

BURMA: A PLAN FOR FREEDOM

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This is a big year in Burma, with a supposedly democratic election coming at its end. But, there is so much happening already, including open warfare in the country's northeast; a failed nationwide ceasefire negotiation; student protests; villager and worker protests; and re-energized repression by the military dictatorship including extensive crimes against humanity. What is one to make of it all; and, how can any election be held, much less a vote that is free and fair?

The confusion and chaos in Burma is easy to grasp if you begin at the beginning, with the dictatorship itself. The ruling generals, in uniforms or civilian clothes - it makes no difference, have precise goals, and if you start with these everything else falls into place. Their first goal is simply to stay in power. Related to this, their second goal is never to be tried for their many, many crimes, nor to lose the wealth of the nation that they have already stolen. Instead, they want to retain the ability to steal even more, on an unprecedented scale, actually, in league with unethical international corporations.

Documented evidence of the first goal, which is of course also self-evident from a thousand different regime actions, was provided in February 2014 by Shwe Mann, former number three in the dictatorship when it called itself the SPDC, and now Speaker of the Union Assembly. As reported at the time in the publication *Eleven*, he stated at a public meeting, "*The previous military regime could only transfer power to the new government after it made sure that the one-sided constitution guaranteed their life security,*" and "*No one would dare transfer his or her power to others unless life and property could be kept safe and sound.*"

Fears of the military dictatorship

Of course, just saying something - including writing a Constitution that enshrines it into law, is no guarantee that it will happen. Even with its massive power the dictatorship is still prey to the same forces that are able to overcome dictatorships everywhere, and not only political. Specifically, Burma's generals are afraid of the people of the country, meaning a popular uprising; military defeat at the hands of the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs); and severe pressure if not military intervention from the International Community.

For the first, documented evidence of this is also available, this time from *Irrawaddy*, again in February 2014, in the form of a secret order from President Thein Sein (aka Lieutenant General), which - as *Irrawaddy* phrased it - commanded his "*ministries to prepare for riots.*" While the directive clearly applied to the at the time upcoming national census, whatever plans that were prepared are undoubtedly still in place.

Regime tactics against an uprising

The dictatorship is using a number of tactics to prevent a widespread uprising. The most important of these is a strict law that bans unapproved gatherings, with - if such gatherings are held - arrest and imprisonment of the leaders and protestors. It is through the application of this tactic that the population of political prisoners is once again on the rise. However, the genie is out of the bottle, and more and more protests are being held across the country. It seems clear that the dictatorship is unwilling to renew mass oppression for fear of igniting overwhelming and coordinated public outrage. This is a critical point - even with the regime's extensive security apparatus, the real balance of power in Burma is shifting to the people.

In the face of this, which the generals recognize only too clearly, they are implementing a second tactic to divide the public, which they have already successfully applied to the EAOs. They are splitting the general public of Burma, by separating the Rohingya Muslims - and all Muslims in general - and defining them as a people to be reviled and persecuted. This has the effect of redirecting public anger about themselves to a small and easily-targeted group.

This has been accomplished (1) through State-level policy, including the denial of citizenship, the right to vote, and now even the right to have children (through the Population Control Bill); and (2) through direct repression using regime security agents and allied general population racists. Most of these racists are actually Buddhists, an amazing pattern of behavior given the well-recognized precepts of the religion, but perhaps not so surprising when one considers that the racism is itself encouraged by Buddhist monks and leaders, all the way up to the country's Sangha. This in turn is merely a new manifestation of Burma's senior Buddhist clergy's long established pattern of backing the ruling generals.

Finally, in what can only be termed a serendipitous development for the regime that I imagine has shocked even Senior General Than Shwe, the generals have the support of "pro-democracy" leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Operating as the effective dictator of the NLD, she has been firm in her opposition to all protests, and through her silence and inaction she has supported the repression of the Rohingya people as well. For the former, she has expelled young and energetic voices from the NLD, more recently a senior officer who sided with student protestors, and just this week apologized for a play put on by a local NLD office that reenacted Burma Army atrocities. It is still baffling that she would so willingly speak in favor of the generals, and ignore their daily crimes. Her lust for power (or her inability to acknowledge a mistake) is apparently without limit.

Controlling the ethnic armed organizations

For the second fear, the pro-democracy armies of the ethnic nationality peoples, the main tactic as always - and which I referred to above - has been divide and conquer. In practice, this is simply the favoring of some groups over others. Different groups, or more specifically their

leaders, are given direct financial and also business deal inducements, and allowed to function as local warlords. In the 1990s, this pattern extended to the groups that arose out of the collapse of the Burma Communist Party, among them the KIO and UWSA. The Kachin leaders were allowed a free hand at resource exploitation, including jade and timber, in league with local regime officers and Chinese partners, while the Wa enjoyed the same approach, this time with narcotics. These deals in turn freed up military resources which were directed against southern EAOs, notably the KNU and the KNPP.

The regime, however, and even with a ceasefire in place, attacked the KIO in June 2011 when it refused to reorganize as a Border Guard Force under Burman officer command. This meant that for a time the Burma Army faced determined opposition both in the north and the south. The result was a massive increase in regime casualties, including thousands of its soldiers killed in the following year. Troop moral reached an all time low - local commanders begged the EAOs not to attack them, and a coup at the top of the dictatorship became a distinct possibility.

Facing this risk the top generals reinvigorated their approach, this time targeting the southern groups. In this effort they further secured as allies - this will be reviewed in the next section, Germany, Norway and Sweden, with their assistance channeled through Shan collaborator Harn Yawngwe's Euro-Burma Office. Through a concerted effort, and with disgruntled former Karen leader Htoo Htoo Lay as co-conspirator, they were able to convince the KNU - under its fraudulently elected leadership, to abandon the Karen people's 65 year old Revolution, and they also appear to have recruited the leadership of the Shan State Army-South as well.

Still, this left most of the EAOs in active opposition, so more divide and conquer was required. The dictatorship's ultimate goal, of course, is to get the EAOs to surrender, or at least to agree to an event that can be portrayed as a surrender. To this end, the dictatorship together with Harn and a number of diplomatic and NGO carpetbaggers and peace prostitutes began to push for a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. No matter the conditions on the ground, an NCA could be used to get the EAOs to stop fighting for their people, and open the door to large-scale development.

The problem was that the EAOs formed an alliance, the UNFC, which though containing some members that seemed susceptible to regime lies, if not actual allies (DKBA, Karen Peace Council), had firm top leadership and policy. The UNFC would not abandon the goals of real peace for the ethnic nationality peoples, and their right to self-determination through a truly democratic and federal form of governance.

The dictatorship and its backers quickly recognized the key weakness of the UNFC, which was money - its limited funding. Through the efforts of Harn, a separate unit - the NCCT - was set up, which would have sole - at least initially - negotiation responsibility, and which would be well funded. Harn then attempted to take control of the NCCT, using his power of the European purse, but he has never been able to accomplish it. The KNU even abandoned the UNFC, to eliminate strong Karen leadership from the organization, while at the same time appointing a Karen traitor

to the NCCT. Still, the UNFC - and the NCCT overall - has held firm, and no surrender, meaning a defective NCA, has been signed.

Finally, to get some sort of victory the dictatorship pressured the EAOs to agree to a bland “promise” - a Deed of Commitment - to sign an NCA in the future. But the UNFC, anticipating this, instead proposed a clear and firm pledge to implement federalism, which the dictatorship - its supposed acceptance of a federal system notwithstanding - refused to sign. The UNFC language which the generals rejected is as follows:

“The two parties agree to establish a genuine federal union based on national states having full guarantee for democracy, national equality and self-determination rights. In accordance with the said agreement, the two parties firmly vow to endeavor and continue to realize the nationwide ceasefire agreement.”

Instead, a ludicrous signing of the dictatorship’s Deed of Commitment was held, on Burma’s Union Day. While there were supposedly four EAO signatories, two - the DKBA and the Karen Peace Council, as they have been allies of the Burma Army for years - don’t count. They shouldn’t even be in the NCCT. This leaves General Mutu of the KNU, and General Yawd Serk of the SSA-S. Mutu is clearly corrupt, and will no doubt benefit handsomely now that the huge Dawei deep water port and industrial development project, which will be a disaster for local villagers and the natural environment, is proceeding. It is difficult to see what Yawd Serk had to gain, though. Perhaps he was ordered to sign by Thailand, to keep his supply lines unhindered.

In any case, the Deed of Commitment was a charade. This time the regime’s divide and conquer failed. Therefore, the renewed offensives in the north are not surprising. Indeed, more should be expected. The generals, like spoiled children, didn’t get their way, and now they are lashing out.

Of note, the aggressor Burma Army is beginning to present itself as the victim in media propaganda. The generals have begun to openly agitate to get the country’s Burman population to hate all its other groups, just as they themselves do. This is an incredibly dangerous tactic - and also a sign of desperation. It has the potential to fatally undermine the nation’s cohesiveness. At present the ethnic nationalities would like their homelands to remain part of a unified, federal Burma. If they ever become the victims, as Muslims now experience, of widespread and overt racism and abuse, they may come to see a separate identity as their only possible peaceful future. This in turn would follow the precedent set in Yugoslavia, the repressive and racist European dictatorship that was ultimately split into six distinct and now peaceful countries. It’s not the best outcome for Burma, by any means, but it’s not impossible, either.

Legitimization of the dictatorship by Barack Obama

The final risk for the country’s dictatorship was the possibility of a military intervention by Western countries, as occurred for example in Libya. Indeed, this was probably Than Shwe’s greatest fear, and it lay behind his nuclear and ballistic missile cooperation with North Korea,

China and Russia, and which cooperation is unquestionably still ongoing. (The programs have been mentioned repeatedly in U.S. announcements, both from the Administration and Congress, who clearly have access to credible intelligence sources.)

Burma, though, at least formerly, following its takeover by Ne Win, had constant support from the West, as a bulwark against communist China. This support never wavered, even in the face of his countless crimes, until the 8888 massacre and the subsequent regime rejection of the 1990 election. Even Western geopolitical cynicism couldn't stomach that.

It's worth noting that Than Shwe's paranoia since then has actually been unfounded. Even though a number of U.S. Presidents spoke strongly about Burma, and imposed a few sanctions, there was never any chance that this would extend to military force. The United States has never had the goal of democracy - a successful democratic transition - as its policy objective for Burma.

Therefore, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, when they implemented the "policy shift," were really only acknowledging publicly what was actually a long-standing U.S. position. It was nonetheless a terrible decision, since the dictatorship seized upon it to embark on renewed repression and crimes against humanity.

Burma was touted as Barack Obama's one unequivocal foreign policy success, at least in the first two years immediately following the shift. Now that the Burma Army has re-energized its colonial war of aggression against the ethnic nationalities, and initiated a coordinated, slow-burning genocide against the Rohingya people, both of which the intelligence analysts who brief Obama understand only too clearly, the Administration is no longer so anxious to take credit.

As for Europe, what can you say? The E.U., following the continent's long and self-generated history of horrific wars, and which spread around the world, is now determinedly pacifist. It won't even act decisively to help its neighbor Ukraine, in the face of conquest by Russia's new Stalin, Vladimir Putin. Europe, certainly Northern Europe, is for business not human rights, and this has infected its Burma policy for decades. Following 1990, E.U. policy was set by the French oil company Total, just as U.S. policy followed the wishes of Unocal - now Chevron. Europe wasn't even willing to impose real economic sanctions, and now European businesses are leading the corporate pillage of the country. It's therefore not surprising that European policy foundations, including through NGOs like EBO and MPC, have fulfilled the parallel role of attempting to organize the surrender-ceasefire that the commercial exploitation requires.

What is most despicable about Europe's policy, though, is that within its own borders it is the most advanced region on earth. The natural environment, worker's rights, and women's rights are diligently protected. But for its economic colonies, such concerns are abandoned. One can conclude that Europe, through its commercial imperialism, is no less racist than Germany was under Hitler. They really haven't learned anything at all.

Returning to the fears of Burma's generals, we can see that their worry about the West is no longer justified, if - as I have demonstrated - it ever really was. But, the fears of unrest, and of combat with pro-democracy rebels, are certainly real. Burma Army soldiers are dying in conflict, and thousands of people are taking to the streets. We - everyone who is truly a supporter of freedom for Burma - should do everything we can to see that the dictatorship's fears are fulfilled!

Encouraging unrest

In writing about last year's pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong, I noted that a successful uprising requires three factors: fierce leaders, a growing population of protestors, and international backing. Hong Kong had fierce leaders, among the students that were involved, but affiliated protest groups were led by weak individuals. Even more importantly, while the demonstrators quickly jumped to hundreds of thousands, they did not continue to rise. The number plateaued and it was at this point that the Communist Party counterattacked, using agent provocateurs. Thirdly, the Hong Kong protestors had no international support. The U.S. and the West, fearful of angering the CCP, were silent.

This pattern matched Burma's 2007 Saffron Uprising. In this case the initial leaders, 88 Generation students and younger NLD members, were fierce. They were quickly arrested, though, at which point undoubtedly brave but somewhat less fierce groups of monks took over. Most importantly, the numbers in the streets also plateaued, at about one hundred thousand in a number of cities. Everyone else in the country just watched. Finally, the West offered only condemnation, on the first crackdown on the students and on the second on the monks, but no real support.

A related factor was the set of grievances driving the protests. The Hong Kong protests were pro-democracy - they had a democratic goal, that of ensuring a fair and open election in 2017. However, the Burma demonstrations were not. The initial street marches by 88 Generation were about a sharp rise in energy prices, and the monks decided to join to protest regime assaults on their own brothers, the monks of Pakokku. The Saffron Uprising was never really about freedom and democracy, and this was perhaps the main reason why more - many more - people were not persuaded to join.

Returning to China, I've mentioned in other writings that the CCP now allows protests around the country over particular issues, such as corruption and environmental crimes. Protests happen in China now all the time. However, demonstrations based on a call for democracy are banned. It is easy to see why. The CCP allows the smaller, issue-specific protests to act as a release valve on public pressure. Anything that would actually unite and grow public outrage is forbidden, and reacted immediately to with arrests.

Burma is in an identical position at the moment, with protests about education, land thefts, working conditions, environmental issues, etc. Just as Burma's EAOs need to unify behind the common goal of freeing their homelands from the invading Burma Army, so too the general

public needs to unite around a call for real democracy - as in Hong Kong, and not just local issues. This is the only way to organize the public successfully and to generate so much pressure that the goal is achieved.

A further critical issue, and which I have also noted about Hong Kong, is that responsibility for increasing the protest size needs to be a clear and delegated objective by its leaders. The top leaders will be busy speaking and organizing and participating in marches and meetings (and getting arrested). Teams from their respective groups should be assigned direct responsibility (before the arrests!) to get as many members of the public to join the protests as possible, day after day and week after week, including through social media and neighborhood canvassing. The essential truth of a popular uprising is that the pressure - the number of protestors - has to grow until it reaches the dictatorship's breaking point. Anything less, as in Hong Kong and with Burma's Saffron, will fail.

Barriers and triggers

There are other challenges that the protest organizers must deal with as they strive to create a massive rally cry around national freedom and democracy, and not only more parochial issues. First, and as I just mentioned, the dictatorship will crack down on the leaders, with arrest and imprisonment, which in Burma is already happening. There needs to be a plan in place for this contingency, so the demonstration doesn't stall. Secondly, the movement must counter regime propaganda. The biggest regime lie is that its reform is real and that everyone should simply wait. People need to be angry to be motivated to take to the streets, and the dictatorship is basically saying, over and over again: "Everything's OK, don't worry, and don't get upset." This is its most powerful strategy, and its effectiveness has been magnified by the fact that Suu Kyi is promoting the exact same message. She has said that democracy will take a very long time to be achieved, and that the people should not rise up; instead, everyone should just follow the rules - the dictatorship's rules, and be patient. Through doing this, she has become the generals' most influential propaganda organ.

Fortunately, the public has begun to reject Suu Kyi. People saw her failure at the Letpadaung copper mine. More and more villagers and townspeople are protesting around the country, regardless of her calls to cease and desist.

Even more advantageous is that there are a series of events planned for this year, which will provide rallying triggers, and which the dictatorship will find difficult to control.

The first of these is in fact already underway: the student protests for education reform. It is clear in the negotiations that have taken place that the regime has been lying to the students and does not accept the idea of such reform at all. The students should therefore continue their protests, and - I would argue - expand their subject to that of freedom and democracy. After all, you can never have real educational reform without freedom and democracy. The shift in objective

should further be accompanied by a call for the general public to join in. (The idea of a general strike should be considered.)

Secondly, many people have missed the potential impact of the national census, for which ethnicity population data was to have been announced in May. In February, *Eleven* published a statement from the Ministry of Information and Population that release of the ethnic census data would be postponed until after the election. This was a quiet attempt to remove one potential uprising flashpoint.

The census has actually trapped the dictatorship. If it announces that Burmans make up say a fanciful 70% of the population, this will set the stage for a USDP election victory. But, it will outrage the ethnic nationalities, who might even choose to boycott the election as a result.

On the other hand, if the accurate data that has been compiled is published, which may well show that the ethnic nationalities as a group, including mixed group individuals, comprise over 50% of the total population of the country, this will not only infuriate Burman racists and ultra-nationalists, it will make it impossible for the regime to say that an election result giving a majority to the USDP isn't rigged. If it tries to do so, this too could cause wider rebellion among the ethnic nationalities.

Facing this trap, the regime chose the logical path, to postpone the census release, thereby preserving its ability to rig the election. Frankly, even with all the money that Europe has spent funding the census, and all the crimes that have accompanied the data collection (the census is still underway with the Rohingya, who are facing daily horrific abuse, including arrest, rape, extortion, torture and murder), I don't think the detailed ethnic breakdowns for Burma will ever be published.

Thirdly, the dictatorship has announced that it is willing to amend the constitution. Given Shwe Mann's quote at the beginning of the article, though, real amendment - much less a redrafting - will never happen. The issue will be postponed, with minimal debate, until after the election, at which time it will be dropped.

Finally, there is the general election itself, now scheduled for November - just eight months away. There are only two possible outcomes here. The first is that election will be held, and rigged to protect the generals' power, as occurred in 2010; or it will be postponed - even cancelled - using some manufactured excuse. Both eventualities could also serve as the triggers for large popular uprisings.

The military dictatorship has imposed its roadmap to "disciplined democracy." We are now at the end of this map, and as the situation make clear, the generals' grasp on power is becoming more and more fraught.

Strategy for the Ethnic Armed Organizations

The NCA negotiations are to proceed in a week. This itself is surprising, given that the Burma Army has been on a rampage in Shan and Kachin States, including murdering over 100 civilians, and that none of the ethnic nationality core demands have been satisfied. As with the Deed of Commitment, this too appears to be for show. The NCCT negotiators probably feel that since Japan is paying for the plane tickets and hotel rooms, they might as well go and talk. The dictatorship, its international allies, and its agents in MPC clearly hope that with enough meetings they can wear the NCCT down and get it to sign a surrender. To guard against this, the NCCT has to recognize that this is a historic situation for Burma, and that they will be reviled forever if they abandon their people. Furthermore, the UNFC and the EAOs themselves have to be prepared to reject any ridiculous deal that the NCCT might accept. It is not enough for the NCCT negotiators to sign a piece of paper. It has to be ratified by the armed groups themselves. If the worst happens, not only will the NCCT surrender, they will set a date for the signing as well. The EAOs need to reject this - they have to be prepared to say that they need time to understand any putative deal, including through presenting it to their respective peoples for feedback. If the real goal is for Burma to become democratic, this should begin by allowing the ethnic nationality peoples to have a say in the ceasefire. If they are not allowed this say, not only will they reject their leaders and the ceasefire, new breakaway armed units will likely be formed and take up the fight.

The Federal Army

Leaving the NCA issue behind, the obvious strategy and goal for the EAOs is to unite and cooperate not only in meetings, but more importantly on the battlefield. It is therefore very positive that the groups in the north have been working together. Powerful armies, including the KIA, TNLA, SSA-N, AA, ABSDF, MNDAA, NDAA and even the USWA, have all cooperated if not fought together.

What this means is that the Northern Command of the EAOs' Federal Army, although not formally organized with its own headquarters and uniforms, is planning and fighting as a unit. While the northern fronts have seen a few Burma Army victories, when the EAOs withdrew from outposts under assault, the ethnic soldiers are again showing their excellence at guerrilla warfare, and inflicting the invading and terrorist Burma Army soldiers with large casualties.

One can only hope that the ethnic defenders will continue to prevail, and impose higher and higher attrition rates on BA units, including through offensive actions.

Of course, were the Southern Command to achieve the same effect as the Northern, and even more-so go on to work together, this would return the Burma Army to the defensive posture and losses it experienced starting in 2011. Another key regime propaganda lie is that the Burma Army is invincible. This is hogwash. Coordinated action by both the Northern and Southern Federal Army commands would not only trigger massively rising BA casualties, it would also

lead to large-scale desertions; an unwillingness to obey orders and to fight; and even the renewed prospect of a real-pro-democracy coup. Neighbor Thailand has accomplished its own pro-democracy coup, to oust the non-democratic Thaksin regime. Pressure from Burma's EAOs can achieve the same: encourage junior officers who are secret democracy sympathizers to take out the recidivist top generals. In such an eventuality, Burma would be free overnight.

The KNU problem

Unfortunately, the idea of unified ethnic nationality action has been sabotaged by the KNU's corrupt leadership. They are preventing a combination of Karen armed groups under the banner of the Kawthoolei Armed Forces, and they have opposed the Federal Army in its entirety thereby making it extremely difficult to establish its Southern Command. The Karen traitors are not only the driving force behind trying to get the NCCT to surrender, they are holding up the ethnic defense as well. What Mutu Say Poe, Saw Johnny, Kwe Htoo Win, Htoo Htoo Lay and their clique have done is no less treasonous to the Karen cause than when Buddhist KNLA soldiers broke away in 1994, in the process revealing the defense secrets to the KNU's stronghold Manerplaw. This betrayal cannot stand. These individuals need to be stopped.

Mutu and his partners have committed three offenses, any one of which is sufficient grounds for expulsion. They fraudulently stole the election at the last KNU Congress. They signed the preliminary ceasefire agreement in Rangoon, even though the Central Executive Committee forbid it. And, they signed the Deed of Commitment, in this case with the Central Standing Committee forbidding it. They even appear willing to sign a comprehensive ethnic surrender at the first opportunity. They are nothing less than rogues!

The Palaung experience

The current situation with the KNU is similar to what happened to the Palaung/Ta'ang people in Shan State. The Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) signed a ceasefire in 1991, and then went on to surrender its arms to the dictatorship in 2005. In 1992, in response to the ceasefire, Palaung leaders who thought it was a mistake broke away and founded the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF). Their associated army, the TNLA, was established at their third Congress in 2009. They took up the job of self defense of their people, and then, in 2011, began to work in the defense of their allies, starting with the KIA. (Source: *Burma Link* interview with Ta'ang leader Tar Aik Bong)

Given the corruption of the top leaders of the KNU, the lower level officers and rank and file soldiers should implement a similar strategy. Of course, agreeing to the Federal Army Southern Command and the KAF initiative does just that. However, as yet these moves have not been translated into action, because of pressure from the corrupt leaders. It appears that everyone is waiting for Mutu and Johnny to retire at the next KNU Congress in 2016, although I would caution that this may be an unrealistic hope. Mutu may well try to stay in power for another term

through once again rigging the CSC election, including by bribing a majority of the CSC members to back him.

With the KNU leadership corrupted, there needs to be a split. The only thing in question is when it should occur. One thing that is certain, though, is that if the Revolutionary Karen leaders acted against Mutu, and refused to follow his orders, the great majority of the KNLA rank and file soldiers, who have witnessed the corruption and the increasing Burma Army repression of Karen villagers, would gladly change allegiance. Just as the Burman generals need to be pressured - thrown out, so too this must be accomplished with Mutu and his gang of traitors.

Conclusion

To sum all of this up, the people of Burma need to unite and agitate for freedom and democracy. In the process, they need to continue the now established trend of rejecting Suu Kyi's "leadership." She too is corrupt and should no longer be followed. The ethnic nationalities in turn need to back their armed organizations, which too should unite into a coordinated Federal Army force. As with Suu Kyi, corrupted leaders such as Mutu should be dealt with.

2015 is a banner year for Burma. So many things are happening, and most if not all of them can be clearly directed to the only real goal that the people have, freedom and democracy. This article examined the issues that are involved. Hopefully the people, and their leaders, can use it as a template to finally free their long-suffering nation. Burma can have real democracy, and considered and proper development that protects the natural environment and which is shared among the entire population. If enough people work together, this can be achieved.

There is a famous idea that if you communicate a lie often enough, it is accepted as the truth. Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda chief, phrased it like this: *"If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it."*

For Burma, the big lie is that the nation is undergoing democratic reform. This belief is completely false. Even after three years, there is no democracy in the country. The few freedoms that have been allowed can be taken away at any time. Many already have. The lie is being spread by the dictatorship; its cronies; corrupt and softheaded international parties, including Barack Obama, the E.U., and innumerable NGOs and media outlets; and by corrupt and soft-headed "pro-democracy" leaders, including Mutu and Suu Kyi.

However, this idea has a corollary - one that is rarely noticed. If you state the truth often enough, it can be preserved. The people will see through the lies. The pro-democracy movement has striven for decades to keep the truth of Burma alive. This was a relatively straightforward job following the 8888 massacre, and then as documentation abilities were established to record the dictatorship's crimes. Now, though, we are faced with the lies not only of the regime, but of former allies as well. Nonetheless, we can keep the truth alive. There are many individuals,

groups and forums that do their best to illuminate the real Burma, and if we all dedicate our goal to freedom, and take the necessary steps, the country and its people can finally be free.