communism and containment of China.

Ne Win quickly expanded the Burma Army, indoctrinated the core group with extreme nationalism of the feudal days and extended the civil war. Since then, the real agenda of the military dictatorship or Tatmadaw (Royal Army or Imperial Army) has been to build the fourth Burman Empire. In 26 years, Ne Win's war of aggression impoverished the country and induced the nation-wide pro-democracy uprising in 1988.

Ne Win had to relinquish power because of the uprising. Senior General Than Shwe, who managed to get the top position of dictatorship, followed the same agenda of building the country into the 4th Burman Empire and had to follow the same policies of ruthless suppression of all oppositions, especially against the ethnic nationalities.

In repudiation of the ethnic forces, democratic forces and the international community's call for national reconciliation and settlement of the political problems by political means, Than Shwe dictatorship implemented its so-called Road Map to Disciplined Democracy to consolidate the military dictatorship and hoodwink the international community. With a biased state Constitution, undemocratic electoral laws and heavily rigged election, the dictatorship has placed in power former generals, military officers and some leaders of its proxy party.

Alliances of Freedom and Democratic Movements

Early on, the Karen National Union (KNU) has realized that the viable way to eliminate oppression and win freedom is through an alliance of forces with

common political aim and program. Accordingly, it has been a founding member of the alliances in the history of the struggle for freedom and democracy, in Burma.

The first broad-based ethnic nationality alliance has been the National Democratic Front (NDF), which was formed in 1976 by 6 major and four minor ethnic minority organizations. Its aim has been to gain national (ethnic) equality and self-determination, and to establish a genuine federal union. Regarding membership, the NDF Constitution stipulates that the NDF shall accept no more than one organization representing a specific ethnic nationality. A candidate organization shall be based on democratic principles, shall have political aim, policies and programs, shall have a territory, an armed force and a population supporting it.

Over the years, the NDF became weak as some of the member organizations left for different reasons. The entry into cease-fire agreement with the military dictatorship after 1994 by some of its members has made it almost defunct.

Democratic Alliance of Burma

In 1988, a large number of democratic activists from different organizations came fleeing from the brutal suppression of nation-wide pro-democracy movement by the military dictatorship. The different organizations of activists and some individual member organizations of the NDF together formed a broad-based alliance known as the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB). There were 22 member organizations initially and it still has about 20 member organizations now. The DAB is essentially an alliance of the ethnic Burman and the non-Burman ethnic organizations. Its 4-point political aim is stated as - To remove the military dictatorship; To establish democracy; To establish a genuine federal union; and To establish durable peace.

Ethnic Nationality Council

The non-Burman ethnic nationality organizations, which had left the NDF, some member organizations of the NDF and some cease-fire organizations got together and formed an alliance known as the Ethnic Nationality Council (ENC), in preparation for the so-called Tri-partite Dialogue, called for by the UNGA resolutions starting from 1994. The ENC is based on the ethnic nationality states that had been in existence before independence and formed by successive central governments.

A number of member organizations left ENC recently, in disappointment, when they realized that the military dictatorship or its proxy was not intending to agree to Tri-partite Dialogue, any time soon. The ENC now has as its members mainly the community based organizations such as the youths, women, human rights, environment etc. organizations. Its aim now is to organize workshops and training for capacity and institution building.

United Nationalities Federal Council

Before the election in 2010, the SPDC military junta pressured the ceasefire organizations to transform into the so-called Border Guard Force (BGF), which would be placed under total control of the SPDC army. The major cease-fire organizations like the Kachin Independence Organization/Army (KIO/KIA), United Wa State Party/Army (UWSP/UWSA), Shan State Progress Party/Army-North (SSPP/SSA-N) and New Mon State Party/Army (NMSP/NMSA) refused to comply. The SPDC military junta threatened to attack the ceasefire organizations, which were refusing to transform into BGF.

In January this year, the ceasefire and non-ceasefire organizations of the KIO, SSPP-N, NMSP, KNU, Chin National Front (CNF), Karenni Progressive Party (KNPP), the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and some smaller organizations met and formed an organizing committee known as the Committee for Emergence of Federal Union (CEFU), for the formation of an umbrella organization of the major non-Burman ethnic nationality organizations.

In May this year, after a number of meetings, the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) was formed to struggle for achievement the legitimate rights and freedom of the non-Burman ethnic nationalities. The UNFC intends to achieve its aim through dialogue and national reconciliation. At the same time, it seeks to achieve early positive change.

However, before it could make overture for talk with the newly formed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) government, the Burma Army started military offensive against one of its member organizations, the SSPP-N, on March 13, 2011. Again, Burma Army initiated military offensive against the KIO, another member organization of the UNFC, on June 9.

The SSPP-N as well as the KIO actively resists the BA's military offensive with war of attrition deep inside their own territories, up to this day.

Aim and Policies UNFC

The political aim of the UNFC is to establish a genuine Federal Union of Burma guaranteeing equality and self-determination of all the nationalities. The objectives are as follows.

- (1) To establish genuine unity of the nationalities;
- (2) To establish lasting peace;
- (3) To realize a genuine system of multi-party democracy;
- (4) To establish a Federal Union guaranteeing freedom, justice and equality for lasting and peaceful co-existence, and for collaboration of all the nationalities.

The UNFC policies can be summed up as follows.

1. To achieve the political aim and objectives through dialogue and national reconciliation;
2. To cooperate closely with all the non-Burman ethnic nationalities and the democratic forces in the effort to achieve early positive change;
3. To urge the UN, US, China, Japan, Australia and India to arrange cooperatively for and mediate on Tripartite Dialogue, comprising of the UNFC, the Democratic forces, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the USDA regime;
4. To support the call for the international arms embargo against the USDP regime;
5. To call for the increase of diplomatic, trade, economic, investment and financial sanctions against the USDP regime by the US, EU, Australia, Japan and South Korea;
6. To support the call for early formation the UN Commission of Inquiry to stop gross human rights violations and atrocities against the ethnic civilian populations and the political activists;
7. To urge the international community for providing emergency humanitarian assistance to the Kachin and Shan IDP and refugees, who have to flee from recent fighting and violence.

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