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## **BURMA TRANSITION: WRONG WAYS AND BAD EXAMPLES**

In December 1993, the SLORC leaders paid visit to Indonesia, reportedly to gain a first-hand impression of the Indonesia's so called "dual function" role for the army. After 3 years of failed trials to introduce such role for the army on its constitution making efforts, the SLORC recently turned to the Philippines for advice on "how a transition from dictatorship to democracy may be made".

While it may be helpful to look for some examples, these both cases do not necessarily give a suitable model for Burma. The Indonesia's "dual function" role for army has, undoubtedly, some elements of political liberalization that seem to accommodate people's views. However, today's Burmese population require much more political liberalization than the Indonesian model can provide. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that even the SLORC sponsored convention has failed to endorse the "leading role for military" in future Burma's politics.

In the Philippines, people's power revolution had brought down the government and given ways to democracy. Though the final result may be desirable, it is not always have to have a popular revolution of the sort to change a government. Certainly, there are much more suitable models that can be found for Burma's transitions.

A notable difference to above two examples to Burma situation is that in Burma we have the elected representatives that recognized by United Nations as legitimate leaders of Burma. It is therefore advantageous to build a transitional model that is inclusive of these elected leaders.

One possible option for the transition period is the South African model. A transitional administration, known as Government of National Unity, was formed to function with white minority government and majority black leaders led by Nelson Mandela.

South Africa in December 1991, a forum known as CODESA - Convension for a Democratic South Africa - was convened. The white minority government, political parties including the main opposition organization, the African National Congress, laid out the foundation for future Democratic South Africa. The outside observers, such as the United Nations, European Community and Organization of African Unity, were also present at the CODESA. One notable fact about CODESA is that the South African people and organizations by themselves have sorted out the political differences at the convention. The United Nations, etc, play their role strictly as outside observers. It did not take extra-ordinarily long time to complete convention: on early February-93 a transitional arrangement - the Government of National Unity - was agreed upon and the South Africa's first multi-party, non-racial election date was announced on June-93.

In the case of Burma, a significant difference to above case will be the election of 27-May-1990. The result of the 1990-Election must be fully respected, or at least being incorporated, in the future transitional arrangements.

### **CHILDISH EXCUSES**

It helps nobody in making such childish excuses as "SLORC have been making dialogue since 1993": it may only irritate the public. The SLORC leaders - and its propoganda - favourite choice, "BURMA AS BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA" also seem to be an irrelevant example. One notable difference between the Bosnia and Burmese population is that in Burma we do not have the same kind of "ethnic hatred" that may generate such conflict. To day, the continuing ethnic conflicts in Burma are result of political inequality between Burman and ethnic minorities. Burma's ethnic rebels, exception to drug lords, cannot mount armed conflict to the level of regional destabilization. Most importantly, the political agenda as well as the focus for the Burma's ethnic rebel are much clear: everybody wants a genuine federal union; and all for the support of Aung San Suu Kyi and building Burma's democracy. It therefore that, if Burma been unfortunately destabilized, the trend is not going towards to that of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The danger that present to Burma came from and within the army. The closer international examples are those of Somalia or Liberia. In Somalia, the central administration breakdown in January 1991; dozens of warlords sprung up and fight for territory. In Liberia, the dictator Samuel Doe regime was successfully ousted by the rebel National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in 1989. Although the Doe regime had collapsed under attack, the NPFL was unable

to consolidate power and half a dozen armed factions emerged. The senseless fightings continues until today. As we read recent Karen Human Rights Groups reports and seeing the behaviour of the Burmese soldiers, it make much more sense of these dangers.

The Liberia example give us the need for Burma democrats to build the democratic institutions and to consolidate even before any transfer of power can take place.

### **DIALOGUE IS ONLY SOLUTION**

Contrary to what was said in public media about the stability of SLORC, the weakness of SLORC can be seen simply by looking at their Cabinet. The 60 member Cabinet(36 Ministers + 24 Deputies) is as a result of insecurity of SLORC leaders. The SLORC leadership do not dare to dismiss or demote anyone of its Cabinet members: an open dissension by one member may have domino effects. Over the years, the regional military commanders who became powerful also had to be "kicked up-stairs" and be given Minister posts in order to neutralize the threat to central administration.

SLORC refusing to talk to opposition NLD is not only posing danger to itself, but also to the entire Burma's population and the region. Recent initiative to include Burma into ARF is not providing legitimacy to SLORC, but it should be interpreted as the ARF's recognition of the situation in Burma as potential threat to the region. SLORC leaders must fully understand this fact and co-operate with international community in solving the problems. -- U Ne Oo.

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### **ASIA: MILITARY REGIME HOLDS FIRST REGULAR NEWS CONFERENCE BURMA**

*RANGOON, Aug 1 AP - In the first of a promised series of monthly news conferences, the military government told reporters today that pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party would not be allowed to help write a new constitution.*

*The National League for Democracy led by Suu Kyi walked out of a convention to write a new constitution last November, claiming it was stacked in favour of the government. Officials said today that convention rules would not allow the party to return.*

*Asked when the regime might open a dialogue with Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw indicated that no talks were imminent. Suu Kyi has sought a dialogue since she was freed in July 1995 from six years of house arrest.*

*"Dialogue began in 1993 at the National Convention," Ohn Gyaw Gyaw said. "The NLD boycotted the National Convention of their own will."*

*Ohn Gyaw was one of several officials from the State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SLORC, to attend the first monthly briefing promised by authorities at the urging of local reporters for foreign news organisations. They should be held the first of every month.*

*The meetings reflect the government's apparent desire to improve its image after international criticism greeted a harsh crackdown of Suu Kyi's followers in May. But the regime may also feel more confident since last month's induction of Burma - also called Myanmar - as an observer to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, a coup in the junta's quest for legitimacy.*

*Information Minister Lieutenant General Aye Kyaw, who presided at the news conference, told reporters the meetings with the media would set the record straight, accusing the Western press of "wrong, incomplete and inaccurate reports about Myanmar."*

*Asked why no Western journalists were present, a senior military officer, Colonel Thein Shwe, replied that notice had been short but that the news conference was not limited to non-Western reporters.*

*"It is open to all journalists and I hope to see more foreign journalists at the next news conference," Thein Shwe said.*

*The last news conference held by SLORC officials was May 23, at the height of a roundup of hundreds of Suu Kyi's supporters to stop a conference marking the sixth anniversary of parliamentary elections that pro-democracy candidates overwhelmingly won. The SLORC never honoured the result.*

*The SLORC succeeded an earlier military regime in 1988, putting down street protests that saw Suu Kyi, daughter of independence hero Aung San, emerge as the country's leading democracy advocate.*

*The regime held weekly news conferences after the takeover, but their frequency became fewer and fewer. Since the end*

of 1990, the press was summoned only occasionally for briefings.

Aye Kyaw met with Burma's foreign correspondents club July 11 and complained about "some negative reports." Journalists replied that their job would be eased if the government would hold regular briefings.

Today's meeting was held at the headquarters of state radio and television before 17 Burmese citizens who work for foreign news outlets, a Chinese and some Japanese journalists, and press attaches from various embassies, including the United States, Britain and France. AP jv

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