

BURMA

Breaking Up the Party

Leading dissident Aung Gyi built his reputation on letters. Earlier this year, he wrote a widely circulated series of missives to Ne Win which were highly critical of the strongman's régime. They helped galvanise the Burmese opposition and propelled Aung Gyi, a retired brigadier-general, to the chairmanship of the National League for Democracy, the country's top opposition group. Aung Gyi is back to writing again. But this time, one of his letters has sparked a deep rift in the NLD. Delivered to party general secretary Aung San Suu Kyi on Nov. 25, Aung Gyi's letter decried the presence of eight alleged communists in her faction of the NLD. They were engaging, he wrote, in "activities damaging to the League." He demanded their expulsion.

Aung San Suu Kyi refused. The third partner in the NLD leadership, Gen. Tin U, said nothing. That prompted Aung Gyi to hive his faction out of the NLD and apply to the election commission for registration of his own Union National Democracy Party. The NLD expelled Aung Gyi on Dec. 3, confirming a split that could reduce its membership by as much as a third. Analysts say the break-up had been looming for some time. Although united in their op-



Aung San Suu Kyi; Aung Gyi: A house divided

Photos: Dominic Faulder—Bureau Bangkok

position to Burma's military régime, Aung Gyi and Aung San Suu Kyi are ideologically opposed. Aung Gyi's long military career under Ne Win was fuelled by fervent anti-communism, while Aung San Suu Kyi's liberalism has been criticised by party conservatives. Personal differences exacerbated the problem. "It was hard to see Aung Gyi as a coalition leader," said one Western diplomat in Rangoon. "He always saw himself as the top figure of the opposition." His departure might not faze Aung San Suu Kyi. Observers expect her to firm her grip on the NLD, capitalising on her popularity.

Aung Gyi's UNDP adds one more set of initials to a roster of new political parties

U Nu as coalition leader.

The opposition disarray brings comfort to the Saw Maung government, which has yet to announce a date for promised elections. Many now doubt elections will take place until the régime is sure of retaining power. Towards that end, the government continues to introduce some economic reforms, including allowing advertising on state-run media for the first time in 26 years. Last week television viewers were bemused by a dozen ten-second advertising spots, including one in which a local pop singer touted a certain herbal remedy as "the cure for cancer." But even that potent potion may not be enough of a panacea for Burma's divided opposition. ■

that continues to burgeon. The tally on Dec. 3 stood at 157. In efforts to reduce the unwieldy numbers, coalitions are being actively sought. Even as the NLD was splitting apart, nineteen other parties were forming themselves into the Coalition League for Democratic Multi-Party Unity. More than 40 others are reported to be negotiating with the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League. The AFPFL favours former premier

Shanghai, China

Forgiveness in Malaysia

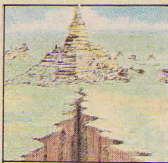
Thank you for the interview with Prime Minister Mahathir [INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, November 11]. In Islam there is no personal vendetta. Offering Musa Hitam and Tengku Razaleigh cabinet posts without portfolio was Koranic wisdom as practised by the Fourth Caliph, Saydina Ali bin Abu Talib, some fourteen centuries ago: "If you do good openly or in secret, or forgive those that wrong you, then surely Allah is forgiving and all-powerful" (Sura IV:149).

In one of many battles, Ali stood up and to his enemy's surprise did not kill him but let him go. Asked why, he replied that "when you spat on my face I was very angry because I felt undignified. If I kill you it is my personal vendetta, not Allah's." In another encounter, at Uhud, he released his assailant Amr bin Ash.

I recall that when a U.S. senator was asked to explain the difference between tragedy and disaster he replied that it was very difficult to do so but would try to give an illustration. "If your political opponent falls in the drain it's a tragedy," he said. "But to rescue him is a disaster." Exactly: Razaleigh rescued Musa and now, to his dismay, businessmen and financial associates have changed horses in mid-stream. While UMNO is united, his

Gland, Switzerland

Voices of Burma



Re "Burma Rising" [ALMANAC, December 2]: The excellent letters you have published are very enlightening. Many thanks to Sai Myo Win of Germany, Mimi Myint-Hpu of the United States of America, Harn Yawngwe of Canada and Tin Aung Gyi of Australia for the good opinions they expressed.

Like all the Anglos, H.K.M. Tin of Australia [ALMANAC, October 28] will melt his prejudice in the melting pot of Australia — from which, it is hoped, a better breed of mankind will emerge in coming generations.

ABEL TWEED

Foreign Department

Karenni Provisional Government

Mae Hong Song, Thailand

When Lawyers Are Editors

As a Sri Lankan I am disappointed to note the magazine's October 28 issue was "censored" in Sri Lanka [ALMANAC, November 25]. It is understood that distribution of *Asiaweek* was prevented on the advice of Prime Minister Premadasa's lawyers. Is this "censorship" a warning to toe the government line? And is this the type of

they can't afford it "they should get out." They can agree with Senator Juan Enrile that money seemed the Aquino government's only concern. The friendship may have been irreversibly damaged. Under President Bush the Democrat-controlled U.S. Congress may have second thoughts about voting the appropriations. It may even insist on treaty ratification.

Senator Wigberto Tañada is wrong to insist there will be no treaty extension beyond 1991. Who will provide the money for defence? Filipino taxpayers? There is no way people here could or would shoulder that burden. Tañada and his friends are always very careful never to mention the cost. The navy is pathetically under-manned and under-equipped, trying to patrol more than 7,000 islands. If the Tagalogs, who control the Manila government, can't protect Mindanao, the Cebuano-speaking majority in Mindanao and the Visayas may well form a separate republic and offer the Americans several excellent properties for military bases.

The Filipinos are a proud and independent people who want to stand on their own feet. They can do this with continued American friendship and a realistic view of their own capability. Otherwise an exasperated U.S. and its allies will refuse to pour more money into a seemingly bottomless pit.

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