KAOWAO NEWS NO. 138

Newsletter for social justice and freedom in Burma
January 10 – February 16, 2008

******************************************************************************

Readers’ Front

Authorities silent after bomb blast in Khaw Zar
Over 30000 amphetamines seized at the border town
KNU Leader Assassinated
Four Mon Migrant Workers Killed in Rubber Plantation
Canada urges Burma to include all parties in constitutional processes
People ‘paying the price’ for health care in Burma
Cockfight gambling poses problems for villagers
Mon solidarity called at MAU gathering
Mon National Day and our National Obligation
They Are Not Dead Who Live in the Heart They Leave Behind
Burma: Lessons from the Past, Problems in the Present, Thoughts about the Future

******************************************************************************
Readers' Front

Dear readers,

We invite comments and suggestions on improvements to the Kaowao newsletter. With your help, we hope that Kaowao News will continue to grow to serve better the needs of those seeking social justice in Burma. Additionally, we hope that it will become an important forum for discussion and debate and help readers to keep abreast of issues and news. We reserve the right to edit and reject articles without prior notification. You can use a pseudonym but we encourage you to include your full name and address.

Regards,
Editor
Kaowao News

kaowao@hotmail.com, www.kaowao.org

**********************************************************************

Authorities silent after bomb blast in Khaw Zar

Kaowao: February 16, 2008

Ye -- Mon State: According to local villagers, a bomb blast that occurred last month has not been investigated by SPDC authorities.

The bomb exploded during the evening near the Khaw Zar Sub-town market in southern Ye injuring two people, one seriously. This incident happened after New Mon State Party (NMSP) leaders held a public meeting with local villagers during an out reach organizing trip in southern Ye area in January.
Many local villagers are disappointed that the government has not undertaken an investigation into the bombing. It is thought the bomb’s target was the Mon leader as it went off near the meeting place of the NMSP. The Vice President of the NMSP, Nai Rot Sa, led the trip and traveled around the area to motivate the public who are under the strict administration of the SPDC after the cease-fire deal.

One Khaw Zar villager told Kaowao, “The bomb blast occurred at night-time beside the Banyan tree near the house where the NMSP was resting. The bombing in the Mon community is not an isolated incident, since last January bombs have exploded in Nai Pyi Thaw - Pyin Ma Nar, Rangoon and other towns.”

According to an anonymous source close to Township authorities, the NMSP and the SPDC authorities didn’t respond to this latest blast, so civilians are concerned about their safety about this bombing. The villagers say that the bombing might be the work of the SPDC or other armed groups that opposed the NMSP.

“They still haven’t figured out who the bombers were and are worried any news leaks will spark action among authorities. The bomb was a M.79 bomb and is used by both the SPDC as well as insurgent groups, so it is difficult to guess who the bomber was,” he added.

**********************************************************************

Over 30,000 Methamphetamines seized at the border town

Moore Ah, Kaowao: February 16, 2008

Three Pagodas Pass -- Burmese authorities, on February 13, seized more than 30,000 narcotic pills worth 150 million kyat, the largest amount seized and the first big drug bust this year.

According to local authorities, “The drug dealer tried to trade the methamphetamines into
the Thai area but was arrested by Burmese soldiers and polices this afternoon. The authorities also seized more pills and about 10,000 Baht worth of drug money.

“The drug smuggler/dealer U Aye Myine, lived in Quarter 3, Khatkar Road No. 213 of the Three Pagodas Pass, was arrested near the border check point in possession of over 28,000 pills and the authorities later seized another 300 methamphetamines in his home,” said the local authority.

According to a police officer, “U Aye Myine was arrested at the militia gate while hiding 28,000 narcotics in his motorbike. He tried to export the drugs from Burma where they are manufactured to the Thai side and when we searched his residence, we resized over 300 narcotics, weight 30 Kilograms in packet including 10000 baht between the rice sack.

On the same day, two drug smugglers passed through the New Mon State Party (NMSP) gate and were investigated by the Thai Police but escaped while leaving approximately 4,000 pills. In total, the authorities now seized methamphetamines worth of about 150 million Kyats, said the police officer.

A youth form the town said, “Currently drugs are increasing in the Three Pagodas Pass and many young people are using the drug for recreational use. They get the narcotics easily at the Burmese side for 100 baht for 3 pills whereas in Sangkhlaburi on the Thai side it is not easy to obtain it and is worth more at 150 baht for one pill.”

“The authorities are responsible for the spread of the drugs because they have not taken any action to stem the flow of chemicals across the border which is used to make the drugs in labs which are in turn smuggled back across the border. The arrested drug dealers are later freed after paying bribes. The drug dealers are confident to trade but this time it was seized in possession of a very large amount,” said an anonymous businessman close to the TPP authorities.

In 2007, the cease fire group cooperated with the military junta and arrested some people in TPP but the authorities later on freed more than 5 people after accepting bribe money from the drug dealers reported from the local source.
KNU Leader Assassinated

Kaowao: February 14, 2008

Mae Sot -- Mahn Sha LaPan, the General Secretary of the Karen National Union (KNU) was shot dead on Thursday afternoon around 4:30 PM at his home according to the source from Mae Sot, Tak Province of Thai Burma border town.

A Kaowao’s correspondent who visited the Karen leader’s house reported, “Currently senior authorities of Mae Sot arrived at his house and are investigating the assassination.”

An eyewitness said the two men arrived in front of Man Shar’s residence dressed in dark clothes driving a two door Toyota vehicle bearing license plate No. 4452. The Karen leader was shot two times in the chest and a 9 mm bullet was recovered. One gunman came in on the first floor of his residence while the other was waiting in front of the door when Pado Mhan Shar was sitting in his residence.

Mahn Shar LaPan was highly respected by the ethnic and democratic forces. He joined the KNU after he finished his degree from Rangoon University majoring history in 1966. The 64 year old Karen leader is survived by his two daughters Naw Nat Boi Boi and Naw Nat Zo Yar Pan and his youngest son Saw Za Laung Pan.
Four Mon Migrant Workers Killed in Rubber Plantation

Kaowao: February 14, 2008

Four Mon migrant workers were murdered and one young man was seriously injured in Surat Thani of southern Thailand. One of the victims was a pregnant woman.

“An anonymous Thai mob gunned down the two couples in the rubber plantation on February 4. The victims were Nai Win Naing and Nai Khaing Thein and their wives, all four came from Thanbyu Zayat Township of Mon State and worked there as migrant labourers.

The two couples had worked in the area for a long time,” said a sibling of Nai Win Naing.

An anonymous source at the plantation told Kaowao, “Seven people come to the plantation and ‘investigated’ the workers, posing as Thai intelligence. They arrested the two couples and a 14 old boy, placing them in their car and proceeded to shoot them. Whereupon the young boy managed to escape certain death but was shot seriously in his back and arm as he fled.

He is now in Cha Ya hospital receiving medical treatment.” The injured boy reported, “They tied our hands behind our backs and began to shoot, but I ran away.”

Currently the Thai police are investigating the murders, said a relative of one of the victims.

Nai Nyi Nyi who has worked in Surat Tharni for five years said, “Last month the robbers attacked the rubber plantation workers near our farm. Five people had worked the rubber by hand for a month, however often the migrant workers are robbed and killed by their bosses. If we don’t have money to pay them they take the rubber or kill the workers. Our lives on the farm and plantation are without security. The places we stay at on the
According to Nai Min Oo who ran away from a rubber plantation recently, “Last month Thai robbers attacked us and stole rubber. I think this was organized through the plantation’s owner because we rolled out a lot of rubber and approached the boss to sell it, he asked us to hold onto it saying he would buy it next week, but after awhile a Thai gang showed up with a big car and robbed us of our rubber. All the workers ran from our boss.”

Canada urges Burma to include all concerned parties in constitutional and electoral processes

By Canadian Friends of Burma

Ottawa (February 14, 2008) – Canada urges the Burmese military junta to include all concerned parties in both the constitutional and electoral processes, Parliamentary Secretary responsible to Foreign Affairs said in the House of Commons yesterday.

MP Deepak Obhrai, Parliamentary Secretary to the Foreign Minister, made the comment in response to the announcement of the Burmese military regime that they would hold a constitutional referendum in May, 2008 and elections in 2010.

“On Saturday, the Burmese regime announced its intention to hold a referendum on a new constitution in May, as well as general elections in 2010. However, Canada believes that an authentic dialogue with members of the democratic movement must occur if there is to be democratic reform in Burma,” said Mr. Obhrai.
He was making this statement on behalf of Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier in the House of Commons.

“Canada was appalled by last September's violent crackdown by the Burmese regime on protestors exercising their right to peaceful dissent. This is why last November the government imposed the world's toughest sanctions against the Burmese regime,” he added.

Mr. Obhrai also deplored continued arrest and charges to those who led the September protests in Burma.

People ‘paying the price’ for health care in Burma

Lawi Weang, Kaowao: February 6, 2008

Mawlamyine -- Under-funding, corruption, and mismanagement in Burma’s health sector are contributing to suffering and unnecessary deaths. People in need of medical care in Mon State are forced to pay unaffordable fees for treatment at corrupt private clinics which provides better care while receiving poor treatment at the public hospitals which is under-funded.

According to local people, patients without referrals from private clinics are denied treatment at the public hospital in Mawlamyine, capital city of Mon State.

When Mrs. Mi Soe, a woman from Thanbyu Zayat Township, sent her son to a public hospital in Mawlamyine the nurses told her that if she did not have a signed patient registration from doctors her son would not be treated or allowed to stay.
Mi Soe then took her son to the Yadanar Mon private clinic to get a doctor’s signature. At the clinic the doctor provided no advice because he knew the boy was seriously ill, so he signed a referral to the public hospital,” Mi Soe explained. “He was worried my son would die at his clinic. So he just signed the registration,” she added. Mi Soe’s son died in the public hospital soon after.

Worried about their reputations, most private clinics in Mawlamyine do not help patients who seem likely to die. People feel that clinic owners and doctors are more concerned about their reputation than the health of the people, because each prospective patient who chooses a different clinic represents lost profits. Seriously ill patients, the very people who need advanced care offered by the private clinics, are sent to public hospitals where care is of poorer quality.

However, people who want to attend the public hospital must first attend private clinics, even if it is likely that they will be sent to a public hospital. The thirty rooms of Yadanar Mon clinic are overcrowded with patients, many of whom are waiting to go to the public hospital.

Forcing people to attend private clinics before they can attend the public hospital causes serious difficulties; the result is that people who cannot afford to pay are denied medical care. From the perspective of the doctors whose salaries are not much better than a street vender and who frequently work at both the clinics and at the hospitals, “if there is no money, there is no treatment. This is how doctors make their living,” said a health worker in Mudon.

The health care in Burma is in shambles due to the mismanagement of the economy in which the military government provides no funding to the social sector, most earnings from investments goes into its defense budget. What health services are available are for the military elite, their families and cronies. Recently, the UN called on the government to address the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the country.
Cockfight gambling poses problems for villagers

Kaowao, February 6, 2008

The cease-fire group Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) authorities have joined hands to open various gambling outfits to run for three months in Zar Tha Pyin village, Pa- An Township in Karen State.

According to the TPDC authorities, they plan to collect money from the community to repair the Zar Tha Pyin’s suspension bridge and collect tax from the gambling to support their businesses, said a source from the local community.

“It started last December with traditional games called in Burmese (Ah-Ni Thaung Wine) and the infamous blood sport cockfighting, in which villagers who enjoy this kind of gambling participate with many losing their money. But gambling also brings out thieves and robbers,” commented a villager from Za Tha Pyin.

Ordered by authorities to prepare the suspension bridge, village headman, U Tun Lwin, is cooperating with the DKBA and TPDC to get over a thousand million kyat from the villagers through gambling taxes to prepare the bridge. But according to a villager from this area they want the money for their own pockets.

A villager commented, “In our village we didn’t have robbers and thieves, but after gambling started every robber and thief from area decided to pay a visit.”

“A similar thing happened in another village, when the DKBA started a gambling den in Ein Du Town, Karen State. They also sold nicotine (pep pills) to obtain funds for the SPDC. However we haven’t seen this drug in the village yet,” said a youth leader from the Mon villager.
The cockfight, a traditional sport in many areas in Southeast Asia, is the main event. “It draws in nearly a hundred thousand million kyat and we hear the news that villagers are losing a hundred million kyat. Moreover each day people wage approximately 30 million to hundred million kyat. For every 100 million kyat bet DKBA will get 10 million kyat,” said an observer.

“If gambling continues for three months parents will be concerned that their children who will be exposed to bad habits and come and play, and parents will have problems stopping them,” said a villager.

************************************************

Mon solidarity called at MAU gathering

Kaowao: January 10, 2008

A group of Mon delegates have proposed a new mandate to strengthen solidarity among the Mons and urged all Mon to focus their struggle on building up local capacity to improve health, education and development, say observers close to Mon politicians.

Delegates from four regions met for three days in the Bleh Donpite village, an area controlled by the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and called on Mon communities worldwide to stand together to build solidarity.

According to Nai Layeh Rot, the main organizer of the Mon Affairs Union (MAU), the members discussed ways to improve leadership and assistance among the Mons, to develop political, economic, and social affairs and to build solidarity in achieving self-determination for the Mon people.

“The conference gathering has evolved and has improved quite a bit because of the appointment of members from different regions which will lead our cause”, said Liaison Officer of the NMSP, Nai Ong Mangae who spoke to a Kaowao reporter.
The 4th Mon National Conference, organized by the MAU, was held from 27-29 December 2007 in a New Mon State Party controlled area. The MAU is headed by a leading committee comprised of Ms. Sardar and her fellow delegates, Nai Damrong (Thai Mon leader), Nai Chan Toi (New Mon State Party) and Nai Suwanna.

The Mon conference was attended by 73 delegates including senior leaders of the NMSP, MUL, overseas participants from the USA, Australia and the Thai Mon community.

Some critics worry that the MAU may not be able to reach out to the international institutions like the previous umbrella organization, the MUL had done. The MUL had participated in a number of international conferences including the United Nations Working Groups on Indigenous Populations (UN-WGIP), UNPO and other important international gatherings.

The MAU is now selecting the 32 delegates from among the four regions, namely inside Burma, on the Thai-Burma border, liberated areas, and overseas. This leading team will meet in March 2008 for further discussion, formal planning and to focus on a common purpose.

******************************************************************************

Commentary

Mon National Day and our National Obligation

As the time nears to the 61st Mon National Day’s Celebration every Mon Community around the world is preparing for the great event.
This year according to the Lunar Calendar, Mon National Day would fall on 22nd February 2008. It is understandable at this moment that every Mon Community and Mon Organization be in full swing organizing invitations and presentations. Depending upon local circumstances in different cities around the world, some may celebrate this occasion before or after the actual date taking into account the weekend and people’s availability to attend.

It is hoped that all Mon People around the world will celebrate on the actual date to show our unity on this day. Nevertheless, if they celebrate this occasion on different dates there is only one common cause in our hearts and minds to win Freedom for our Mon Land.

When our homeland Ramanya Desa was occupied by Aung Zeya in 1757, who killed and displaced many thousands of our Mon people, our people became a minority in their own land and have been subjected to oppression ever since.

We lost our sovereignty and have been deprived of our fundamental rights. We have been brutally forced into assimilation and have fought to regain them ever since. It is our right to say that we wish to govern our own people according to laws agreed upon by the future government of Burma and so must guide our thinking toward this future. But I must emphasize without any hesitation that it is enshrined in law and international institutions for us to exercise our fundamental rights to govern our people in our own language, according to our traditions. This is why Mon National Day is important as it gives us an opportunity to reflect upon our achievements and strengthen our community endeavors.

We should not forget the fate of our Mon People in Monland who are under constant oppression imposed by the ruling Burmese military regime which is one of the cruelest in the world where there is absolutely no democratic freedoms. They must challenge the Military Regime and defy unlawful orders and the threats imposed upon them to celebrate the Mon National Day Ceremony with freedom.

We must not forget how brave they are in standing up against the military and not take for granted our right to exercise our freedoms living overseas.
I would like to describe the history of Mon National Day, why it exists and who organized the first event. Mon National Day came to life in 1948 under the direction of the United Mon Association.

In describing the United Mon Association, we must not over-look the role of Mon Pho Cho who was the founder. We need to go back to the period of the Mon National Movement in 1939 to enable us to understand clearly the present circumstances. Mon Pho Cho was then a member of All Ramanya Mon Association (ARMA) which was formed on 6th August 1939. ARMA was an organization involved in Literature, Culture, Religion, and Social activities. ARMA was not a political organization. In its regulation there was one paragraph under section (17) which strictly stated that its members refrain from any involvement in politics.

With a view to gain a political advantage for the Mon People, Mon Pho Cho wanted to join the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL), a political coalition of nationalities wanting independence from Britain, at the time the leading freedom movement in Burma.

At the time Mon Pho Cho urged his other Mon colleagues to join AFPFL as well. Both he and his colleagues had a view that it was very necessary for Mon Organizations to join AFPFL and to get involved in the Burmese freedom moment along with other nationalities in order to gain more support and more understanding from Burmese leaders as well as from other nationalities’ leaders for Mon self-determination State after independence from Britain.

But section (17) of ARMA’s Regulation became a barrier for some members to get involved in politics. According to this section (17) its members could only participate in the fields of Culture, Literature, Social, and Religious activities and affairs. Some young educated members of ARMA were not happy with that restriction and wanted to get involved in politics. They wanted to move away from that sort of old-fashioned thinking. Moreover, they realized that the objectives of ARMA alone were not enough for the Mon People to reach their goal and destination. They saw that the political circumstances demanded the participation of the Mon People to get more involved in the political arena in order to secure their political rights for the future. And so on the 9th of November 1945, Mon Pho Cho and his colleagues organized a meeting at Bahan Mon Monastery where they formed the United Mon Association.
At that meeting they also elected the Executive Committee of UMA as follow;

**Executive Committee**

Mon Pho Cho …….President
Mon Thant ………..Secretary
Nai Hla Kyaw……..Treasurer
Nai Ohm Pe………..Audit
Nai Tun Yin………..In-Charge of Information Section
Nai Chan Mon……..In-Charge of Information Section

**Committee Members**

Nai Maung Gyi
Nai San Nyunt
Nai Shwe Kyuin
Nai Ba Chit

At that time the UMA joined AFPFL and Mon Pho Cho and Mon Thant became a member of Presidium (Chairman Committee) of AFPFL.

By joining the AFPFL Mon Pho Cho and his colleagues dishonored the (17) section of regulation of All Ramanya Mon Association. The news of their involvement in politics
and becoming a member of Presidium Committee of AFPFL caused enormous repercussions among the members of ARMA.

At the ARMA’s meeting held at Ma Ha Chi Mon Monastery in March 1946 the members of ARMA seriously discussed this Section (17) whether it was still needed or whether it was to be entirely taken off. Mon Pho Cho, Mon Thant, Nai Tun Yin, and Nai Khin Maung (Ye) wanted it to be removed from the regulation of the association to pave the way for its members to become involved in National Politics. Other members of the association wanted this section to remain and did not want it to be eliminated.

There was a strong debate between pro and con of this section. But in the end according to a majority vote this section remained as before and its member could not take part in any political activities. If they wanted to take part in political activities, they must resign from the organization. According to my knowledge there was a government regulation at that time which strictly banned all government officials from being involved in politics.

In my view the government regulation was the main factor behind the decision not to have members involved in politics. As most of the members of ARMA were government officials it was obviously understandable that most wanted to keep this section (17) intact. Mon Pho Cho, Mon Thant, Nai Tun Yin (Kamawet), and Nai Khin Maung (Ye) had to resign from ARMA. Mon Pho Cho and his colleagues were now freed from any restrictions and could take part in National Politics more actively.

In 1946 UMA called a Conference at Pa-Nga Village, Kyaikami District where the following two important resolutions were passed, as follows:

(1) The 1st wane of Maik of lunar, the date of the founding of Hongsawatoi by Sammala and Vimala to mark as Mon National Day.

(2) In coming Constituent Assembly Election as AFPFL’s interim government allots exclusive Constituency to Shan and Kayin, it must collect separate Mon Electorate and to allot exclusive Constituency for Mon People. (If not to boycott the election)-- I am not sure what this means?
The following year in October 1947, UMA called a Conference at Kamawet Village, Moulmein District. At that Kamawet Conference, UMA confirmed the date of 1st wane of Maik to mark as Mon National Day. The following (3) resolutions were also passed at the conference:

(1) To urge AFPFL’s interim Government to form a meaningful Mon State with Self-Determination Rights immediately.

(2) To form Mon Youth Organization.

(3) To take the 1st wane of Maik the date of the founding of Hongsawatoi by Sammala and Vimala, to mark as Mon National Day.

On the eve of Burma’s Independence, the Mon National Movement, led by the two main large Mon organizations, Mon Affairs League and the United Mon Association, were now in a better position to represent more fully the aspirations of the Mon to press ahead for self-determination. Mon people from all walks of life became more involved in the National Movement and their voice for meaningful self-determination could be heard at last for the first time. The Mon learned to uphold democratic values and legal procedures in pursuing their goal. The AFPFL’s interim government was urged to recognize and accommodate our fundamental rights within an independent Burma and it was felt the Mon People would not rule out other possible means, including an armed struggle, if our rights were ignored.

On 3rd October, 1947 the Mon Affairs League (MAL) organized an enormous mass rally in Moulmein where more than 100,000 people took part and strongly pushed forward the idea for a Mon State based on self-determination. (By self-determination, I mean to be able to pursue our economic, social, educational and political rights in the 20th century.) At that meeting President of MAL, Nai Hla Maung, delivered a very remarkable speech and sent a strong message to the AFPFL’s interim Government to recognize the right of all the nationalities, including Mon State, to be major stakeholders in governing the new Burma.

All people at that mass rally strongly urged the AFPFL’s interim government to form Mon State. It was very obvious at the time that the people showed their commitment and were ready to use all means and resources including armed struggle in order to enable them to govern their own people with freedom.
The following year 1948 (1309) the leaders of UMA gathered at Kwan Wai Tut, Kowkamine, for their annual meeting. The Mon leaders decided to celebrate a Mon National Day to bring together people in a meaningful way based on our cultural heritage and our political aspirations as a people. According to the decision passed at Pa Nga’s meeting, on the 1st wane of Maik of Lunar for the first Mon National Day Ceremony which was celebrated at the cinema hall at Kwan Wai Tut. Many people took part and the large hall of cinema was overflowing with people who were happy about the future. According to the booklet written by Abbot Venerable Palita there were (7) leaders who organized the event at Kwan Wai Tut for the first time. They were as follows:

(1) Abbot Venerable Nai Kusala (Kwan Raik)

(2) Mon Pho Cho (President of UMA)

(3) Nai Pho Aung (Kwan Wai Tut)

(4) Nai Pho Sein (Kamawet)

(5) Nai Htaw Aa (Kamawet)

(6) Nai Chan Mon (Secretary of UMA) (Kamawet)

(7) Nai Pyaing (Kamawet)

Nai Htaw Aa (Kamawet) was the person who proposed the date of the 1st wane of Maik of Lunar to be marked as Mon National Day. In 1309(1948), after Mon National Day Ceremony which was held at Kwan Wai Tut, Mon leaders from United Mon Association and leaders from other various organizations gathered at Moulmein Sala, Rangoon south of Kyaik Da Gon again. At that meeting all leaders including Nai Hla Maung, president of Mon Affairs League, agreed to mark officially the 1st wane of Maik as Mon National Day.

Since then Mon National Day became a symbol of National Unity. On this National Day all Mon from all walks of life take assemble without distinction of any kind, such as organization, religion and region. They unite and struggle together for a common goal.
It is with great honor that I respectfully bow my head to all those who brought this Mon National Day into light. Above all we must remember the reasons why MND was formed and never lose sight of our goals and the objectives set forward for the first time by those great leaders.

The MND came to life during the Mon National Movement for Self-Determination that gathered momentum to ensure our rights as a people. It came about through a very difficult time in Burma’s history and we are proud to be part of it. So let me draw attention to the point that MND was brought into life along with our National Obligation:

‘To form a meaningful Mon State with Self-determination Rights’ based on equality, political, social, economic, and educational rights’.

I would like to emphasize that MND bears a National Obligation in itself for all Mon to carry this out: to unite and struggle together for ‘Freedom of Mon Land’.

Unity is victory!

Nai Pe Thein Zar

(Federal University)

******************************************************************************

They Are Not Dead Who Live in the Heart They Leave Behind

Padoh,
The news of your death shocks your Karen people, but also other ethnic nationalities and people in Burma and around the world. People are devastated from your death and cannot come to terms with it. The barbarians have unfairly taken your life. But they cannot take your soul. You are still among the Karen people that you love, you sacrificed for them and you dedicated your life to them.

I once read this poem, Padoh. It said, “For my people and my country, I will always do what I can. If you cut my right hand for helping my people, I will still do with my left hand. If you cut my left hand, I will make speeches for our people using my voice. If you cut my tongue, I will still serve my people with eye gestures and head. If you cut my head off, my soul will still be serving my people and my country.” That poem can apply to you, Padoh. I know that though the barbarians have forcefully taken your life, they cannot take your soul, your commitment remains with us, your sacrifice and your determination for your Karen people, for your beloved other ethnic nationalities and for all people in Burma. I salute you, Padoh.

“Right is Might” or “Might is Right” is controversial. But for you, me and all other people who love justice and are fighting for justice vividly know that “right is might.” We and all other people who love justice and fairness will prove that ‘right’ is for you Padoh. We will show those barbarians who took your life unfairly that your life was all about justice and fairness. All people that you love and have left behind will always condemn this act as unfair, uncivilized, and barbaric.

We know and they know that you had been sacrificing since 1966 for your people, not for your own sake. You have sacrificed for your Karen people, for all other ethnic nationalities and all the people in Burma. But there are differences in ideology and practice, which is understandable because we have different histories. However, these differences can be solved by negotiation and dialogue.

I am so shocked and saddened to hear the news of your death. Your sad news keeps me awake throughout the night. It also becomes a nightmare in my sleep. In these difficult times all people are committed to solve our country’s long-lasting crisis by meaningful dialogue and negotiation, the news of forcefully taking your life by those barbarians is very sad to us. Nevertheless, Padoh, we promise you that we will use the appropriate means to achieve your goals for your Karen people, for all other ethnic nationalities and for all people in Burma.
I salute you, Padoh.

May you rest in peace forever!

Siri Mon Chan

*************************************************

Special Lecture by a Burma Expert

Burma: Lessons from the Past, Problems in the Present, Thoughts about the Future

By    Dr. Josef Silverstein (Professor Emeritus, Rutgers University)

All Ethnic International Open University (AEIOU) in conjunction with Chiang Mai University presented this special lecture by one of our visiting faculty members, on 9th Feb. at UNISERVE, (Fai Kham Hall) Chiang Mai University, from 9 am to 12 noon.

BIO of the Speaker:

Professor Silverstein earned his BA with honors in Political Science and History at U.C.L.A. in 1952. In 1960, he was awarded Ph.D. in Government and Southeast Asian Studies at Cornell University.
In 1958, he began his teaching career as an instructor in Government at Wesleyan University in Connecticut; and in the next year, was promoted to Assistant Professor. In 1961, he accepted a Fulbright lectureship at the University of Mandalay. In 1964, he was appointed to the faculty at Rutgers University as an Associate Professor and promoted to a full Professor in 1967.

During his career at Rutgers, he served as a chairman of department and director of Asian Studies. In 1978, he was promoted to the rank of Professor II, and retired as Professor Emeritus in 1992. During his years at Rutgers, he took leave to accept a second Fulbright lectureship; this time at the University of Malaya, from 1967-68. In 1970, he took a two year leave to serve as a Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore.

Since his retirement from Rutgers, he had taught at the University of Pittsburgh in its Semester at Sea Program, once in 1994 and again in 1998. In the fall of 2002, he taught in the East Asian Studies Program at Princeton University. Throughout the past decade, he continued to serve as an occasional lecturer at the Foreign Services Institute, Department of State.

His publication record began in 1956 with an essay on the Burma election of that year, which appeared in Far Eastern Survey. He has published more than 50 scholarly articles and numerous essays which appeared in various newspapers and journals on issues of Burma.

Of the seven books and monographs he had written or edited, two reflect his central interest in Burmese politics; Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977, and Burmese Politics: The Dilemma of National Unity, New Brunswick, Rutgers University, 1980.

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE TALK:**

What I’m going to talk today is about the central political problem in Burma, for centuries, where it was, where things may be heading. Why did the previous constitutions fail in uniting the ethnic groups and the country? In 1960, several
assessments were made, and the Burmese University produced some of the leading world leaders in several subjects. What happened?

In World War II, Japanese liberated Burma from the British, and then the British liberated Burma from the Japanese. The country was in recovery, in many areas such as rice production. In 1960, Burma, for the first time, exported millions of tons of rice to the rest of the world—even 3 million tons at one time. How do we explain how things fell to the situation at this time of the day, as it is one of the greatest tragedies?

Now, we’ll go back to 1945, at the end of the war, and 1947, where there was a rapid move towards independence. The Burmese people know that they must recover from Independence, and they can no longer stay as a previous colonial state. The Burmese, under no condition, want to accept colonialism, and they want freedom and independence.

In 1936, there was a nationalist movement where a young man named Aung San, who was a student leader, joined Dr. Ba Maw and formed a united front. The country was not unified—at least 8 major ethnic groups were ruling their own territories. The British inherited this structure from the Burmese king, where several ethnic groups led their own areas on their own. The central political power was in the South, in the Irrawaddy valley, in Rangoon. This led to isolation of other ethnic groups in the rest of the country.

On the eve of the meeting between Aung San and Clement Atlee, they formed AFPFL—Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League. The key statement of AFPFL is: It is our policy, in regard to the frontier areas of the people (those outside of Rangoon), in our relation to the people of the frontier system, form a Federation of Burma to include and unite several people and bring them together for the first time. It is not the intention to impose anything that the ethnic groups do not want, but to give them the autonomy as they need. Their policy is to invite others to join them to this assembly, under mutual conditions, where the Burmans and the non-Burmans agree upon.

Aung San, a general at that time, was going to take off his uniform to become U Aung San, to become the leader of AFPFL. The area of concern was the concerns of the people of the frontier. The Hill People would be allowed to administer their own areas in any ways they please, without any imposition of policy from the Burmans. There will be equality and everyone will get their equal share of resources. There will be autonomy
based on the needs of the diverse groups. That was the bedrock of AFPFL, where between the two levels (the state and union governments), there will be interaction in Burmese and English, in learning about one another, slowly absorbing each others’ cultures; creating a multi-racial society.

In reality, AFPFL did not work. The reason this didn’t work was there wasn’t enough time for this idea to work out. In their meeting, Aung San and Atlee demanded independence within a year. The people in the frontier areas weren’t sure how they would work with the people in Rangoon. The Burmese Communist party, whose members were mostly Burmans, challenged this united front. It was a Socialist idea and Burma was to become a leftist country. Aung San himself was once a member of the communist party, but left the party, with the idea of AFPFL leading the country. Aung San removed Than Tun from the position of the secretary, and appointed John Yeng. This was a move towards the British way of Socialism instead of adopting the Soviet Socialism.

In 1948, three months after Burma achieved independence, civil war broke out. But where was the Burmese Army at this time? Admiral Mountbatten invited Aung San, Than Tun and others to see what kind of Independence the Burmese would want. They agreed to form a single army that includes all the people of Burma. By the end of 1948, Burma was deeply entrenched in war. It has been 60 years to date. Karen leader Bo Mya agreed a total cease fire with the Burma Army. They began by declaring end to fighting. The military rejected Bo Mya’s statement. Others, such as Shans, Chins, Kachins, Arakans all got problems as the military ceased to coerce them.

The constitution formed in Burma at that time, was the most controversial in the 1947 constitution. Even though it no longer exists as the doctrine, it continues to be in the discussion of the law of the country. It focuses on the right to succession, and the right of withdrawal of troops. What if we joined this union, and we don’t like it, so how do we get out of it? The issue was raised with Aung San at the very first meeting and discussion with the minorities at the Ping Long conference in the Shan State. The idea was, if the minorities are not happy with the AFPFL union, any ethnic group can get out. Aung San wants the right of succession to be guaranteed in the constitution. It was in the article 201 of the original constitution.

The idea was, if you have been a member for 10 years of the state of the union, and you are dissatisfied, you can withdraw from the agreement. The procedure to withdraw is not easy, but doable. It was necessary for the member of the group to make a petition to the
president that they wish to succeed. The president is obligated by law to hold an election, on the condition to vote, if others agree, they can withdraw. Drawbacks are, the constitution did not say what percent the majority would have to be. That information is missing. Instead of spelling out the percentage required to agree on succession, it simply states that the “majority” would have to agree on the succession.

The second flaw in the doctrine, as far as the people are concerned. When Aung San spoke of the right of succession, he had given a number of talks about what constitutes a member of a state, and what constitutes a state in itself. And he gave out 8 points that he took from Stalin’s ideas. First he said a state has to be large enough to be called a state. Not only it is a sizable population, it must also be economically viable. There must also be a community of people who are similar in language, culture and way of life. When he laid out his 8 principles, he said there are only 2 groups that qualify this standard: the Burmans and the Shans. These two groups have advanced economically and socially, that if they wanted to succeed, they could survive by themselves, if they were to lead.

When the constitution was written, there was a controversy: The document said that it is the basic right of the people that they have the right of succession, unequivocally. But there are states that would be denied of this right. First and foremost, the Karens have no right to succeed, but without any reason why it was stated as such. At that time, the Karens did not protest, as they were never interested to unite with other ethnic groups. They wanted a state of their own. The Kachins were also denied of that right. The Kachin state was artificially created. The historical area of Burma where the Kachins lived and in Ba Maw Northwest to that area, there were Burmans who aren’t Kachins, but were identified more with Western civilization. However, the people of Ba Maw were combined with Kachins to form the Kachin state. They said there must be a head of state who is a Kachin. Kachins and non-Kachins have lived together peacefully. The constitution said that the Kachin state would not have a right of succession. The Chins, on the other hand, do not have a state. They wanted to be a part of Burma proper, and they want their territory integrated with Burma itself. However, the constitution wanted the Chins to have their own state. So they are not eligible for a right of succession. The state most likely to succeed was the Shan state. Shans were much more politically mature. They have achieved a great deal of experience from 1922-1948, when the British let them govern their state and interact with Europeans successfully, so they were ready to govern their own state if they want to become independent.

The other state that was given its right to succeed was the Kayahs/Karennis who had a unique history. In the 1850s, there was unrest amongst the Karenni people, and King Min Don sent his army to the area and forced them to change some things. The Karenni appealed to the British to preserve their identity. The British made a treaty with King
Min Don, and they had their own identity. This was documented in the Etison-Etison (sp) treaty. They always argued that they were never under King Min Don, and they should be able to rule their own state. Aung San talked about it at 3 different times, and finally agreed that the Karenni people are free people and he invited them to join the union. They didn’t quite answer first, and at the last moment, their leaders agreed to join in the union. So, the Karenni, the only independent group, voluntarily agreed to join the union, and had the right to withdraw legally if they aren’t happy with the union.

This has been the most disturbing thing in the constitution, that right of succession after 10 years of forming the Union, will be in 1958. There was unrest in the Shan state, and the Shans had a slow movement to succession. There wasn’t a point where even a state that had a right to succeed could act, due to undefined majority vote for this to happen.

In 1958, the military became an outspoken critic of this right of the Karennis. General Ne Win and other officers think that they did not tolerate the idea of anyone leaving the constitution. They warned from the beginning that if the Shans might succeed, the military may violate the constitution. The constitution allowed people to voluntarily join or leave the union. The military, however, was created in 1945 with the help of the British, and it was integrated with half Burmans and half minorities. Between 1958 and 1962, there was rumblings from all sides, so U Nu, the Prime Minister, sought to resolve it in a peaceful and democratic way. He called a seminar and invited minority groups to come to Rangoon and at the Federal Seminar, work to come to an agreement. U Nu did not promise independence, but the goal was to hash out the problems and to come to a solution. Everyone came, and had an open and honest meeting. All delegates had an open meeting, but the press was barred from it, as they would not want the information to leak out before a resolution. There were honest discussions, and the Shans and other minorities spoke freely about their discontent.

All this came to an end in 1962, March 2nd, when there was a visiting a ballet team from China, and most people who are interested in culture, including General Ne Win were in attendance. People enjoyed the show and went home, and at night the army struck. General Ne Win called 600 troops from Meikhtila, and ordered a military coup to seize power, arrested all leaders of the government, and put an end to all the work done by the constitutional group. He didn’t trust the Rangoon cantonment, but ordered the troops from Meikhtila to help him with the coup. At that time, there were a few newspapers that reported the events. In the mean time, the government disappeared, the constitution disappeared, and General Ne Win had formed a revolutionary council to act for the government. General Ne Win began to issue decrees illegally, and the military has operated illegally until 1974, when the military government wrote a second constitution.
So the question of succession that hung like clouds over the society for 10 years finally disappeared in 1962, with democracy disappearing in Burma, and in its place you have military dictatorship. Ne Win changed the constitution by getting rid of it and formed a centralized government, or a unitary state. The center of the unitary state was a revolutionary council with 19 military officers and 1 civilian, and it took to itself the right to decree with the power of the law. There's nothing legal in what the military did, but that they held power through the use of the gun.

The 1962 coup was a clean coup, with just one person killed by accident, the son of Sao Shwe Thaik, the Shan who was the president of the Union of Burma. So there was no succession. In its place there was coup-de-tas, with the one party rule and military dictatorship. Sadly, for the Burmese, the military was incompetent in managing the economy of the country. Very quickly the economy, the quality of life, and the beginning of development came to an end. Rice business fell, and Burma went from a country exporting millions of tons of rice to a rice-deficit country.

In 1974, the military created a political party, very much different from AFPFL, but a party that gives Socialism to the Burmese: the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). General Ne Win led the party with his fellow military officers. They are incompetent in managing the economy. They set the price of rice without really knowing the cost to farmers. They force the price on the farmer, so farmers stop growing rice for selling, except for their own use. 40 years later, these incompetent military officers are still running the country. Socialist way is the state owns it, the state distributes it, and everyone will have to put up with it.

So in 1974, the BSPP attempted another constitution, which isn’t much different from the revolutionary council. All power still stays with the central government, and they created a hierarchy of committees. The socialist argument of democratic centralism that was widely used in Eastern Europe was implemented. Power, decisions, and leadership remained in the hands of the military, at the very top. They created 2 mass groups: workers and farmers. All people were categorized as belonging to such groups. There were mass meetings, thousands of people assembled, and nothing gets accomplished. The new Burma had 2 large parties, the workers’ party and the agriculturalists’ party. Obviously, it didn’t work. And Burma created the largest black market in the world. Burma's goods were sold across the frontiers. The frontier people became the gatekeepers, and they charge 5% to have the goods go across the border. With that money, they buy arms to fight against the military. There were new civil wars. They
controlled the border, and many ethnic groups revolt against the military. There were new civil wars.

Finally, in 1987, General Ne Win, not unlike the comic figure Rick Van Winkle, woke up after a long nap, seemed surprised, and was unable to understand why things are going so badly and Burma was falling so far behind. So, he blamed the black market, saying they are the ones with all the money. Overnight, he said certain units of money are no longer being accepted. They came up with new notes: 90 Kyat, 45 kyat, etc. Suddenly, the money belonging to the people is no longer worth any. The demonetization of the old notes left the citizens of Burma in extreme poverty.

This led to the first student revolt, as they no longer have money to spend—all their belongings were no longer valid. The military beat the students up, and in 1988, there was a dispute in a tea shop outside the Institute of Technology, and a student got killed. The army quickly came to seize the body of the student, but other students didn’t give up the body. The next day, the military cracks the students as they were crossing the famous white bridge next to Inya Lake, and many students died in this massacre. It marks the beginning of the students in revolt against the military. Later on, there was a large protest in downtown Rangoon, by the Sule pagoda. The students gathered and will not disperse. The military brought in black trucks and arrested the students to take them to jail. There weren’t enough room in jails to put them all in, and they left the students to suffocate and die in the trucks, due to the heat outside. About 45 students died in the heated trucks that day.

This started a nationwide march against the military, with people and government workers from all walks of life joining for a change. Even the air force personnel joined in the marches with the students, to bring back democracy in Burma. The military, on September 18th, attacked the students on the streets of Rangoon. For 3 days, they shot and killed anything that moved on the streets of Rangoon. There’s no accounting for all the people who died, as the dead bodies were took to the crematoria and the evidence destroyed. The families never saw their loved ones. That was the summer of 1988 when the military seized power completely.

General Saw Maung, the acting president at that time, promised an election. Everyone believed him. About 233 parties were formed from all walks of life. There was a hidden party called “National Unity Party”, morphed from members of BSPP. There was also a new party that emerges, the party of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy (NLD). She wasn’t widely known, but stepped forward in Shwedagon
Pagoda march, where she stepped forward and talked about how she wanted democracy for Burma that her father dreamt of. She began to be the leader of the people, and it became apparent that the majority of the people of Burma want her to guide them in democratizing the country.

However, the military made certain that she cannot lead the party, as she’s married to a European, so she wasn’t allowed to stand for election. She was, however, clearly the speaker of the people. The people believe in her and trust her, and it became evident that there clearly were just 2 parties competing in the national elections, the NLD and the NUP. But the military tried to prevent her party from winning. At the general elections, NLD won a landslide victory, stunning NUP and the military backing that party.

In 1960, after the 3rd elections, and U Nu had resumed the role of the Prime Minister, he was going to leave the position and there began a contest on who will succeed him. The possible successors were more interested in their futures than the country’s future. U Nu stepped aside from the role of the prime minister and called on Ne Win to take that role. Ne Win accepted this position. Some believed that this was a plot behind Ne Win and U Nu. General Ne Win, according to the constitution, cannot be a Prime Minister, as he wasn’t elected. However, there was a clause that said it is possible for anyone who has served in the government to hold the office without elections, but only for 6 months. Ne Win and U Nu used that article to elect him. Ne Win gave a moving speech as a Prime Minister at that time, as to how he planned to serve the country.

However, after 2 months of becoming the Prime Minister, he went to the parliament to amend the constitution, so that he can serve indefinitely, beyond the 6 months that he was legally allowed to. As soon as he took the office, this law disappeared. Parliament, listening to their Prime Minister, changed the law, saying that as long as he remained the Prime Minister, he can stay in this position indefinitely. Basically, he changed the law with the gun, not legally. When he finished his term as a Prime Minister, and allowed the 3rd election to be held, when U Nu came back, there was no way to remove Ne Win from the position.

So the point I’m making in all of this is, history is crucial and important. Things do not happen by accident, they happen over time. One has to study and understand history, and we need to question why things happened the way they happened? Could they happen again? Is there a way out?
The democratic forces in Burma today stand ready to write a democratic constitution. The military, on the other hand has determined that they shall not allow that to happen. The military wants to perpetuate in the new constitution they want to write. This constitution is to secure their power, and Burma, as we all know, will go backwards.

The final question is: If this government is so bad, why do other governments all seek to favor from this? The answer is: Burma is rich of natural resources. In a time when there’s energy crisis in the world, we have China, India, Russia, all wanting the natural gases and energy resources from Burma. Look at India! It was the only country to support the students in 1988, and not recognizing the Saw Maung government. That was when Rajiv Gandhi was the PM. When Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated, the new leadership in India changed their policy to support the current Burmese military, as they all want a hand in the pot.

So, don’t measure the security, the strength, the intelligence, by how the outside world looks. Ask yourselves the question: What is the world getting out of this by catering to the most cruel and incompetent government in existence in the world today? Thank you!

(Recorded by Mona T Han)
ABOUT US

Kaowao Newsgroup is committed to social justice, peace, and democracy in Burma. We hope to be able to provide more of an in-depth analysis that will help to promote lasting peace and change within Burma. Editors, reporters, writers, and overseas volunteers are dedicated members of the Mon activist community based in Thailand.

*Our motto is working together for change and lasting peace.*